

2 Comments

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# Urban villages: Some observations from LSE London, by Kath Scanlon

I call myself a Londoner but really, I live in a village: Forest Hill, SE23. My kids went to the village primary school, I meet my friends in the village cafes (or pubs, of an evening), and the pound-a-bowl fruit and veg man often gives me a free punnet of something as I'm a regular. One of the best things about my village is how easy it is to get to the rest of London—but really Forest Hill has almost everything I need.



We Forest Hill-ers are not London's only village people. Observers over the centuries have remarked that London is quintessentially a city of villages. Neighbourhoods like Dulwich, Hampstead and Richmond were historic

century railway suburbs (Hither Green Village) to the growing number of new developments that call themselves villages.

Why do the citizens of one of the world's great capitals want to live in villages? What is an urban village—and do the new ones springing up fit the definition? And how can we ensure that big new London developments work as the kind of village communities where Londoners like to live? Last year Berkeley Homes asked me and colleagues at LSE London to look at these questions. The report of that research—New London Villages: Creating community—was released on 22 July. We identified six characteristics of a new London village:



1. It's small and intimate and can be comfortably covered on foot
2. It's unique, and has an identifiable centre with its own atmosphere and sense of place
3. It's designed for social interaction with plenty of public and green space, and places for community events

4. It's locally driven and locally responsive, and residents are involved in decisions
5. It's functional; well served by public transport and with good access to core services like a doctor's surgery, food shops and schools.
6. It's mixed – the community has a mix of ages, backgrounds and tenures; there are long-standing residents as well as new arrivals.

We also put together a video that describes our findings.



It's easy to see how established communities can function as villages. But what about a new development? We looked at Berkeley's Kidbrooke Village, which has replaced the 1960s Ferrier Estate in Blackheath, to see how it measured up. The development will by 2030 have about 4800 homes; when we did our research there were about 1200 units occupied. It wasn't yet functioning as a village in every respect. This isn't surprising—villages cannot be created instantly. They emerge over time, as local traditions and a sense of collective memory become established. But the building blocks were there: an intimate, walkable layout; a central hub with shops, a GP surgery and a school; an emerging sense of place.



The research did provide some pointers for Kidbrooke—but more importantly it has lessons for the rest of London. The scale of housing demand in the capital London means that we need to build big to have any hope of meeting it, especially if using Green Belt land is ruled out. On past experience these big new developments will be housing Londoners for at least 50 years and possibly 150. They need to work as communities, not just collections of homes.

place they are trying to create. Second, private developers should put resources into building community during the development period – specifically during the initial five to ten years after the first residents move in. Finally, public bodies own much of London’s potential development land. They should prioritise quality and delivery, not just price, when they sell this land for residential development.

We can’t all live in Dulwich (or indeed Forest Hill), but all Londoners should be able to live in genuine and functional communities—even if their homes are new. Our full report, [New London Villages: Creating Communities](#), which can be found [here](#), provides more ideas about how developers and councils could work together to create such communities.

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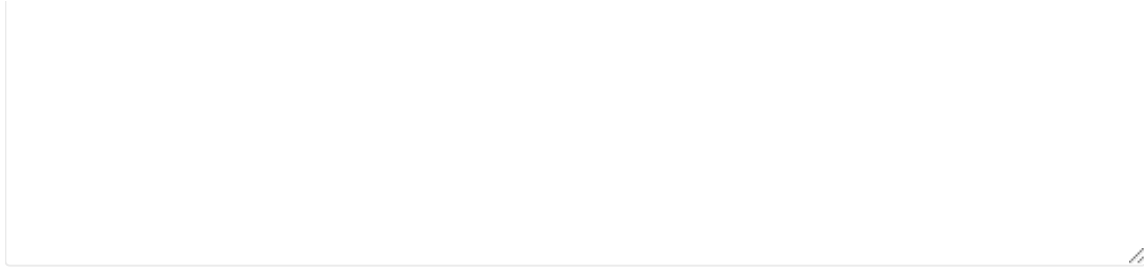
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