

CREATING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Alex Bell asks developers, designers and placemakers how they are creating and repurposing both new and existing residential communities

"It's a site where you could potentially live throughout your whole adult life, by moving within it," says Tahreen Shad of the recently completed 127-home Spinners Quarter development in Pendleton, Salford.

Lovell Partnerships' regional partnerships director – North West and North Wales adds: "With sustainable communities it's not one organisation that knows best, it's a collective, and you've got to try to understand that collective to make sure that you design it right for that local area.

"Also, you don't just want to rely on one tenure, you need a blend of mixed tenures to ensure you create a holistic development."

Sustainable community defined

In 2005, the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC) was set up by then deputy prime minister John Prescott as a key part of the government's drive to create local communities fit for the 21st century.

A sustainable community is a place where people want to live and work both now and in the future, said ASC, adding that a place that is prosperous and vibrant is one that will improve everyone's quality of life.

Tahreen Shad



Ten years later came the Paris Agreement and net zero, a concept that has come a long way in a very short time and one that has significant and rapidly changing implications on the real estate industry.

On the importance of quality development, open public space, energy efficiency, connectivity and green infrastructure, Shad says: "It all adds up to a better sense of wellbeing for people who live within communities."

Spinners Quarter, a 7.7-acre plot south of Liverpool Road, includes a mix of two, three and four-bedroom homes, 17 of which are

for social rent. "A big part of our business focuses on how we lift communities and we do that by asking residents what they need while working within key stakeholder groups.

"You have to work with the community and understand what you're dealing with, and improve the public realm because ultimately you're trying to not just develop a lifestyle, but also intergenerational developments."

Factory-built homes

Peel Waters' Wirral Waters is billed as the UK's largest and most sustainable regeneration project, within which the emerging Northbank neighbourhood includes 30 mixed-use energy-efficient modular homes Redbridge Quay, a £55m development.

Two-thirds of the family townhouses and row houses are occupied, with plans for phase two due to be unveiled in the summer.

These have been designed by Liverpool architects shedkm, whose associate director Darren Jones leads the internal sustainability group.

He says: "It is all about how you start to build a community and then make it feel like

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a place where people want to live. Getting the pocket parks delivered early was a key part of that at Redbridge Quay, as were the residents' gardens and communal garden.

"One of the lovely things in the first phase was the planting of semi-mature fruit – apple and pear – trees, which are there for all the residents to use and share."

The pocket park adjacent to phase one of Redbridge Quay – named due to its proximity to the red bascule bridge in the northeast corner of Birkenhead Docks – is fairly modest in size but contains public open space, grassed areas, plants and children's play equipment.

The idea is that as phases progress, local independent shops will operate between the pocket parks and along the water's edge.

When it comes to energy efficiency at Redbridge Quay, Jones says: "Our target of being 50 per cent more energy efficient was set in the early stages.

"The standards that we're having to meet in terms of building regulations are forever getting tougher and tougher but the whole thinking was that we had to go above and beyond what building regulations needed us to do.

"Good insulation is key and high-performance external walls and roofs help to keep energy demand for heating low. Modular helps us with that as with a traditional build you're very much dependent on the workmanship and construction on the day.

"Modular is more controlled in the factory, and rigorous, so you can get consistent thermal performance. These homes have tall windows and therefore good daylight too. It's also about getting to the optimal sweet spot with this as with summers becoming hotter we don't want overheating in the homes."

The completed Redbridge Quay modular homes all have air source hot water cylinders producing hot water and small electric panel heaters providing heating.



Commenting on whether the North West will see more modular community-focused developments, Jones says: "I think we will see more as there are lots of advantages to modular, like build quality always being better. It's also easier to hit the ever-increasing energy performance targets.

"There are challenges, however, which means they aren't right for every site. It's not cheaper than building traditionally.

"There's also a number of high-profile big modular manufacturers that have gone into administration for different reasons.

"With modular I think there's a learning curve in the industry and the kind of slow and steady approach is the right one. Some of the most interesting modular companies have a standardised chassis and kit of parts, but you can put them together in different ways so that the homes aren't always looking the same on every site."

Living with social value

Northstone, part of the Peel Group, sells itself as 'more than a homebuilder', and at the heart of its social value framework is the creation of new training, employment and local business opportunities through Northstone's regeneration work.

In November, Wigan Council approved plans for a 113-home scheme off Stothert Street in Atherton, to be known as Popple.

The first energy-efficient homes at Popple are expected to be ready by the autumn, including 33 for affordable rent, 12 available for social rent and 68 rent-to-buy properties. It follows a £22m deal between Northstone and affordable housing provider Torus.

Commenting on how long-term rent versus home ownership will be shaped in the future, Northstone sales director Anita Jolley says: "Between owner occupier and renter, you've got the shared ownership option which always works out as slightly cheaper.

"With that in mind there will definitely be more shared ownership in the marketplace. I still think there's a little bit of a lack of understanding of both what it means and what it's all about."

For Richard Sterling, development and decarbonisation director at Seddon Housing Partnerships, looking after existing stock is a key part of the wider housing strategy.

"We've invested in upskilling a number of our team to become retrofit s," says Sterling. "These are people who sit with residents and talk to them about what energy improvements actually mean and look like in practice. That can't be underestimated.

"From a new-build perspective it's about partnership, partnership, partnership and bringing the whole team of partners together early while engaging with the community so we can collectively follow a co-design principle.

"Assessing a range of different sustainability options within the partnership is also crucial, so that we arrive at a solution that does the right thing in terms of improving the sustainability of homes and delivering in a viable and commercial deliverable manner."



Lovell Partnerships development in Miles Platting