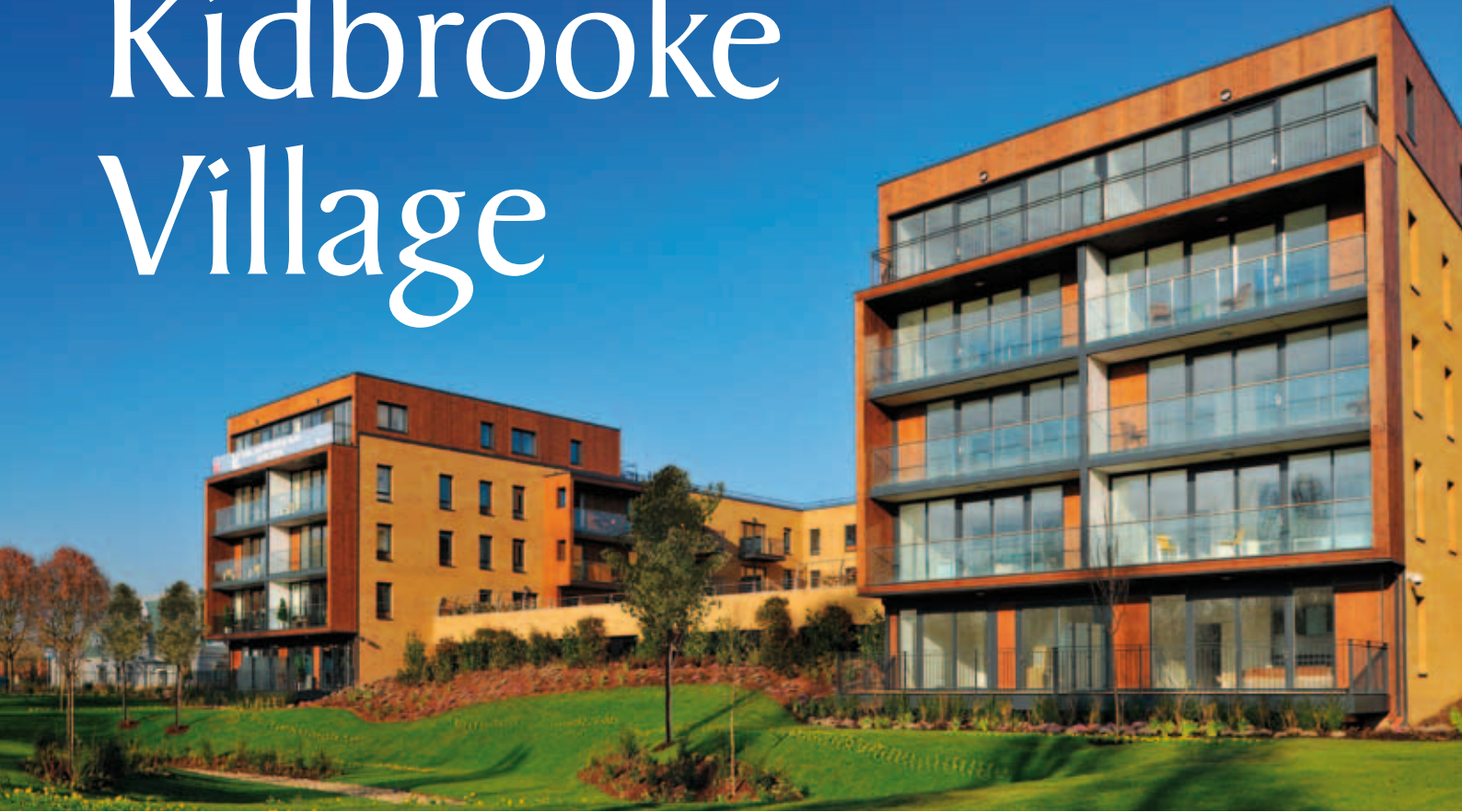


Kidbrooke Village



Turn left out of Kidbrooke station and follow the road round towards Sutcliffe Park. It's a strange experience. Isolated parts of the former Ferrier Estate remain, large and incongruent, being stripped away and readied for demolition.

Across the road, though, next to a busy construction site, are new modern apartment blocks – large windows, balconies and smart red brick – set in immaculate landscaping with lush grass, scarlet geraniums and other brightly coloured bedding plants. It feels almost manicured.

This is the beginning of Kidbrooke Village, one of the most ambitious regeneration schemes in Europe. The masterplan will cost £1bn to deliver and transform 109 hectares of deprived south-east London, an area little smaller than Hyde Park, into a stunning modern community.

It's immediately obvious this is no run-of-the-mill development. The attention to detail and quality in the public realm mark it out from almost any other regeneration scheme in Britain. This quality is what will help Kidbrooke emerge from a recent troubled past and create a place where people will battle hard to buy or rent, either privately or through the housing association.

Over the next 15 to 20 years, 4,800 homes of different tenures will be built – in squares, around courtyards, in apartment blocks and streets. There will be family homes, new schools, health buildings and a commercial centre at its heart with shops, hotels, restaurants and offices, as well as leisure facilities and a brand new transport interchange. A new green spine of parkland and playing fields will flow through the centre, running from Sutcliffe Park at the south end of the site to the railway line at the north.

But what does the creation of Kidbrooke Village tell you about the process of regeneration and renewal? Could the ideas and approach taken here inform the way we create new places nationwide?

'Kidbrooke Village has many of the key ingredients of an English suburb. The value of the scheme is created by the spaces between buildings – not just by the buildings themselves.'

The story so far

The estate was built between 1968 and 1972. At the time, it was an award winning development. Families paid a rent premium to move in. But by the 1980s it had become one of the most economically deprived areas in the country. Bad design and an enclosed inward-facing layout isolated it from neighbouring areas and all 1,906 of its homes were single tenure. It had become a poorly integrated community rife with social problems. The fact that only about 160 homes were snapped up under the right-to-buy attests to this unpopularity.

In 2001, the Royal Borough of Greenwich consulted on its redevelopment, going out to tender in 2003. Berkeley was selected in early 2006, with the deal signed in 2007. Southern Housing became the housing association partner and will purchase the affordable housing on the site.

The masterplan for the scheme was designed by the architects Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands. It received planning consent in June 2009. Demolition of some of the existing buildings on the Ferrier Estate began shortly after, so that construction of the first two phases could get started. Building the first tranche of homes got underway in September 2009 thanks to £43 million of funding from the Homes and Communities Agency. The HCA also provided another £65m grant for affordable homes. By January 2012, 229 affordable homes have been built, the majority of which are occupied by residents from the Ferrier Estate. Altogether 2,516 new homes, together with 170,000 square feet of commercial and community space, have now received detailed planning in the first four phases. Of this amount, 829 are completed or in construction.

So what makes Kidbrooke different?

It's not just the sheer scale and ambition of this transformation that stands out. The vision, the funding, and the way it has been designed and phased may suggest ideas for other regeneration schemes and new directions for future policy.

We consider three of these below:

1. How do you create a sustainable suburb?

Kidbrooke Village will have:

- A clear sense of identity, through investment in excellent landscaping, clear and uniform architectural design, and a thriving new commercial centre.
- A well-considered masterplan, allowing density to more than double while still only building on 35% of the site.
- Good transport links, both to other busy local centres and 20 minutes into London. Unlike some other suburban schemes, this is not located at the end of a railway line.
- Green infrastructure, with a new spine running down the centre with additional green areas or "fingers" coming into the streets to provide play areas, cooler spaces, and a sense of calm.



- A mixture of housing types and tenures, including self-contained apartments for the elderly in the heart of the development.

Kidbrooke Village has many of the key ingredients of an English suburb. But what really marks this development out is investment in the landscape. The value of the scheme is created by the spaces between buildings – not just by the buildings themselves.

Careful design has also enabled the density to be more than doubled while still only building on 35% of the land. This makes the scheme much higher density than the classic English suburb. Hampstead Garden suburb, for example, is 10–20 dwellings per hectare. Kidbrooke Village is around 40 if you include the park and 130 dwellings per hectare if you don't.

The masterplan proposes four distinct areas – CityPoint, where construction is underway at the moment; Meridian Gate, Capital Plaza, and Blackheath Quarter. But there will still be uniformity and an overall feel that gives this place its own identity, characterised by high quality design and beautiful landscaping.

The predominant building material is brick, typically used in the suburbs, rather than rendered facades, a choice for more inner City developments. The architects specified a limited pallet of materials and planting for the landscape. Again this is intended to create an overarching identity and ensure that, like a classic Victorian or 1930s suburb, Kidbrooke Village does not become an architectural zoo.

There is a balanced mixture of housing – so that roughly a third will be affordable; a third for private sale; and about a third private rent. The good transport links, including bus links to North Greenwich Jubilee Line and rail services, which take about 20 minutes to London Bridge, should make the area attractive to younger or more transient professionals who want to rent for shorter periods.

But this is certainly not designed to be a dormitory for the City. The centres of Blackheath, Lee and Eltham, Canary Wharf and Greenwich are close by, while the shops and offices in the new central hub will provide local employment and fuel growth.

In a radical departure from other British developments, Kidbrooke Village will take a leaf out of practices in mainland Europe and host sheltered housing for the elderly at the

heart of the scheme. The idea is that older residents can live closer to amenities and are therefore better able to remain active. At the same time, because they are usually at home during the day, they bring more life and spirit to the place during working hours.

2. How do you make partnerships work?

Kidbrooke Village has:

- An open relationship between the different partners – Berkeley Group; the Royal Borough of Greenwich; Southern Housing Group and the HCA.
- Continuity of personnel through the key stages of the development.
- Regular meetings as well as design and energy review panels enshrined in section 106 agreements.
- A communications group across all the partners to debate and coordinate messages and promotion of the scheme.

For a scheme as complicated and huge as this, it's essential that all those involved are pulling in the same direction. As you'd expect, the financial arrangements are underpinned by legal contracts. But relationships around the table are also underscored by a remarkable degree of openness, trust and understanding of each other's needs.

All the partners engage in problem solving together. For example, Berkeley re-phased the scheme early on to bring forward more affordable housing at the request of the Royal Borough of Greenwich. This allowed Ferrier families to be re-housed very quickly. There is also a clear intention for all the partners to be realistic and stay on message, driven by the communications group. It might, for instance, be tempting to suggest the scheme will be complete in 10 years. But the reality is that it will be 20 and all the partners openly acknowledge this.

Community involvement has been taken forward through a programme of workshops, seminars, engagement with school children, health providers and the police. In addition, alongside the overall partnership board, there are separate panels covering design review and energy, set out in the section 106 agreements. This provides a degree of continuity of purpose and personnel rarely found in many other regeneration programmes.



Kidbrooke or Hammarby?

Kidbrooke Village is being built to high levels of energy efficiency – code level 3 homes for the first phase, and higher code level 4 for phases three and four. There will be an energy centre in the middle and extensive use of renewables. But it's no cheer leader for what Housing Minister Grant Shapp described as Swedish eco-bling.

The contrast with Hammarby, on the edge of Stockholm, is instructive. Kidbrooke and Hammarby have a similar scale and feel but there are key differences. Hammarby is very advanced in terms of environmental technology, with a centralised waste and recycling facility built into the housing. Waste is then automatically recycled to generate energy on site.

Kidbrooke Village, by comparison, explores the social dimensions of sustainability. It has better architecture and landscaping, and higher quality interiors. The masterplan makes efficient use of space, developing only 35% of the available land and leaving a 'spine' of parkland. This supports outdoor activities: a running track at Sutcliffe Park, new sports pitches, ecology and wildlife and SUDS drainage swales. In this respect the emphasis on communal land and gardens, rather than larger individual gardens, makes it more similar to the award-winning housing scheme Accordia in Cambridge.

Landscaped corridors form the principle cycle and pedestrian routes that extend into the established neighbourhoods of Eltham and Blackheath. The new park includes ecology and wetland zones. Also, in a further move to underscore a peaceful green environment, the road running through the development is being raised, resurfaced and calmed, so that it too has the feel of, say, the route running through Richmond Park in west London, and an expectation that drivers will respond accordingly.

Below: Hammarby
Below left: Affordable homes at Kidbrooke Village





3. How do you deliver?

Phasing and funding:

- At Kidbrooke Village, the phasing changed to provide a higher proportion of affordable homes to house existing residents from the Ferrier Estate early on.
- These changes were made possible by HCA funding and the strength of the balance sheet of the developer which allowed Berkeley to operate on a longer term basis.
- High specification affordable housing in phase one provides a show case for the sale homes – rather than the other way round.
- Within set parameters, HCA infrastructure funding was used at Berkeley’s discretion rather than being tied to site clearance and potentially wasted on unnecessary remediation.

It might seem a subtle point, but seeing Kidbrooke Village as an extension to existing neighbourhoods rather than a separate estate renewal programme is key to understanding how the area might be transformed from a no-go estate to a thriving community. The site has four character areas which link with these existing communities, whilst cycleways and paths encourage footfall between them.

The masterplan itself is understood to provide a framework for people to operate within. It is constantly honed and reviewed, not to change the identity so much as to make the site work harder. The topography of the central area, for instance, has been altered to create underground carparking and the masterplanners have tightened the detailed designs when too much render appeared to creep in.

Berkeley agreed to increase the proportion of affordable housing on the first phase to 50% from a site average of 38%. In total, there will be 1,525 affordable homes on the site. These have all been built to design standards in the interim London Plan, which increase dwelling sizes by approximately 10%. From the outside, all tenures look

exactly the same. This makes Kidbrooke tenure blind and a clear expression of the latest London planning policy framework.

Despite having fewer private homes to market and sell in phase one, Berkeley has invested strongly in the public realm and landscaping. This deliberate strategy creates an immediate quality of place for the first residents and a showcase to attract interest in the scheme. The development team are also seeking to bring forward construction of the commercial hub. Schemes like Beaufort Park in Hendon, north London, show what an impact this approach can make.

One of the most important decisions has been allocation of the £43m HCA funding. This was targeted at infrastructure and demolition of the Ferrier Estate. In the past, government cash has often been used to pump-prime sites. This has led in some cases to money being spent on unnecessary remediation. The lesson from Kidbrooke Village is that allowing the development partners locally to decide how government investment is spent may provide the best use of public funds.

One step ahead

Kidbrooke Village is a bold development – audacious even. As you walk around the area today, that leap of faith taken by Berkeley and the Royal Borough of Greenwich is quickly taking shape. The old Ferrier Estate is morphing into a very different kind of place.

This development exemplifies many of the core ingredients of successful placemaking: vision, tenacity, collaboration and design. But don’t imagine Kidbrooke Village is unique, despite its scale. The ideas and attitude which drive development on this site offer practical inspiration for anyone contending with similar challenges, anywhere.