

NEW LONDON VILLAGES

Creating community

An independent report for the Berkeley Group by LSE London
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NEW LONDON VILLAGES

For decades, people have talked about housing in London and never come up with a solution that is deliverable. As the challenge grows, I think there are really two issues to debate. First, delivery and at what price? Second, quality and placemaking.

London itself has always been a city of villages. That heritage still matters today and remains incredibly popular. People want a place with character. They want to shop from local stores and visit the local pub. They want to feel safe and know their neighbours. They want a sense of community, as well as some privacy. Together with the right product and architecture, these are the qualities I think need to be embedded in Housing Zones across the capital.

This whole approach has been right at the heart of our commitment to Kidbrooke. We have put our heart and soul into engaging with the residents and building a new London village on the site of the old Ferrier Estate.

Today, a real community is starting to emerge where people feel proud to live once again. There is something for everyone here, for each and every part of society. Everybody has been involved, from all walks of life, regardless of the profession they work in or the age group they fall into.

From the very start, we have all had a clear shared vision and strategy for the kind of place we are trying to create. Somewhere that reflects traditional ideas about community and at the same time offers contemporary London living.

Fundamentally, housebuilding involves creating community. It's about people, identity, amenity and atmosphere.

Not every major site has to be a village. But they are part of this city's great history and I think they could help define its future.



AW Pidgley CBE
Chairman, the Berkeley Group

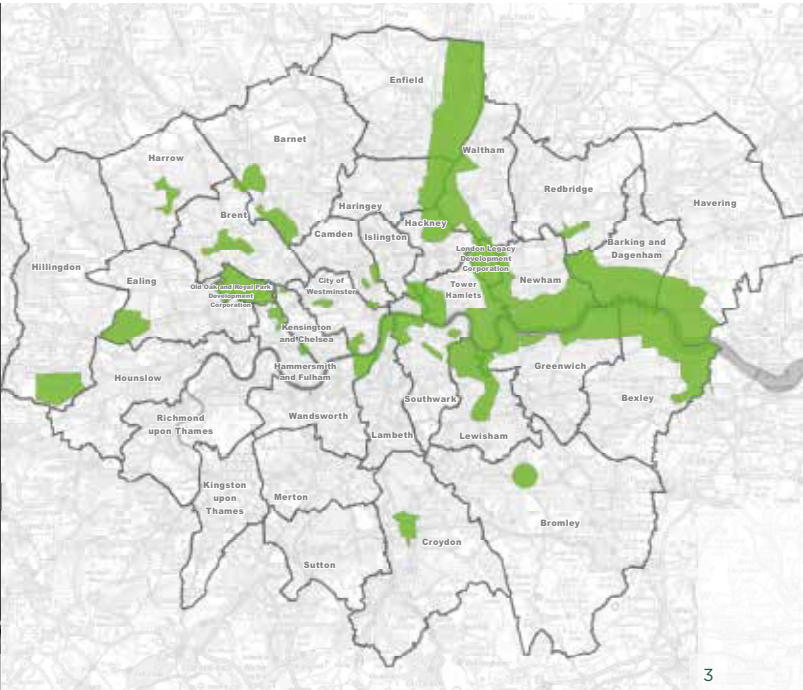
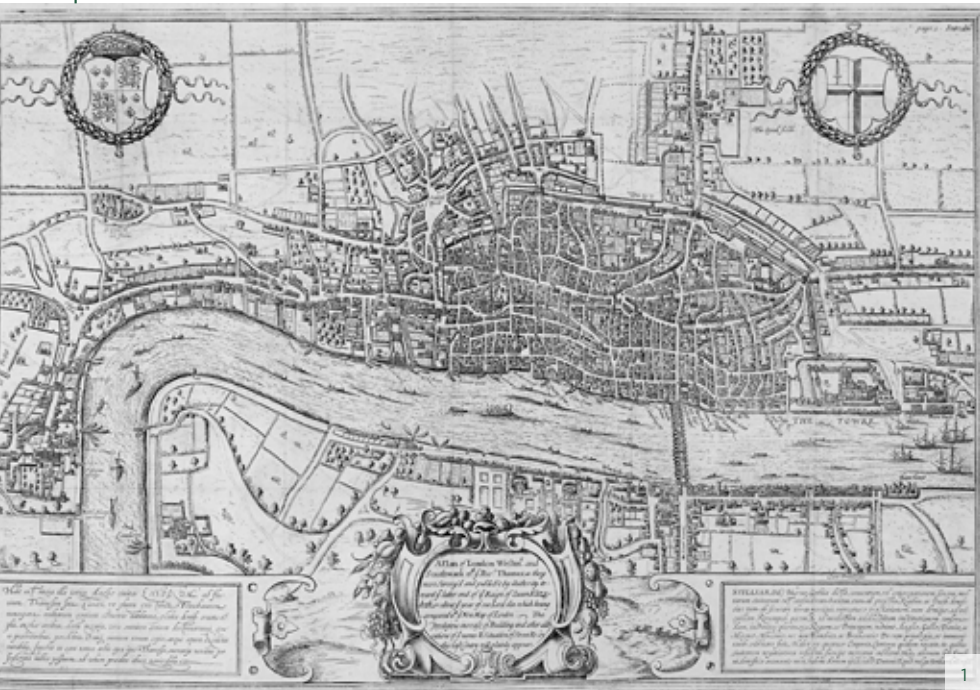
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Chapter 1

WHY VILLAGES?

This chapter briefly explores the relevance and evolution of villages in contemporary society. It suggests six characteristics which could define a new London village.



1 Map of the City of London and City of Westminster c.1600
2 Lord Campbell of Eskan, Chairman of the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, announces his plans at a press conference in March 1970
3 Opportunity Areas, London Plan, 2015

England is in the midst of its greatest housing crisis since the post-war period. The need for new homes particularly in London and the South East is undeniable, but most of the conversation thus far has focused on numbers and targets, rather than what types of housing and neighbourhoods we should be building. Recent history provides many examples of what can happen when questions of quality, placemaking and sustainability are forgotten. Ribbon development and single use, mono-tenure housing estates often failed to develop into desirable, enduring communities. Windblown high-rise blocks stood isolated from the surrounding streets. The country's challenge now is not only to deliver housing quickly but to develop homes in a way that promotes community development and attachment between residents and the places they live.

Throughout the last few decades, the village concept has grown increasingly popular as a model of development. The Urban Villages Forum (UVF), established in the 1990s, made the case for urban villages largely by contrasting the quality of life on standard housing estates with that offered in characterful mixed-use, mixed-tenure villages (Aldous, 1992). Like the New Urbanism movement in the United States, the UVF identified increased car dependence, the contraction of heavy industry and manufacturing in cities, and the sprawl of commercial and residential development as ‘an intense and painful process of social, economic and physical disintegration’ (Neal, 2003). They argued that concentrating residential development in new urban villages would offer not only good financial value but good social value as well.



Jane Jacobs, in her extensive writing on urbanism (c.f. Jacobs, 1961), says that mixed use, dense, human scale development increases liveability and quality of life. The city, she argues, is a site of holistic 'organised complexity' where rather than being separated a mixture of functions and uses harmoniously interact, increasing convenience, social integration, and economic opportunity. Villages are one way of achieving this.

The village model is equally related to ideas of sustainability. Communities that include a mix of tenures and income groups, are well connected via public transportation to other areas and integrate residential and commercial uses arguably allow their residents to live in a more environmentally, socially and economically sustainable way than does suburban sprawl.

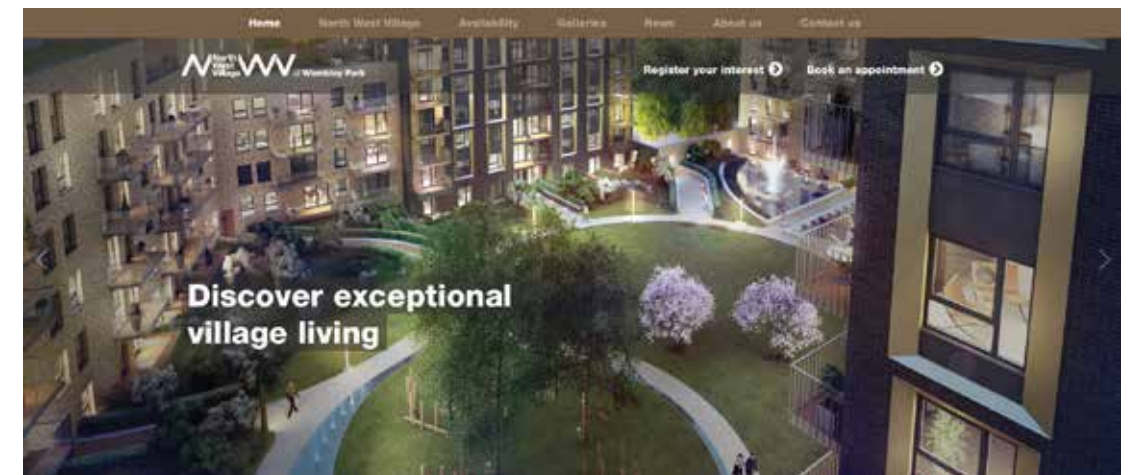
The density and design of traditional villages tend to increase social interaction, which in turn stimulates the production of social capital (Bourdieu, 1985; Putnam, 1995). The building of formal social networks, and particularly the informal relationships and associations that characterise villages (people knowing their neighbours, for instance) can increase communal benefits (Putnam, 1995).

In the 2011 British Social Attitudes survey, 96% of those living in rural villages reported that they were 'satisfied' with where they live, a higher level of satisfaction than found among big-city dwellers (80%) or suburbanites (84%) (DCLG, 2011). Unfortunately, to date there has been little formal research into resident satisfaction in 'urban villages'. One study into resident satisfaction in a US New Urbanist development (Podobnik, 2014) suggested that residents felt their current community was friendlier than where they previously lived. They also felt that there was a greater sense of community and that they were more likely to be involved in informal or formal neighbourhood groups.

Planning Policy Guidance 1 (1997)—now replaced by the National Planning Policy Framework—specifically referenced the urban village as a positive model of mixed-use development:

'The planning system can be used to deliver high-quality, mixed use developments, such as "urban villages". They are characterised by: compactness; a mixture of uses and dwelling types, including affordable housing; a range of employment, leisure and community facilities; appropriate infrastructure and services; high standards of urban design; access to public open space and green spaces; and ready access to public transport'.

So do 21st century households want to live in 'villages'? Evidence suggests that they do. Research by Kinleigh, Folkard & Hayward (2013) found a significant price premium (51%) for homes located in 'London villages'. Articles about 'London's hip new villages, uncovered' (Acharya, 2012) or 'the rise of London villages' (McGhie, 2010) pepper magazines and newspapers, and the term is being used more and more by developers and estate agents to market areas of the capital. At least eight proposed or recently launched schemes in London are currently being advertised as 'villages'.





DEFINING 'VILLAGE': HISTORICAL, POPULAR AND POLICY VISIONS

What is a village? There is no single accepted definition, in part because ideas of the village have changed over time. Village identities are also locally rooted and contextual, which makes it difficult to define universal characteristics and features.

Historically, English definitions of a village often referred to the size of a settlement and the institutions it had. Even today, the Oxford English Dictionary defines a village as a place 'larger than a hamlet, smaller than a town'. This definition does not directly mention household numbers, but historically, villages were quite densely occupied. The earliest examples developed near key transport and communication routes, a pattern that helps explain the extraordinary longevity of England's villages' (Wainwright, 2011). The traditional village landmarks—a manor house, the church, the pub, the village green, the shop (or shops), and the village hall—have Anglo-Saxon roots. Alongside these physical features of historic English villages, social events—including recurring communal occasions and festivals—were intrinsic parts of 'village life'. These traditions emphasised the enduring identity of the village, and often the procedures or festivals were 'designed to din into the community's collective memory' (ibid).

Governance structures in historic English villages became more formal over time, as local customs around the management of village commons turned into regular village meetings, and eventually the establishment of village byelaws, manor courts and administrative structures (Winchester, 2008).

Defined boundaries were important historically, but even today 'communal identification and neighbourliness' as well as the core elements of 'security, sociability and economic purpose' are highly sought after (Neal, 2003). Indeed resonance across time is, according to Wainwright (2011), a defining feature of England's historic villages.

Following the industrialisation of the 18th and 19th centuries, philanthropists and utopian thinkers turned to these 'village' ideals in planning communities to alleviate the ills of overcrowded urban environments, improve conditions for industrial labourers and promote a range of industrial, religious and political values (Solly, 1884; Neal, 2003). Model villages such as New Lanark, Saltaire, Bournville, and later the Garden Cities movement sought to integrate the best of town and country and to mix land uses. High quality housing and community amenities—including places of worship, community halls and village greens—were located close to the factories. Homogeneous and mono-tenure, these model villages were created for particular purposes and residents, and lacked the organic diversity of historic villages. Even so, many have an enduring utopian appeal. Saltaire, for example, is now a destination for art and tourism, capitalising on its connection to a (now defunct) industry (Myers, 2015) – see box below.

SALTAIRE: A MODEL INDUSTRIAL VILLAGE

Saltaire was built in 1851 on the outskirts of Bradford by Sir Titus Salt. It housed some 4,000 labourers who worked at Sir Titus' textile mills, also located in the village. The housing Salt provided for his workers was of a much higher standard than that enjoyed by labourers in the Bradford city slums, and the village included a school, a park, churches, almshouses, wash-houses, a concert hall, gym, hospital and allotments. The fabric of the village is still largely intact but the industrial buildings have taken on a new role; the mill now houses upmarket retailers and restaurants.

UNESCO granted the village World Heritage status in 2001, saying it gives 'a vivid impression of Victorian philanthropic paternalism' (UNESCO, 2001). The village is a magnet for tourists and architectural enthusiasts and boasts a thriving arts scene (Myers, 2015). There are frequent fairs, festivals and community events, village vibrancy and culture endures, despite the population being much more diverse than it was in the 1850s.



In the latter half of the 20th century, many practitioners and policy makers returned to the village idea, but this time situating the village within the urban realm. Rather than the utopian visions of the 19th century, this time questions of sustainability and social mix were uppermost.

The idea of an 'urban village', however, can seem oxymoronic: how can the characteristics of a village—identity, intimacy, neighbourliness—be reconciled with the busy 'loneliness' of cities (Neal, 2003)?

From a different perspective, the idea of the village and the city are not at odds. In the case of London, villages are the building blocks of the city:

'Some would suggest that without the initial energy and loving nurture provided by the village, the city would not have been created' (Neal, 2003).

Patrick Abercrombie's map of London (1944) demonstrates that the capital is an amalgam of different towns and villages, each identifiable through its character, identity and architectural grain. The idea that London is a 'city of villages' endures, echoed by Steen Eiler Rasmussen in 1960 and the GLA in 2002. With 600 high streets, London proves that villages can exist, indeed thrive, in the urban context (Adonis, 2015) – see the adjacent Blackheath case study for the description of a thriving village in the capital.



Patrick Abercrombie's 1944 Map of London

BLACKHEATH: A TRADITIONAL LONDON VILLAGE



Blackheath village

Blackheath is a mainly nineteenth-century village that now forms part of the inner London borough of Lewisham. The Roman road from London to Dover was built across the eponymous heath (along the route of the A2 today), and camps and small settlements grew up during the medieval period. In 1783, John Cator purchased the manor south east of the heath and began developing a substantial Victorian suburb known today as the Cator Estate. The Victorian and Georgian homes and buildings from this period are well preserved, alongside architectural examples from other periods including 1960s Span housing. Over time a bustling village hub developed around the train station, which opened in 1849.

Today this is a highly desirable family neighbourhood. Despite Blackheath's proximity to the centre (trains to Charing Cross take just 20 minutes), the visitor's first impression on leaving the station is that they are not in London. The high street, with a variety of quirky independent shops, updates the traditional, romantic ideal of a Victorian village. The highest landmark is the bell tower of All Saints' Church, which stands out over the relatively low height of the surrounding buildings and provides an orientation point. The area is very green, with spacious private gardens and tree-lined roads as well as Blackheath and Greenwich Park.

With its convenient rail links, thriving high street full of local shops, community culture and palpable identity—reinforced through recurring activities like farmers' markets—Blackheath's village-ness endures. It demonstrates that a village can have a strong, specific identity even though it is embedded in greater London.

The urban villages that are attractive places to live today combine key elements of traditional ‘village’ life and modern urban requirements: identity and adaptability; localism and connectivity; cohesion and diversity. By synthesising these ‘old and new orthodoxies’ (Biddulph et al, 2002), the UVF model of the urban village is not simply fuelled by nostalgia, but looks to learn from the past how best to meet the needs of the present.

Like their historic predecessors, new urban villages are also intended to endure for generations. We know that what we create today may not meet the needs of the future, which are unpredictable. Recognising that fact, new London villages should be flexible and resilient. By thinking carefully about community development at the outset, we might avoid the need for regeneration or demolition just a few decades down the road.

Criticisms of the urban village model centre on two issues. First, some say it is overly deterministic (Thompson-Fawcett, 1996; Biddulph et al, 2002). Can community be engineered? Particularly given that notions of village-ness are often tied to tradition or memory, can a village be created from scratch?

Second, others argue that the term ‘village’ is applied to so many types of development that it is losing its meaning (Franklin and Tait, 2002). This may or may not be a disadvantage: on the one hand, a more fluid definition of ‘village’ could mean that contemporary village developments are more reflective of the needs and values of 21st century communities; on the other, it could mean that the word has become just a cliché marketing term.

In light of these critiques, we must ask whether it is advisable—or even possible—to develop contemporary villages. Given that the term is applied to an increasingly wide range of developments, does the ‘village’ concept still have a clear meaning?

We suggest the model is still very useful. The concept clearly has a strong resonance with modern Londoners. Using the village as a model also encourages developers to consider social sustainability and placemaking. Doing so will not only allow us to address the housing shortage but deliver desirable communities which will stand the test of time.

In summary, there are two key points:

Villages are not the only template for high-quality new build neighbourhoods: diversity and innovation in development models is a good thing.

Villages emerge – they cannot be created instantaneously. More important to the ‘village idea’ than any design landmark or architectural feature is a sense of collective memory and tradition, and this must develop organically as residents live in and build a community. This implies that residents and their children – or at least some of them – should want to stay through their lives and the fabric and housing mix of the village needs to make this possible.

Over time, our understanding of what villages are changes as well; and as a community develops, so too might preconceptions about what architecturally or symbolically constitutes a village.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR NEW LONDON VILLAGES

We have developed a framework of six characteristics which might define a ‘New London Village’ (Table 1). It draws on ideas from history, academic theory, policy debate and popular media. These are principles rather than concrete traits or features. They are intended to allow for a flexible assessment – not a tick-box exercise – of how developments tap in to the traditional and contemporary elements of a village.

CHARACTERISTIC		EXPLANATION
Small and intimate	1	• The area can comfortably be covered on foot • The scale of the buildings and spaces is suitable and comfortable • The residential density can sustain a range of key services
Unique	2	<i>Spatial identity</i> • The area has defined boundaries and an identifiable centre • The area has its own atmosphere and sense of place • There are community landmarks <i>Traditions and collective memory</i> • There are regular community events and festivals • Residents create collective memory
Designed for social interaction	3	• There is ample public and green space, which is used in many ways • Facilities are provided for community events and everyday activities • The central hub generates social interaction, and there is a network of walkable routes
Locally driven and locally responsive	4	• Residents are involved in managing the life of the village • There is a long-term vision that residents support • Leaders represent the community and reflect its concerns
Functional	5	• The community is well served by both public and private transport • Core services are available locally • There is a mix of uses
A mixed community	6	• There is a mix of ages, backgrounds, incomes and housing tenures • Residents know and trust each other • There are long-term residents who provide continuity

Table 1: ‘New London Village’ Conceptual Framework

In the next chapter, we analyse Kidbrooke Village using this framework. Our aim is to evaluate how this new suburban development responds to the key principles set out above, which may help us understand how new communities in London can develop over time into villages fit for a 21st century city.

Chapter 2

IS KIDBROOKE
A ‘VILLAGE’?

This chapter tests a major new development of nearly 5,000 homes against six defining characteristics of a new London village. It looks at the design, amenities and public space as well as the emergence of identity, memory and community in this neighbourhood.



Kidbrooke Village

OUR APPROACH

In early 2015, we were asked by Berkeley Homes to assess Kidbrooke Village and determine whether it has the characteristics of an urban village. After reviewing the academic and specialist literature about urban villages (reported in Chapter 1), we conducted a number of semi-structured interviews in and around Kidbrooke. We spoke to local residents, community figures and Berkeley employees, as well as to the master planner of the development. Members of the research team, which included architects and planners, made several visits to Kidbrooke Village, to other new London developments on a similar scale and to historic London villages.

A SITE HISTORY

Kidbrooke Village occupies 109 acres bordering Blackheath Village, Eltham and Lee in the Royal Borough of Greenwich. The area was originally occupied by a World War I logistics centre (barrage balloons were made there), and its historic boundaries still circumscribe the site.

The aerodrome was replaced in 1968 by the local authority’s Ferrier Estate. Built using an uncompromisingly modern ‘streets and squares’ design, the estate was initially very popular. Over the next decades, though, it became a byword for neglect and anti-social behaviour. Its decline was the result of many factors: its isolation from the surrounding neighbourhoods, a single tenure, poor construction quality, badly managed and maintained decks and communal areas and the steady concentration of the most vulnerable and troubled households.

By the late 1990s the Ferrier was in very poor condition, and the council decided that the only solution was to knock it down. The council tendered for a developer in 2003, and in 2006 selected Berkeley Homes (Berkeley Homes, 2011). The master plan by architects Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands received consent in 2009. Construction of the new development started in September 2009 and the Ferrier Estate was entirely demolished.

As of September 2015 there were 1,170 homes. A total of 4,800 homes of different tenures will be built by 2030. Kidbrooke Village is comprised of four distinct neighbourhoods along a meandering ‘green spine’, dotted with water features, which connects Sutcliffe Park in the south to the borders of Blackheath in the north. When complete, buildings will occupy only 35% of the overall site, with the rest being green space. While the development is not particularly high rise, the density is high at 166 dwellings per hectare.



Key

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| A Sutcliffe Park | E Pedestrian and Cycle Links to Blackheath |
| B Kidbrooke Station | F 'OneSpace' Village Hall |
| C Village Square | G New Park, Wetlands and Sports Pitches |
| D Senior Living | H A2 Road - Links to The O2 & Central London |

1. SMALL AND INTIMATE

- The area can comfortably be covered on foot
- The scale of the buildings and spaces is suitable and comfortable
- The residential density can sustain a range of key services

Even though it is one of the biggest regeneration schemes in Europe, Kidbrooke Village is physically small. The leisurely pedestrian can stroll around its perimeter in about an hour, and the four neighbourhoods make the various areas feel more intimate.

But while the area is small, the population will be substantial. When complete, Kidbrooke will house about 16,000 people—more like a small town than a village, some interviewees said—at double the density of the Ferrier Estate. This responds to today’s principles of social sustainability as well as the densities at which villages flourish. With a population this size, the neighbourhood will be large enough to sustain basic services like primary schools, local shops and community centres.

In a departure from standard practice, Berkeley is developing Kidbrooke Village from the perimeter in. The idea is to knit the new housing into neighbouring areas as quickly as possible. This is an excellent idea and helps the development feel integrated rather than insular (as the Ferrier Estate was) but it does mean that the core is still unfinished and feels ‘empty’, according to some interviewees. There is optimism that this will change once the village hub is in place. It will offer a range of key services (including restaurants, shops and medical facilities). By giving the community a focal point and main gathering space, it should make the area feel more intimate and defined—which has been a real problem for the Kidbrooke area in the past according to interviewees.

Kidbrooke Village does not have to offer every type of service because it sits among established neighbourhoods. Residents can make use of the wealth of amenities offered in nearby areas, and at the same time the site will offer new facilities to people from surrounding areas and the rest of south-east London. This will help it to grow organically and integrate with the wider area.

VERDICT:
YES



2.1 UNIQUE

Spatial identity

- The area has defined boundaries and an identifiable centre
- The area has its own atmosphere and sense of place
- There are community landmarks

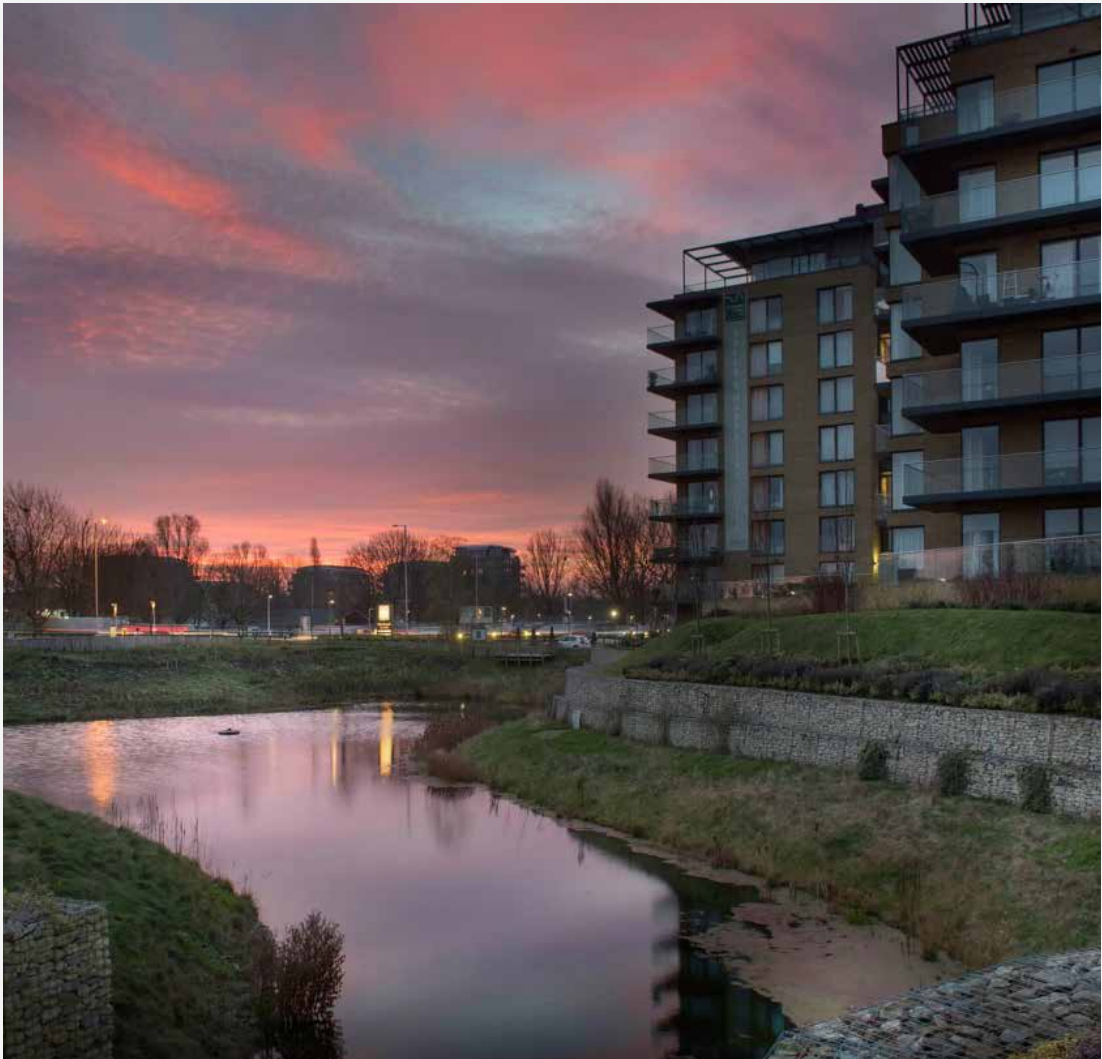
Kidbrooke Village was master planned by architects Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands (LDS), who saw it as an exemplar for sustainable suburbs. The site already had well-defined boundaries, and the LDS plan places the hub in a strong central position, next to the train station. The development encompasses four separate neighbourhoods, each designed by a different architect. The neighbourhoods have characteristic architectural styles, but work together cohesively to give Kidbrooke a distinctive atmosphere. Development and density are intentionally ‘feathered’, with high densities close to the ‘green spine’ and lower densities further away; this echoes the development pattern seen in older villages like Blackheath, where densities fall with distance from the village centre.

One of Kidbrooke’s distinguishing features is the amount and quality of green space. Only around a third of the development’s 109 acres will be built on. The housing is ranged along a series of water features that follow the original course of the Kyd Brook, helps to orientate the visitor. The green areas are criss-crossed by a network of footpaths, so pedestrians can reach the centre and station without walking along roads. The site’s mature trees were kept where possible and 1000 new trees are being planted. The development borders Sutcliffe Park, which has a Green Flag. The ample green space, most of which is communal rather than in the form of private gardens, has been thoughtfully landscaped.

At the moment there are few real landmarks apart from the river and the station, although these will emerge as the scheme is built out. Many historic English villages have a church with a spire or tower, but there is also a tradition of other, secular village landmarks—for example, the towers of medieval municipal buildings in Italian villages. Kidbrooke’s 21-storey residential tower, designed by Studio Egret West, could act as an important visual landmark in much the same way.

‘A village is a place with its own identity. Usually that comes from history, which can cause problems...The hub of the village needs to be intimate in some way, and probably quirky—unique.’ (interview)

VERDICT:
IN PROGRESS



2.2 UNIQUE

Traditions and collective memory

- There are regular community events and festivals
- Residents create collective memory

Unlike the neighbouring historic villages of Blackheath and Lee, until the 20th century Kidbrooke was never more than a hamlet. The area had no strong post-war identity other than the negative connotations of the Ferrier Estate, and local interviewees struggled to define it—one saying it could be described only as somewhere that ‘other communities abut’. The new Kidbrooke will need to develop its own atmosphere and sense of place, and continue to dispel lingering negative memories of the Ferrier Estate, which still colour the views of older residents in particular.

One challenge ‘new’ villages face is a lack of existing history or collective memory. Both are integral to our understanding of what makes a village—this was certainly demonstrated by our interviews—but both take time to develop. Memory, however, can be catalysed as residents build associations with each other and their surroundings and as places are animated. It is therefore important to foster social interaction and creative uses of space and to start implementing traditions that can in turn build memory. There are some local events and activities that, although still in early stages, are starting to do this. Thomas Tallis School hosted a community piano recital, and Ferrier Focus, a local community improvement group, has become Kidbrooke Focus, demonstrating a continuing legacy of community leadership and activism.

Berkeley organised a number of community events including the village fête, a celebration of the Chinese New Year, and the lighting of the local Christmas tree, decorated by pupils at a local school. The firm also supports other local events such as ‘Together We Run’ in Sutcliffe Park.

‘The Ferrier is gone completely, and probably that needed to happen. But the memory is also gone—this will be a completely new community.’ (interviewee)

VERDICT:
IN PROGRESS



3. DESIGNED FOR SOCIAL INTERACTION

- There is ample public and green space, which is used in many ways
- Facilities are provided for community events and everyday activities
- The central hub generates social interaction and there is a network of walkable routes

Berkeley has built a temporary village ‘hub’, just south of Kidbrooke Station, with a Sainsbury’s and a small range of services to support the first residents. In 2018, the next phase of development will deliver a major public square with restaurants, shops, and other public facilities. It will also be the location of the tower. The hub is expected to be lively and populated at all hours, since it will be the main access route to the station, the centre for local services, and the ‘front garden’ for hundreds of the closest residents.

The designers have considered the daily cycles of use of the public realm. Halton Court, the retirement living building, was intentionally situated near the centre of Kidbrooke Village, since its residents are around during the day and can use the public realm when commuters have gone. There is a good variety of green spaces, both public and private, and the grassy areas are already being used for fitness classes. There is a ‘village hall’ at Halton Court that can be hired for parties and meetings, but it is underused, partly because there is no parking.

The most vibrant community facility is OneSpace, the local youth centre, which is alive with toddler groups, exercise classes, birthday parties and a church. The centre’s leaders think it works because everything indeed takes place in ‘one space’. It serves Kidbrooke Village residents but also, importantly, people from the surrounding community, acting as a bridge between the new development and its neighbours. But OneSpace cannot create community on its own, and there are plans to demolish the building (the only one remaining from the days of the Ferrier Estate). While Greenwich Council has said it will provide a new space elsewhere for the activities now housed in OneSpace, it is still unclear where this will be or what form it will take. Ensuring continuation of these activities is important to the next stage of developing the ‘village’ atmosphere.

‘The long-term attractiveness of the village depends on the green space. The developments that have become very undesirable are usually pretty built up and concrete-y—once the buildings aren’t new why would you want to live there?’ (interview)

VERDICT:
IN PROGRESS



4. LOCALLY DRIVEN AND LOCALLY RESPONSIVE

- Residents are involved in managing the life of the village
- There is a long-term vision that residents support
- Leaders represent the community and reflect its concerns

Kidbrooke is not a democracy but a large residential scheme currently managed by its developer. Even so, Berkeley Homes have made great efforts to inform local residents (both those at Kidbrooke and neighbours) about what they are doing and, to a lesser extent, involve them in decisions. The Kidbrooke Stakeholder Group, which meets regularly to discuss progress and talk about issues in the area, includes representatives from Kidbrooke Village itself and from surrounding communities, Greenwich Council and Berkeley. A social entrepreneur has been engaged to formulate a community development plan, and is working to establish a group of residents that will take an active role in community leadership and decision-making.

Local people told us that Kidbrooke Village is impeccably managed by Berkeley. Berkeley handles all maintenance of the public realm, and this appeals to many who move there. In traditional villages, though, residents themselves often contribute to maintaining public areas, while parish councils make decisions about what is needed.

Berkeley's plan is for Kidbrooke residents gradually to take over these functions and it is putting the building blocks in place. Will people step up to fill these roles, particularly if some were attracted to the development because it offered low-maintenance living? Some interviewees were worried about the long-term management of the development's extensive open/public spaces: they are an asset now, but what will happen when the scheme is complete? Given that development is projected to continue at Kidbrooke for the next 15 years, Berkeley will inevitably play an important role in the life of the village for some time – but it must allow space for the residents to play their part into the future.

‘The way Kidbrooke is managed is quite unusual for a village. In a village, people take a lot of ownership over the area and put a lot into it. At the moment, residents in Kidbrooke Village don't have to lift a finger. Moving forward, we know we'll have to set up a management structure that allows people to take that ownership and play a bigger role.’ (interview)

VERDICT:
IN PROGRESS



5. FUNCTIONAL

- The community is well served by both public and private transport
- Core services are available locally
- There is a mix of uses

In drawing up the plans for Kidbrooke Village, Lifschutz Davidson Sandilands tried to include all the ingredients of a ‘sustainable suburb’: transport infrastructure, good connections to surrounding neighbourhoods and homes appropriate for range of household types (families, older downsizers, etc.). The development itself is overwhelmingly residential but does include key local services and excellent links to central London, where many of the residents can be expected to work. There is a functional mixed transport pattern: the main (traffic calmed) car route runs north to south, and cycle pedestrian routes and ‘green fingers’ run east to west. However links to neighbouring Blackheath are not as good as they could be—partly, we were told, because amenity groups in Blackheath opposed greater permeability.

Buyers report that the integration of modern features into an open, tranquil ‘village’ environment is subtle and effective, and particularly value the well-designed green space. But it is important that this be used. Rural villages have a symbiotic connection with surrounding green areas (often arable farmland); Kidbrooke’s green spaces will similarly be integrated into community life only if they are functional rather than merely decorative, and serve a variety of user groups.

The homes all meet ‘Lifetime Homes’ standards and the mix of homes can accommodate households through all stages of their life cycles. In principle young couples who move to the area can stay as their families grow and even as empty nesters and retirees. However some interviewees did not feel that even the larger homes were spacious enough for growing families.

The station provides a natural nexus. The village centre just south of the station, at the moment houses only a Sainsbury’s Local, a café and a GP surgery facing on to a small landscaped square, but a village hub featuring restaurants, specialist shops and public space is now being built. This is a change from the original plan, which was to put the hub in place at the very end of the development process. The first phase is scheduled to open by 2018, and the hub should be complete by 2021. Kidbrooke’s location means the retailers there will not compete directly with local shopping centres like Blackheath and Eltham, although some consumers from neighbouring areas will use the new facilities.

‘Even though the final hub isn’t built yet, we already have a supermarket, coffee shop, dentist, pharmacy... they are there, just not in the format they eventually will be.’ (interview)

VERDICT:
YES



6. A MIXED COMMUNITY

- There is a mix of ages, backgrounds, incomes and housing tenures
- Residents know and trust each other
- There are long-term residents who provide continuity

Some 50% of the housing provided in the first phase of construction was affordable, and when the entire development is completed it will account for 38%. The idea was that about 1/3 of the housing would be in each tenure—social/affordable, private rented and owner occupied. It is not clear what percentage are privately rented, as purchasers are under no obligation to inform Berkeley or the council if they rent their homes out, but interviewees suggested that the proportion was comparatively low. Around 65% of the private units were sold to owner-occupiers.

Residents range from older people (both in Halton Court and elsewhere) to downsizers and young families attracted by the schools. There are two primary schools in the Village, and neighbouring Thomas Tallis is a secondary school of choice for families of all incomes. Berkeley commissioned a social sustainability study of the development about two years after the first residents had moved in (Woodcraft and Bacon, 2013), and the indicators for social interaction and mix seem encouraging.

Villages develop a collective memory which is passed on by long-term residents, so it is important that people can stay in the community if they wish to. Kidbrooke Village offers a range of accommodation types to suit households at various stages in their housing careers, meaning that families that choose to stay can do so.

A few interviewees reported a lingering ‘us versus them’ tension between former Ferrier residents and newcomers, and resentment that some blocks have particular amenities while others do not.

*‘We want people to stay long term, that’s really our goal—to create a sustainable community, and places where people will stay for years.’
(interview)*

VERDICT:
YES



Gauged against our conceptual framework, Kidbrooke Village already has some of the characteristics of a New London Village. Its design and particular amenities are undeniably modern, at odds with the quaint images many of our interviewees associate with historical English villages. But its size, the integration of ample, useful green space, inclusion of key services and thoughtful design are all important building blocks which will help it grow into a sustainable, desirable village for today’s world and today’s Londoners. The other less tangible—but equally important—village features of identity, memory and community must develop over time.

EAST VILLAGE:
A CONTEMPORARY PARALLEL?

east village
london E20

The village name is not the only similarity between East Village and Kidbrooke Village. Both are large-scale new east London developments, and the first residents moved in at about the same time. East Village in Stratford occupies the former athletes’ village from London’s 2012 Olympic Games. Its handsome purpose-built blocks, located between the enormous Westfield Shopping Centre and the new Queen Elizabeth II Park, contain nearly 3000 flats. The area has several characteristics of a New Urban Village: it has excellent transport links and varied and impressive landscaping, which provides continuity with the park next door.

But while there are similarities between the two developments, there are also important differences. Perhaps the most important is that in East Village, almost all the units are rented. Half are owned by a large private landlord (Get Living London) and rented at market rents, and the other half, owned by a group of housing associations (Triathlon Homes), are let at affordable or social rents. While there are some families in the affordable housing, most of the private tenants are single people or young couples—despite the fact that East Village is next to the beautiful Queen Elizabeth Park and boasts an expensive new school. Given that English families traditionally prefer owner-occupied homes with gardens, it will be a challenge to create a genuinely mixed community in East Village.

The quality of the architecture is very high. The buildings are generally similar in shape and size, but each was designed by a different firm (many internationally famous). This has produced interesting variety in the detail of the buildings, but the overall uniformity is rather dull and makes orientation difficult for the visitor. The open space is attractive; the many intimate pocket parks or squares amongst the buildings all have their own atmosphere and are clearly used during the day by people who do not live there.



Commercial units are spread throughout the development on the ground floors of all the residential buildings. This pattern, traditionally seen in the centres of continental European cities, could help to produce a lively ‘city centre’ in East Village as well. But although there are 35 businesses planned, only a few had opened as of September 2015, and even when the units are occupied, they are likely to be mainly cafés, restaurants and shops targeted at young professionals: this will not provide a full range of services. The landlords recognise that they need to work to create a genuine community here, especially given that there are few families and almost all the residents rent, and they regularly organise activities and events to bring residents together.

East Village offers an interesting parallel to Kidbrooke Village in many ways: its newness, its size, the high quality of its design and public spaces. But the all-rental model means that residents are less likely than at Kidbrooke to put down long-term roots and coalesce into an urban village.

Chapter 3

WHAT COULD THE VILLAGE MODEL OFFER LONDON?

This chapter reflects on the lessons from Kidbrooke and how the idea of villages could inform our response to the housing crisis. It offers three recommendations for anyone involved in large-scale placemaking across the capital.



London is undergoing a development boom. The talk is of a housing crisis—which is true enough—but in fact there is a significant amount of housing being built in London now, with housing starts nearing their pre-recession peak. The infrequent visitor to the capital is struck immediately by the difference this has made to the city’s skyline. Twin lines of high-rise residential blocks, each with a suitably imperious name, snake along the banks of the Thames from Putney to Canary Wharf, and long-derelict plots or underused industrial sites now sprout wholly new ‘quarters’, ‘villages’ and ‘squares’.

So the quantity of new development is moving in the right direction. But is the quality right? Will at least some of them grow into genuine communities—the Blackheath Villages of the future? Or are we instead building iconic but isolated high rises that will never generate social interaction or integrate fully with their surroundings?

Urbanists have learned that the types and quality of buildings themselves are not the only determinants of how a place functions as a home and a community. We need to consider the wider setting: the neighbourhood, the schools, the walk to the tube station, the mix of residents. In other areas of south-east London, estates of post-war pre-fabs, regarded by some experts as appalling architecture—indeed, not really architecture at all—have only recently been replaced, in part because the residents so fiercely defended them. They were fond not of the homes themselves, which were, by modern standards, small and poorly insulated, but of the communities that grew up around them and of their generous outside space.

In these low-density pre-fab areas and even in some high-rise estates, communities grew in an organic way; the concern of the authorities at the time was simply to provide roofs for families, so there was little in the way of services and no thought given to ‘placemaking’. But the population densities of current London developments are very high; many can house thousands of residents, often ranged vertically in high-rise flats rather than horizontally around streets and squares. These higher densities put more pressure on neighbourhoods, and call for more attention to facilities and place. There are plenty of successful communities that have not been carefully planned, but there are also too many developments where there was no thought given to the features that nurture community and social interaction. You cannot manufacture a community, but you can think about what kinds of design and planning help communities to emerge.

Housing was the single most important issue in the London mayoral campaign. All the candidates recognise the need for a step change in the rate of residential construction in the capital. There is much debate about the amount of new housing needed, but far too little about the kinds of places that should be created. And despite support in many quarters for the creation of a new programme of garden cities (see for example Sadiq Khan, 2013 and Rudlin and Falk, 2014), the political and financial reality is that most of London’s housing will be built in London, often on small high-density sites but also in larger regeneration areas such as Thamesmead. Community needs to work in these places, and the urban village offers one model for how to create it.

Kidbrooke has done some things very well, and offers positive lessons for other high-density developments in London. There are three things that stand out. The first is that in new developments, the quality and design of the public spaces and the routes that people take through them shape community much more than the designs of individual homes. These are things that must be thought about at the design stage and even earlier—when the land is being assembled and purchased, and transportation both local and longer-distance is being planned.

The second is that urban villages should be permeable to residents of surrounding communities, with mutual sharing of facilities. People living in nearby streets use the doctor’s surgery in Kidbrooke Village, and there is reciprocal traffic to local schools, shops and churches. This is both efficient in an economic sense—it avoids unnecessary duplication of facilities and enables higher usage rates more in line with capacity—and serves to knit existing and new communities together. The benefits of permeability are underscored by the experience of the Ferrier Estate: the housing itself was generous and well designed, but there were only a few access routes into the estate, and the form of the blocks excluded outsiders rather than welcoming them.

The third lesson is that village-building is a process that does not stop when the first residents move in; indeed, that is when the real work starts. On large sites that are built out over years rather than months, the developer may need to take an active role in community-building, exercising—at least temporarily—the kind of stewardship role that major employers, local authorities or large landowners had in the past (and still do have—see the box below). Housing associations have always prioritised this kind of work, as did the creators of some utopian villages.

MARYLEBONE VILLAGE: A CURATED VILLAGE

Marylebone Village, centred on Marylebone High Street, is an urban village between Regent’s Park and Oxford Street in central London. The Howard de Walden Estate, which owns the land, is one of central London’s great landowning estates. The estate actively manages the retail and commercial mix on the high street, renting mostly to independents rather than typical high-street shops.

This is one of London’s most accessible districts, served by seven tube stations; its housing stock consists mostly of blocks of flats built in the Edwardian period and terraced housing. In the past considered a rather unremarkable neighbourhood, the area is now one of the capital’s most sought-after addresses. Marylebone Village demonstrates how a landowner or developer can actively mould the character of an urban village.



RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, this report makes three recommendations. None call for a change in policy. Arguably, there are plenty of policies in place already. At its heart, this report is calling for people to think carefully about the kind of places we are trying to create in London and have a plan to deliver them.

1. HAVE A CLEAR VISION FOR EACH SITE

London is a city made of villages. But clearly, not every new development has to be a village - there are many valid housing models. Moreover, the concept of a village changes over time. What matters is that every developer should be clear from the outset what type of place it is trying to create and take this vision seriously.

There are 33 sites, for example, in the current London SHLAA allocated or approved for 1,000 homes or more. At that scale, each of them could genuinely express the idea of a village. Even excluding those which already have an outline planning consent, there is potential for more than a dozen new urban villages across the capital.

If villages are the answer, the six characteristics described in this report should inform the design and delivery of each site. The characteristics can also relate to an area. Every time we designate a Housing Zone, we should think about the social qualities we want it to possess, not just how it might contribute to jobs and the economy.

2. PRIVATE DEVELOPERS SHOULD LEAD COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

We all know that buildings don't create a community. A genuine community requires social capital, not just high quality architecture. It depends on emotional connections, links with neighbours, a feeling of ownership and identification with place. Given the right environment, this kind of social capital will usually develop over time, but the process can take decades. The problem for new development is that nobody wants to wait that long. Someone needs to act as a catalyst.

Traditionally, this job might have fallen to staff from the council, a neighbourhood management team, or an active local charity. But the reality today is that money for salaries and grants has gone. So who can pick up the baton?

We believe that developers working on long-term regeneration schemes should lead community-building programmes during the five to ten years after first occupation. They should plan for these activities, resource them adequately, and staff them with appropriate expertise.

Planning authorities should acknowledge this investment and could even trade off an element of capital expenditure on physical amenity for revenue funding to support community development.

3. TURN ESTATES INTO VILLAGES

A number of the sites that could become London villages are on public sector land. This means the disposal process and choice of development partner are crucial.

All public works procurement contracts above £4.1m are, as things currently stand, obliged to use an OJEU process. In practice, this tends to produce a lengthy and expensive bidding process that adds cost and limits the number of interested parties. Above all, it tends to favour bids with the lowest upfront costs and militates against high quality placemaking.

The lesson from Kidbrooke and elsewhere is that if we want to turn estates into villages, the contracting authorities (whether a council or government department) must prioritise quality and delivery as much as price in the criteria they set and the weighting they assign. There are processes within OJEU that public bodies can adopt that are not solely based on price. But this is a significant cultural shift for the public sector and taking a more balanced view will need direct endorsement from the Mayor and Whitehall.

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