

HIGH RISE HOPE REVISITED

The social implications of
upgrading large estates

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OCT 2014

HEADLINES

LSE researchers interviewed residents of the Edward Woods estate in West London between 2011 and 2014 during and after renovation works which included a major energy efficiency upgrade with residents in situ. This scheme was used as a model case study for how the Green Deal and Community Energy Saving Partnership (CESP) 'whole building' approach could work in high-rise, socially rented estates. The estate comprises of 754 flats in three towers and several lower blocks. The headline findings are from our second survey in 2014, after the retrofit works were finished.

There are high levels of deprivation on the estate and **many residents are fuel poor**, with previously very cold, uninsulated flats. Most community activity and **engagement on the estate is of an informal nature** although there is also an active Tenants and Residents Association (TRA). Residents are **positive about the estate and their homes** and generally feel safe living there, although slightly less safe in 2013-14 than back in 2011 due to the reduction in concierge services

Residents, particularly in the studio flats, have made the biggest cost savings since 2011. **Average energy costs have gone down** significantly for those in studios and have increased a little for those in one and two bedroom flats – but far less than the increase in energy prices. Even in the one bedroom balcony flats, where insulation appears to have been least adequate, the rise in energy bills is far lower than the rise in energy prices. This means that overall energy use (i.e. units of energy consumed) has fallen over the retrofit.

Some residents remain unaware that the retrofit work was carried out to save energy and provide warmer homes. Community education needs to focus on how people can reduce their energy use in order to maximise the gains of increased insulation.

A number of residents were disappointed about the level of **internal refurbishment and redecoration** to the communal areas that accompanied the works – people feel they were promised more than was delivered in the end. Although there was considerable consultation at the beginning of the project, **more ongoing support would have improved wider understanding of the objectives of the regeneration** and explain the many delays.

Concerns about the reduced concierge service dominate many people's view of the changes on the estate. The visible presence of the concierge in the blocks was removed while the works were going on and had some impact on residents' perception of safety.

The main suggestion from Edward Woods residents was for better management of the works – particularly around the timescale of the project which slipped many times over, and communications about the delays.

1. INTRODUCTION

High Rise Hope Revisited is the report on the second stage of a two-part study investigating the social implications of energy efficiency retrofit in large multi-storey tower blocks. It investigates the social and community impact the works can have on large social housing estates before and during the refurbishment process, following an initial study which was carried out in 2012 and written up in *High Rise Hope*¹.

2. THE EDWARD WOODS ESTATE

Edward Woods is a large high-rise estate situated in the Shepherds Bush Green ward in the north of the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. The estate is made up of three 23-storey tower blocks alongside four walk-up maisonette blocks all built between 1966 and 1971. There are 754 mostly rented flats within the estate owned and managed by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham.

Social conditions and fuel poverty

According to the Government's Department for Energy and Climate Change, the key drivers behind fuel poverty are a combination of:

- the energy efficiency of the property (and therefore, the energy required to heat and power the home);
- the cost of energy;
- household income.

Before refurbishment works were carried out to the Edward Woods Estate tower blocks, many of the risks associated with fuel poverty were present, for example:

- extremely poor levels of thermal efficiency;
- dominance of more costly energy payment systems e.g. pre-payment meters;
- concentration of fuel poor, lower income groups such as pensioners, ill, disabled and unemployed people.

A survey in 2007 found that two thirds of Edward Woods residents suffered from excessive cold and damp in the winter and that many were very worried about rising energy bills.

In summary, the estate:

- suffers from considerable deprivation but is surrounded by more affluent areas;
- has higher than average levels of unemployment and working age people dependent on benefits;
- has diverse population of different ethnic backgrounds;
- contains more single-person households than average and fewer households with children;
- includes a sheltered housing facility;
- houses many residents affected by fuel poverty.

Regeneration of the estate

The estate has experienced a significant amount of regeneration and upgrading over the past 20 years. The most recent regeneration project was led and managed by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, who commissioned Energy Conscious Design (ECD) Architects and the building contractors Breyer. Rockwool was the insulation provider. The Council's project objectives at the outset were to:

- transform the visual appearance of Edward Woods at both estate and wider neighbourhood scale;
- address the problems of unsatisfactory physical conditions and an unattractive environment caused by poor design and underinvestment;
- deliver reductions in energy use and costs, and hence CO₂ emissions;

- create a flagship renewable energy project within the Borough by providing solar PV cells to generate electricity.

The project was ambitious and complex, covering many critical building elements. Much remedial work was required on the concrete building structure before the external cladding of the blocks could begin. The energy saving and generation potential of PV is considerable: the exterior insulation improves the insulating value of the building nine-fold, and each block has its south facing wall covered with solar panels, which it is hoped will provide around 82,000 kWh of electricity annually. This electricity will be used via the grid to power lifts and lighting in the communal areas.

In addition to these building elements, the regeneration project also included:

- refurbishing the communal areas;
- constructing 12 penthouses for private sale;
- refurbishing the main electrical systems, including new lighting;
- double glazing the windows in stairwells;
- installing gas central heating to studios;
- converting ground floor space to provide seven offices for voluntary organisations.

3. LSE HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES RESEARCH

There is a potential social and community benefit in energy saving intervention and our research on the Edward Woods estate set out to discover what these benefits were.

The research was a two stage process in which we interviewed residents of the three tower blocks during the refurbishment process (September – December 2011) and then re-visited residents once work was complete (August 2013 – March 2014). Our original plan was to interview the same residents at both stages. We managed to track and re-interview half of the original 48 interviewees, and also interviewed a further 26 residents making a total of 50 resident interviews in 2013-14.

¹ <http://www.rockwool.co.uk/files/RW-UK/site%20images/facade/High%20Rise%20Hope-Full%20Report.pdf>

At both stages of work we interviewed tenants on the estate, mostly within residents' homes, for around 20-40 minutes. With residents permission we recorded the interviews. We asked people about:

- their home;
- the estate;
- their sense of safety and security;
- energy usage and costs;
- levels of social interaction and community participation;
- residents' personal experience of the regeneration works and energy use;
- residents' overall feelings about where they live and their relations with neighbours, the council and local services.

a. Key findings

WHERE PEOPLE LIVE

In general, **residents on the Edward Woods estate like their homes**, especially the space they have, they find their flats comfortable and have a generally high quality of life. 78 per cent describe their quality of life in their home as good or excellent and just six per cent say it is bad or terrible. This compared with 68 per cent and 21 per cent in 2011, showing a marked improvement.

There are **some concerns about conditions within the blocks**. Many residents would like more investment and improvement in communal services particularly lifts which people rely upon. A quarter would like the concierge service reinstated at the base of every block as it was previously.

Overall, **residents value living on the estate**, with only four per cent of interviewees feeling negative about it. The location and accessibility of the estate are the most attractive aspects of the estate.

People are generally proud to live on the estate, with many saying this had improved since the regeneration, and residents overwhelmingly say they enjoy living there. However, some say that the **regeneration was too narrowly focused** on the exterior of the blocks and not enough on the internal living conditions for residents. Residents on the estate **still feel very safe and secure** both in their homes and in the estate as a whole in 2013-14 although **slightly less so than in 2011**. This can be mainly attributed to the change in the concierge service which was introduced as the works were ongoing. Only one tower, Poynter House, now has an actual concierge present in the reception area. The other two tower blocks are monitored by CCTV from there and through occasional walkabouts and inspections by the concierge team. For many residents, the removal of the friendly face and point of contact in the reception area at the base of their block has been significant. There are 175 flats in each tower.

A relatively low number of residents interviewed described themselves as active in the community (28 per cent) with another 52 per cent saying they were not involved at all. This is very similar to 2011. A small number of residents interviewed are very active in the local community, playing key roles in the Tenants and Residents Association. But the majority of community interaction is of a much more informal nature, involving speaking to neighbours and helping people out. Many residents felt that the regeneration works had impacted on community relations in either a positive or a negative way.

“Residents on the Edward Woods estate like their homes, especially the flats themselves and their spaciousness, and have a high quality of life.”

Energy saving

Energy costs in 2013-14 remain a key concern for residents as energy prices have risen steeply. Energy costs have dropped somewhat or stayed the same, and some residents are paying a lot less than in 2011. More than half of those interviewed said that their bills had stayed the same or gone down since the works, in spite of price rises. Where costs have gone up, the price rises experienced by residents appear to be lower than the average ten per cent increase in energy prices seen across the major energy supply companies since 2011.

Residents are well aware of how much energy they use because of the very high costs associated with it and a large majority felt that saving energy was important, although they were often unsure of how best to do this. They showed a need for “refresher” information on energy saving.

Managing the process of renovating large estates

ON-SITE MANAGEMENT AND CONCIERGES

The Edward Woods Estate has been a model of local management since the beginning of the 1980s when it was identified by Government as a ‘priority estate’ and its problems were addressed through local estate-based management, a local budget and frequent repair. For many residents the concierge service on the estate provides an invaluable local link between residents and the Council. Back in 2011 residents were concerned about

“There was inevitable disruption to residents throughout the works with noise, dust and lack of light because of scaffolding and plastic sheeting over the whole tower block.”

the proposed cuts to this service and when we carried out our second round of interviews in 2013-14 many residents were disappointed about the reduction in staffing that had taken place. As these changes occurred during the regeneration works, some residents were unable to distinguish the two processes and their views of the upgrading work were influenced by their views about the concierge service.

IMPACT ON RESIDENTS OF UPGRADING WORK

An upgrading project of this scale required intensive management and close collaboration between the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, Breyer (the contractors), Rockwool (the suppliers) and the local residents. There was inevitable disruption to residents throughout the regeneration works with noise, dust and lack of light because of the scaffolding and plastic sheeting covering the whole tower block. In spite of this, almost half of those we interviewed still rated their own experiences of the work as good or excellent.

CLARITY OF COMMUNICATION

There was disappointment from many residents that the focus of the works was on the outside of the blocks. For some this supported their view that the works had been commissioned for the benefit of others not for the residents of the estate themselves. Communication of the original intentions of the building works needed to be much more frequent and clearer throughout the project to help residents understand what was happening, why it was happening and when it would be completed.

b. Lessons from residents

Our findings from the first survey show that a number of aspects of the work could be improved during the process of retrofit:

- **Management** of the timetable and associated delays to the project requires great care and application. Communication with residents is vital to ensure that residents do not feel left behind / abandoned in difficult circumstances.
- **Better advance preparation** before the works began would have helped. Vulnerable residents (young families, ill or elderly) needed more support. In special circumstances, agreements could be made to relieve the immediate problems (noise, dust, disruption of services, etc).
- **Communication** about the project and its energy saving potential (not just aesthetic improvement) needs to be repeated frequently throughout the project – linked with post-regeneration provision of energy advice and support for residents.
- **Resident fatigue** at incessant regeneration works to the estate – coupled with huge delays – created worries that the work would never end.

Our second round of interviews in 2013-14 underlined how dominant **these themes have remained:**

- Many residents specifically mentioned better management of the works and improved communication as ways that a project like this could work better in the future.
- For many residents, there was a lack of understanding of the main purpose of the works, i.e. energy saving.
- Long delays lasting over three years made some people frustrated and exasperated by the disruptive building works and associated noise, dust and mess.
- In spite of this, it was remarkable how long suffering residents were, and how strong their social and emotional ties to the estate were. They liked it even more at the end of the works.

c. Lessons to learn for future schemes

- **Improved communication with residents** – before, during and after works
- It is necessary to find a way to **engage residents in the purpose of the works**
- Ensure that **when residents are inconvenienced** for example through a lack of water, gas or electricity supply, or when lifts are taken out of service, that **effective communication** takes place and times given for the lack of service are not breached.
- **Make realistic promises to residents** about the final outcome in terms of quality of works
- **Changes relating to management or maintenance** of the estate that occur during the regeneration process will be seen by residents as **inextricably linked to the project.**
- **Staff presence is important**
- **Find ways to help promote community involvement and engagement**

d. Conclusions

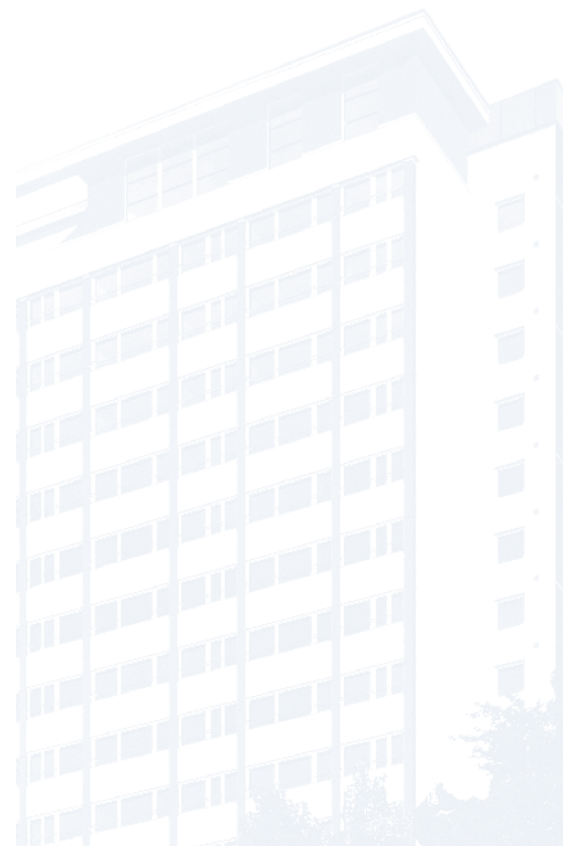
From our research over three years in the Edward Woods estate we are able to show that the estate is generally very popular with residents, a view that may be contrary to public opinion of how residents would feel about a high-rise, low-income estate in inner London. People are very happy with the location of the estate, appreciate that the flats are a good size and are comfortable and on the whole feel safe and secure living there.

The works undertaken on the estate were substantial and there was significant disruption caused to the residents of the three tower blocks as building works went on for over three years.

Projects like this are incredibly valuable though for a number of reasons, all of which are demonstrated through the work on the Edward Woods estate:

- Addressing issues of **fuel poverty** and **energy efficient improvements** to the existing housing stock.
- **Improving quality of life and conditions** in individual homes and wider estates and neighbourhoods.
- **Making people feel proud** of the aesthetic improvements to their area and general upgrade – people feel their area compares well with others.

The installation of energy efficiency measures as part of wider regeneration schemes can help extend the life of existing buildings for the future whilst ensuring long-established communities are able to enjoy improved conditions in a secure, well maintained place to live. These types of neighbourhood improvements may also help promote more mixed communities as people want to buy into places that are innovative, forward thinking and energy efficient. Improving the quality of housing leads to greater satisfaction and pride among existing residents meaning that people will want to stay where they are, helping to ensure a stable local community.



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