



PROJECT-ENGAGING ARTISTS IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Creative Homes Award

Barton Hill, Bristol - Project Outline

The area

Barton Hill is part of the New Deal for Communities (NDC) area in Bristol, which also covers the neighbouring areas of Lawrence Hill, Redfield and the Dings. In 2000, approximately £50 million was granted, over a 10 year period, to make sustainable improvements to education, health, crime, employment and the environment. In order to tackle high crime, as well as poor living conditions, an area Masterplan has been developed for the central space, which includes 8 local authority tower blocks (B1-B8) and a rank of dilapidated shops (currently on H5). The Masterplan, which has received outline approval from the planning authority, comprises of the following elements:

1. Bespoke environmental improvements and a security programme to every tower block
2. Demolition of shops and garages and reprovion of the shops nearby (H4)
3. Housing to provide street level surveillance as well as more family homes for local people
4. A new 'village green' (V1, V2)
5. An element of new through routing /Homezones

It is important to note that this is only an outline plan which helps to identify sites and indicative housing numbers as well as demonstrating how the roads, village green, block security and new housing inter-relate, especially since there is more than one lead organisation involved.

Sovereign and Solon Housing Associations were selected to deliver the housing element of the plan, and the first phase of 26 new architect-designed family homes are due for completion by Bovis Homes in December 2005. These homes are sited slightly outside the core tower block zone. Levitt Bernstein Architects were responsible for the design of these homes as well as developing the original Masterplan for the area. This Masterplan has changed considerably based on feedback from local residents and planners over the last year.

The Project

The next stage in the housing programme is a much larger and more complex one. It is to develop the three sites located within the central tower block area (H1, H2, H5). Approximately 50 new homes are planned for these sites, ranging from 1 bedroom flats to 5 bedroom houses. Sovereign and Solon plan to run a competition in Summer 2005 to select an architect to develop site proposals.

There are a number of significant issues that the architects would need to consider.

1. Establishing a design that ties together the mixture of building designs in the area, including traditional Victorian terraces, 1970's tower blocks, as well as a pocket of self build properties and a stone built church.
2. Developing low rise family homes in an area which is predominantly high rise blocks
3. Overlooking from blocks into family home gardens
4. 'Secured by Design' principals of informal surveillance of through routes
5. The changes that the area might undergo as part of the long-term regeneration of the area

6. The changing demographic of the area. There has been a sharp rise in the numbers of Somalians living in council owned accommodation, especially tower blocks

As previously mentioned, the planners have agreed the outline principle of the housing sites and indicative numbers, however these are likely to change once detailed resident consultation is underway. The aspiration is that the overall number of flats will be reduced, however the design and the financial programme will play a part in this decision.

The Artist's Involvement

The development of the designs for the new housing sites would benefit greatly from the involvement of an artist, in order to help tackle some of the major issues outlined above. In particular it would be helpful to have some creative input into how the issue of scale is addressed when positioning housing directly between or beneath blocks. The intention would be to involve an artist at the earliest possible stage, identifying their role in the development team prior to the competition tender process. In this way, the potential architects can make them an integral part of their proposal rather than as an 'add on' once they have been selected.

The artist would also be a key contact for local residents during the consultation process, being in a position to gain an in-depth understanding of their concerns about living in the area and the elements that need to be improved through future building design. There is a community based arts programme funded by the NDC, which would be an essential partner in developing ideas and working with residents. They might help to deliver workshops, seminars or exhibitions as part of the overall process and also have links into an established core of local artists working in the area.

The artist would be involved throughout the design process, including a comprehensive programme of resident consultation.

Outcomes

Design

The outcomes of the project can only really relate to the impact of the artist on the housing designs that are developed. This is unlikely to be the creation of a physical piece or pieces, it being more likely that they will inform the overall design of the homes. This will obviously need to be done in a way that recognises the constraints of the programme budgets and practical deliverability. The artist may well be able to identify a way of monitoring their overall influence through the provision of a project diary/portfolio, to capture their input as the project progresses.

Community Involvement

It is hoped that the artist will be able to reflect local aspirations in a creative way, which in turn will help residents to feel part of the process rather than at a distance. The outcome of this aspect therefore could well be measurable in terms of a sense of local ownership and advocacy for the new build programme.

Budget

The project would require the employment of an artist to work on average ten days a month for 6 months depending on the scheme programme and how the project develops (it could be fewer days per month over a longer period). This equates to 60 days at £250 a day, which totals £15,000.

Timescale

The artist involvement would commence on the appointment of the scheme's architects and they could potentially be involved slightly earlier during the selection process. The selection of architects is currently dependant on a number of factors to do with the Masterplan financial programme and therefore there is currently no firm project timeframe, however it is hoped that the appointment will take place in August 05. The design process is likely to take between 6 and 9 months in order to incorporate careful resident consultation.