

Conservation Area Developer Case Study - Whitefield, Pendle: Development by Great Places Housing Association

Whitefield in Pendle is a remarkably intact former mill workers settlement, containing over 1700 terraced homes on an urban grid. Following a public enquiry which rejected the planned 'compulsory purchase order' which proposed extensive clearances, the whole neighbourhood was eventually designated as a Conservation Area in 2004. For several years after, Whitefield became the subject of concerted regeneration efforts and benefitted from Housing Market Renewal (HMR) funds. Hundreds of terraced homes were repaired and in many cases, larger homes were created by knocking two houses together, to meet community demand for larger family housing. The area also benefitted from a Heritage Lottery Funded 'Townscape Heritage Initiative' and English Heritage 'Partnership Grant' scheme.



HMR funded terraced housing group repairs, new school and public space, Every Street, Whitefield. © Great Places Housing

Following the withdrawal of HMR funds and the winding down of heritage-led investment, the regeneration of Whitefield began to struggle again, leaving unoccupied properties falling into further disrepair. A revised masterplan then proposed a new school, public space and affordable housing to transform the heart of Whitefield and these have substantially contributed to the 'good growth' of the area.

Great Places Housing Association initially contributed to this by developing a Homes and Communities (HCA) funded, new-build project in 2012 which filled a gap site. This left a largely cleared site containing two historic buildings in an advanced state of collapse, one

being supported by a scaffolding frame ! With poor sales receipts from previous group repairs and a lack of private investment, Great Places stepped in again to work in partnership with Pearl 2 (a joint venture between Pendle Borough Council and locally based Barnfield Construction) the HCA and Lancashire County Council. A further 14 'affordable rent' properties were built whilst the County and Pendle Councils delivered the new primary school and enhanced public realm.

The design team responded to the site challenges, creating modern homes following the layout, mass and height of their neighbours. Whilst the new houses are set back from the main street, their terraced form respects the character of the conservation area. Those houses facing the side streets have been built to match the traditional back-of-pavement line. The predominant material is brick, carefully selected to harmonise with the colour of the local stone.

Following the opening of the new school and completion of the Great Places development, the final element was to enhance the public realm. Stone setts and paving have been used to reflect Whitefield's past, alongside more contemporary insertions such as granite planters and edging.



New housing and public realm improvements, Every Street, Whitefield, by Great Places Housing Group. © Great Places Housing

When asked to comment on the project and working in a conservation area, Nicky Lloyd (Development Officer at Great Places Housing Group, Manchester) said:

‘Great Places is a Housing Association providing over 19,000 affordable, social and supported homes across the North West and Yorkshire. Based in Manchester, we are a not-for-profit organisation which prides itself on resident participation and high quality design.

Development in a Conservation Area presents a variety of challenges. The key constraint is balancing high quality design with limited funds. By their very nature, there are typically a host of new issues to address when working in a historic area, in addition to the high build cost of utilising a palate of materials which responds sympathetically to the surrounding built environment. The key to our development in Whitefield was partnership working; without the support of all of those involved the scheme would have proved a challenge to deliver.

Conservation Area status ensures careful consideration is given to the design of a new build scheme and how it harmonises with its surroundings. Although design should be scrutinised through the standard planning channels, conservation status is a useful tool to ensure a more robust consideration of design and context. For Great Places, design scrutiny is a fundamental component of our internal procedures; undertaking exhaustive internal and external design development to deliver neighbourhoods of choice. We are proud to say we had 100% customer satisfaction on the development in Whitefield.

Conservation status requires consultation with a wide range of statutory bodies, meaning progress can sometimes be hindered by adopting ‘design by committee’. This can lead to incoherent design, and a lack of a clear vision and aesthetic. Although there is an appreciation that each Conservation Area is unique, at times it was unclear in this case whether the design brief, dictated by the planning process and statutory consultees, required a pastiche or a more contemporary approach.

As an organisation we encourage authorities to establish a clear development brief when regenerating historic places, aligning Local Plan policies with the objectives of the Conservation Area Management Plan to streamline and speed up the design and planning process. The brief should provide a clear steer on design principles and aspirations, without being so prescriptive as to hinder creative interpretation and innovation’.

Whilst there are still repair and enhancement works to complete in Whitefield, the delivery of the Great Places development alongside the new school and enhanced public realm contributed to the Whitefield Conservation Area being removed from the Heritage at Risk register in 2016. House prices have risen substantially – an indication that public confidence has returned and the growth of the area can continue into the future.

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