

Second life for Hillington Square

The Minister for Housing and Planning Brandon Lewis MP has officially opened Millfleet Court, the first phase of the Hillington Square estate regeneration designed by Mæ Architects and Hemingway Design. The project, for clients Freebridge Community Housing, transforms an estate close to King's Lynn town centre.

The £30m refurbishment of Hillington Square is the biggest regeneration project currently taking place in King's Lynn. The project includes refurbishment of 320 properties, remodelling of the estate layout and public realm improvements.

HemingwayDesign were commissioned by Freebridge to develop a new vision for the estate. Working with Mæ as lead architect the team chose to give the failing estate a second life rather than demolish it and redevelop. The team has given the estate a new identity, improved security, layout and environmental performance. Parts of the Hillington Square complex have been demolished, the flats upgraded and the whole site opened up to improve connections and integrate it back in with the rest of the town.

Hillington Square suffered from many design faults found in estates of their period. Problems often exacerbated by their design: had garages dominating the ground floor frontage. The whole estate was connected by a single deck access and vehicle and pedestrian connections to the wider context were severed. Rather than assuming that the answer lay in demolition the team sought ways of remodelling the buildings and environment to improve connectivity, security, sense of ownership and character. Working with Freebridge, residents and the Behavioural insights team at the Cabinet Office the team developed designs focused on improving social capital and quality of life.

Externally new stair and lift cores have been built to make each block independent, balconies have been added, windows replaced and insulation upgraded, garages have been converted to new entrance porches activating the ground floor and new routes and landscape. Internal remodelling includes changes to layout along with new kitchens and bathrooms, while

Alex Ely of Mæ said: "This is more than just a refurbishment. The changes transform a challenging estate and will help improve the lives of residents. It would have been easy to demolish and start again but the fabric of Hillington Square was sound. Remodelling has allowed us to develop a template for adapting such estates, extending their life and overcoming their urban and architectural design flaws."

Wayne Hemingway of HemingwayDesign said: "The popular consensus amongst the great and the good of Kings Lynn was to demolish Hillington Square. If it had been demolished then the site would most likely be languishing empty. So we salute Freebridge Housing for allowing us to prove that the team could turn a sow's ear"

Tony Hall, Chief Executive of Freebridge Community Housing said: "This is a momentous occasion for the people living in King's Lynn. We are delighted that the new homes are ready and people are about to move in and enjoy living in the heart of the community."

Phase 1 has been built by Lovells. Hemingway Design as client design adviser, Mæ as Architects, Rossi Long were Structural Engineers, URS and ALH Building Services as Services Engineers, GC Baxter and Associates as QS

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