

CASE STUDY: THE SURREY DOCKS DOWNTOWN PROJECT

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1. BACKGROUND

The Downtown Project in the Surrey Docks area of London Docklands was the result of a unique financial and urban design package which was drawn up by the development authority, the London Docklands Development Corporation, in conjunction with the London Borough of Southwark, various housing associations, builders/developers and financiers. The project was more than a simple development exercise; it was also seeking to re-build an important part of London and to make an inner city area more hospitable to both the original population and the growing number of people who wanted to live and work in the area.

The project centred around the refurbishment of eight former local authority estates situated on Rotherhithe Street, the loop road fringing the Surrey Docks peninsula, some two miles from Tower Bridge. The estates were built between the wars and represented classic examples of the best tradition of model public housing in Bermondsey, pioneered by Dr Salter, and the former Bermondsey Borough Council. The Downtown Project restored the estates and in so doing effected a significant and innovative piece of inner city regeneration.

2. PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

Prior to the closure of the Surrey Commercial Docks in 1969 the Downtown Estates had been occupied by a stable local community. During the 1970's the economic decline and dereliction associated with the closure of the docks, mirrored by the worsening physical condition of the estates, presented London Borough of Southwark with growing management, maintenance and allocation problems. By the mid-1980's the spiral of decline had produced the physical symptoms characteristic of the economic and social problems associated with the 'inner city'. Vacated blocks were in a terrible condition, having been vandalised, squatted, in some cases set fire to and subject to fly-tipping. The Borough could not raise the funds even to begin to improve the physical condition of the estates despite the pressing housing shortage.

In 1986 the LDDC, in conjunction with London Borough of Southwark, set about the regeneration of the Downtown Estates. A feasibility study undertaken by architects Price Cullen established that most of the blocks were structurally sound, that the flats had good internal space standards and that the blocks lent themselves readily to refurbishment. It was agreed that most of the estates should be kept and refurbished and that very little demolition

was necessary. Importantly it was agreed as a key objective that the refurbishment should be geared towards achieving a mix of tenures but with a strong bias towards social housing catering for the needs of the local community.

3. ROLE OF THE DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

The role of the LDDC as development authority, is set out in the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980. It is 'to secure the regeneration of its area, by bringing land and buildings into effective use, encouraging the development of existing and new industry and commerce, creating an attractive environment and ensuring that housing and social facilities are available to encourage people to live and work in the areas. In the case of the Downtown Project the LDDC performed this enabling the role by:

- Acquiring eight estates from London Borough of Southwark by agreement.
- Arranging the refurbishment and new build for each site by tender or negotiation.
- Controlling the refurbishment process through building agreements and the planning system.

4. FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS

In 1986, following much negotiation, a financial agreement was concluded with the London Borough of Southwark through which the LDDC bought eight of the Downtown Estates for £3m, on a rolling programme. These were then to be separately disposed of through housing associations and builders/developers in order to achieve a mix of tenure but with a strong bias towards the needs of the local community. The LDDC agreed to pay Southwark 50% of any overage accrued from the disposal of the estates. With the exception of the Amos Estate the housing association schemes were funded through grants from the Housing Corporation. New building schemes were funded by the developer and in the case of Surrey House (Essex Self-Build Group) funding was obtained from a building society.

The disposal of the Estates excluding Amos Estate raised some £2.3; a further £728,000 accrued from the LDDC taking its share of increased sales prices (beyond prices agreed at the time the sites were disposed of) achieved by developers on units for sale. Taking account of expenditure including demolition costs, professional services, works and fees, security, maintenance and other costs a surplus of £584,000 was accrued on the disposal of the Downtown Estates. Additional revenue is anticipated from the sale of flats and houses on the Amos Estate to add to the £3.37m achieved from the disposal of the site.

In addition to the £3m paid to Southwark for the purchase of the Downtown Estates an interim payment of £292,000 was also paid, being 50% of the current credit balance. Together with a grant of £3.£6m obtained by LDDC from the Department of the Environment these monies were used in the refurbishment by Southwark of a ninth Downtown Estate, the Redriff Estate to provide 220 units.

5. PERCEIVED IMPACT

The successful implementation of the Downtown Project played a major role in the social and physical regeneration of the Surrey Docks. Its impact can be summarised as follows:

- 458 new and refurbished residential units were provided, of which 257 were for shared ownership, fair rent, affordable home ownership and self build for local people (See Appendix I). This was seen as a direct benefit to local people.
- The process of urban decay was reversed and vacant buildings falling into disrepair were given a new lease of life and brought back into use in a little over two years.
- The refurbishment of the buildings positively enhanced the appearance of Rotherhithe Street and changed public perception of the area.

These tangible signs of regeneration stimulated development interest and investment on other privately-owned derelict and run-down sites in Rotherhithe street. Thus the Downtown Project can be seen as not only socially beneficial in its own right but also as a catalyst to the regeneration of the area in general.

6. CONCLUSION

The Downtown Project represents a very varied mix of tenure and utilisation of financial mechanisms in order to fund and achieve such a high proportion of social housing at little cost to the borough. When completed some five hundred flats which were largely empty and derelict will have been retained or rebuilt and given a new lease of life to provide new homes for many of the original occupiers within a viable package of development.

The Downtown Project is an example of public/private sector co-operation bringing about a significant element of physical and social regeneration in an inner city area. The enabling role of the LDDC in pump-priming to bring about substantial inward investment to help meet social objectives is well-illustrated by the Downtown Project.

The main benefits of the project were threefold:

1. The provision of low cost of 458 residential units, 56% of which are for fair rent, shared ownership, affordable home ownership, or self build for occupation by local people. In addition about 50% of the units for sale were estimated to have been bought by Southwark residents.
2. The refurbishment of five 1930's blocks to their former glory enhancing the townscape, removing dereliction and stimulating private investment on privately-owned run down and derelict sites elsewhere in Rotherhithe Street.
3. The disposal of the estates to housing associations and developers, whilst enabling 257 social housing units to be provided for local people, raised sufficient revenue to enable about half of the cost of the refurbishment of over 200 local authority flats to be met.

APPENDIX I: NUMBER OF DWELLINGS IN DOWNTOWN

Estate	original No of Units	Refurbis hed	New Build	Fair Rent/ Shared Ownersh p	For Sale	Total
Church House	20	14	-	14	-	14
Bryan House	36	31	-	31	-	31
Holyoak House	39	-	32	-	32	32
Acorn Walk	133	111	-	44	67	111
Silver Walk	50	48	18	-	66	66
Surrey house	9	-	14	-	14	14
Amos Estate	214	121	54	121	54	175
406-438 Rotherhithe Street	17	15	-	15	-	15
TOTALS	518	340	118	225(49%)	233(51%)	458

APPENDIX II DOWNTOWN PROJECT - DETAILS OF EACH ESTATE

Church House

Refurbishment to provide 14 units for fair rent. Carried out by Barratt (East London) Ltd for the South London Family Housing Association. All units were rented to L.B. Southwark nominees.

Bryan House

Refurbishment to provide 31 units for shared ownership ~~ownership~~ through the Crystal Palace Housing Association. Barrat (East London) Ltd carried out by building works.

Holyoake

The original block was found to be structurally unsound and was demolished following a competitive tender the Render Group, with architects Corrigan Soundy and Kilaiditi, were awarded the site. They carried out a courtyard development comprising a mix of 32 three storey houses and flats. All units were for sale of which 18 were sold under the LDDC Affordable Homes scheme whereby these units were available at £40,000 or less to Southwark tenants or their sons and daughters.

Acorn Walk

Refurbishment to provide 111 units carried out by Barratt (East London) Ltd. Some 33 units were made available for fair rent and 11 units for shared ownership through the South London Family Housing Association.

Silver walk

Demolition of one block and refurbishment of the remainder by Regalian Properties Group to provide 66 units for sale of which 18 are new-build houses and flats. In addition two shops were refurbished and a community facility was provided.

Surrey House

Demolition of the building and replacement by a four storey block of 14 flats being undertaken by the Essex Self-Build Group.

Amos Estate

A mix of refurbishment demolition and new-build being carried out by Barratt (East London) Ltd to provide 175 units. All the refurbished units are for fair rent to L.B. Southwark nominees through the South London Family Housing Association. The new-build units are for sale. Four shop units are also to be refurbished.

406-438 Rotherhithe Street

Refurbished to provide 15 units for fair rent through the Hyde Housing Association.