10 Principles of placemaking
10 Principles
Introduction
The Berkeley Group has a passion for creating successful places. We operate across the South-East of England and are currently the biggest residential developer in London, one of the world’s great cities.

Our business strategy is called Vision 2020. This focuses on four key areas: running a sustainable business, the customer experience, delivering sustainable communities, and building greener homes. Each of these has a related set of targets and ambitions.

The 10 principles set out in this document articulate our approach to placemaking. They are based on many years experience and common sense. Each site is different but our approach to development remains the same.

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The success of a place is significantly determined by the quality of the location. We look for sites which are well-situated but under-utilised. Our aim is to realise the locational advantages that a place may already possess but not yet exploit.

Every site we chose will have the potential to be well connected by public transport, to be well-served by local facilities, and to create its own distinctive character and style. We can then create the kind of environment that people will buy into.

We know from experience that it is possible to reinvent a place – just look at the transformation of Imperial Wharf in Fulham from a disused 32 acre brownfield site into one of the premier riverside locations in London. We can achieve this because of the vision, tenacity and financial strength in our business, combined with an ability to calculate and manage risk.
Partnering does not just happen. It is the product of respect and trust. Partnership arrangements need to be tailored to suit the project, skilfully coordinating the investment and ambitions of developer, local authority, residents, RSL and other stakeholders.

The key to success is a shared vision. On larger projects, a masterplan or design codes can help. As a project moves into the delivery phase, we might propose specific mechanisms covering the whole team structure, from the Mayor or Chief Executive down. Responsibilities can then be shared – so that each partner does what they are best at – and combined into complementary plans and budgets.

At Woodberry Down in Hackney, the council set out a clear planning framework; the Principal Developer Agreement ensures project viability; and a Residents’ Design Committee reviews each phase in detail before every one of our planning applications.
Building good relationships helps us build better places. We never make false promises. We listen to what local people and other partners want and incorporate this into the design wherever possible.

We know that good community engagement takes more time. But it leads to better decisions, and it gives the process integrity.

We also relate our work to the strategic plans for an area. We do not simply focus on the delivery of an individual scheme: we seek to understand a project in its context. This is not about fitting in with a certain style of architecture but addressing the physical and social connections of a place and the way it relates to other neighbourhoods.

At Camberwell Grove in south London, local residents run the Butterfly Tennis Club on a site bought by St George. We refurbished the courts and built a new clubhouse. Membership rose by two thirds and subscription fees nearly doubled.
Successful communities have variety – a range of different people, with different things to do. A mix of uses and tenures makes a place more vibrant and creates the ingredients for a convenient modern lifestyle.

We invest in neighbourhood facilities as early as possible, providing they can be sustained. This might include a park and play area, a nursery, a business centre, a gym or a pub. The siting of these facilities and the commercial premises is crucial to ensure that there is the footfall and passing trade to make them viable.

Gunwharf Quays in Portsmouth brings together different types of housing in a safe environment where everything is conveniently located on a south-facing waterfront. The retail and leisure area opened up a site that had been in naval ownership for over 300 years. It now has street markets, festivals and performances all year round as well as 37 bars and restaurants, shops and a hotel.
Every home built by Berkeley now achieves at least Level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes. We have a ‘fabric-first’ approach that focuses on reducing heat loss through walls, floors, windows and the roof, before installing new technology.

But we think sustainability is as much about the place as the product. We deliver on the low carbon agenda by creating beautiful, durable places where people want to live, close to where they work. Often these qualities are created through investment in the landscape, not just the architecture, of each development. Successful places are as much about the spaces between the buildings as the buildings themselves.

The Hamptons in Surrey has been built by St. James on the site of the old sewage treatment works. Now it has 30 acres of parkland, three lakes and a whole range of sports facilities (as well as PV and solar thermal panels delivering 20% of the energy from renewables on site).
There is no generic Berkeley scheme. Every design is bespoke. Each project is scrutinised intensely at all levels. We have regular design meetings involving each relevant team at every level of the business to go through the specification. This intensity of involvement means we always deliver on the detail.

Berkeley always use architects on every project. This is not common practice within the housebuilding industry. We often invite three or four to pitch their ideas. We find people with an ability to collaborate, and with the talent to create a powerful sense of place and articulate this to all the different stakeholders.

Our designers range from world-famous architects like Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners working on the Riverlight scheme in Battersea to smaller practices like BHP Harwood producing an equally intelligent design for Kings Hill in Cirencester. At Grosvenor Waterside, we used a combination of seven different architects on the same development to create a place with variety and flair.

Below and opposite: Bramah House at St James’ Grosvenor Waterside development in London, designed by Make architects and the artist Clare Woods.
The quality of the public realm sets the tone of a development. We invest in the landscape – both hard and soft – at the earliest possible opportunity. We realise its importance in creating a sense of place, enhancing values, and demonstrating the level of our ambition for a neighbourhood. High quality public realm also helps create a community, encouraging people to meet and mix, not simply use the space as a thoroughfare.

At Beaufort Park in Hendon, we used granite paving and brought in mature trees to create the right landscape setting. At St George’s Park in Hammersmith, we created a public space that people now feel safe to enjoy in a place that had previously been dominated by dogs and gangs. At Kidbrooke Village, we built permeable paving in front of the affordable homes which will not only soak up excess rainfall but looks striking too.

Opposite: The rose garden at Queen Mary Place in Roehampton used to be a car park before St James transformed this space.
Below: The public realm at Beaufort Park.
Detail matters at Berkeley: whether it is paving, door fittings or kitchen work surfaces. This is about the culture of the business, not just the materials we specify. We apply the same exacting standards to a scheme of 20 units or 2,000.

Delivering a great scheme demands strong leadership, the appointment of the right design team, and a relentless focus on detailed quality control. These are all routine hallmarks of a Berkeley development.

But a well-detailed scheme does not have to be complex. At Stanmore Place in Harrow, we are building 798 homes in a clear and well connected layout of streets and courtyards. The elevations are coherent and well proportioned. They use a simple palette of materials, brick and timber. Its strength is in its simplicity.
The majority of our projects are built out over many years. Each phase of a scheme must have a sense of identity from the outset – it should be a place in its own right, not just part of a development site.

This means getting the density of each phase right, and ensuring that every phase delivers new or improved public spaces, with local facilities close at hand. These can be funded through forward selling to help create sufficient cash in the business to invest in amenities. We also design a strategy for the phasing which minimises disruption to existing residents.

Kidbrooke Village in south-east London will take 20 years to complete. The masterplan creates four distinct areas. Each of these has its own character, within an overall identity. Phase one has provided not just very high quality affordable housing alongside the homes for sale: it also helped restore the local park, refurbished the play areas, and built a new multi-use games area.
Creating a great place is not just about getting the planning, design and construction right. The management and maintenance regimes must be set up to ensure that the scheme continues to look good, work well and stand the test of time.

We strive to create a single set of management arrangements delivered through one external managing agent, covering the oversight of public space, the buildings and internal areas. We look for a long-term relationship with these agents so that they understand our business and ambitions for the place. We usually insist on step-in rights to ensure we can maintain the quality of the public realm.

As a developer, our reputation is determined to a large extent by the way we manage this environment. In that respect, the interests of our business and our customers are exactly the same. We have a set of five public commitments to everyone living on a Berkeley development, which explain exactly how we will work together with residents to care for each place.
Placemaking, not just housebuilding