



Zero carbon at Gallions Park

Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, announced last month that the One Gallions Consortium, made up of Southern Housing Group, Crest Nicholson, BioRegional Quintain and architects Feilden Clegg Bradley, had been selected as preferred development partner for the zero carbon development at Gallions Park, Royal Docks, in East London.

The consortium beat four others short-listed in a competitive selection process, with a proposed scheme of around 200 net zero carbon homes, built to the highest environmental standards and including renewable energy sources.

In developing the site, energy-efficient

architecture will be coupled with natural materials. The completed scheme will include integrated waste management, on-site food growing and green transport measures such as car and cycle clubs.

Referring to the competition, the Mayor stressed the importance of schemes of this kind, pointing out that energy used and wasted in buildings is responsible for the majority of carbon dioxide emitted in London. He was pleased at the positive response from the sector.

Artist's impression of Gallions Park, courtesy of Feilden Clegg Bradley.



Valli van Zijl, the Group's Thames Gateway Regeneration Director, said: "Gallions Park will be a timely step forward for the house building industry in reducing the environmental impact of the homes we build and live in. Equally important for our residents is how it will address affordability in terms of energy and water costs."

"We are delighted to be involved not only in the development of Gallions Park but also in its long-term management, working with our residents to sustain the vision into the future."

South Wight HA joins Service Centre

From 29 January, the Group's Customer Service Centre became the first point of contact for residents of South Wight HA.

The move means that residents in all the Group's rented housing, a total approaching 20,000 properties, are now serviced by the same team of staff based in Horsham.

In September, we will be extending the service to include leaseholders.

Centralising our enquiry service has

improved the service offered to residents by extending the hours they can contact us.

We have also developed specialist teams to handle rents, repairs and tenancy issues, freeing up the time of our patch managers to spend more time out and about at schemes.

The Service Centre is playing an important role as we work towards the Government's efficiency agenda, achieving significant economies of scale and value for money.



Tom takes the G15 Chair

Group Chief Executive Tom Dacey has been appointed as the new Chair of G15 from June 2007. On Board talked to Tom about his new role and hopes for the sector.

[Congratulations on being appointed to the Chair. How do you feel about your new role?](#)

I am very pleased to have been elected Chair of G15 at such an exciting time in the sector, with plenty of change in the air, but a host of opportunities as well.

[What is G15?](#)

The G15 is a group of London housing associations – independent social businesses that work by ploughing our profits back into building new homes, improving our existing housing stock, and developing and delivering services to our residents and neighbourhoods. Our strength is that we are neither part of the state nor the private sector, but blend the values and skills of both.

Our central objective is to build diverse and sustainable communities. Places where people want to live now and in the future. To this end, we combine our housing work with a variety of innovative community and economic development programmes. To improve the quality of life for Londoners, we work closely with local, regional and central government, with private and voluntary partners, and with our residents.

[What role does the G15 play in helping to alleviate London's social housing problems?](#)

A very significant role. G15 owns or manages over 250,000 homes in London, housing around 10 per cent of the capital's population. Our development programmes

will add a further 53,000 new homes by 2008 – half of London's new homes annually.

G15 also acts as a lobby group and recently successfully campaigned, alongside others, for an increase in the provision of family housing in London, a position now accepted by our funder the Housing Corporation and the Greater London Assembly.

[G15 produces regular reports. What can you tell us about 'Neighbourhood Capital', which is due out shortly?](#)

Neighbourhood Capital offers the first independent review of G15's core housing management and maintenance activities. It considers our long-term investment in neighbourhoods, our emphasis on continuous improvement and how accountable we are to residents and their communities. It is the latest in a suite of publications that commenced with Social Capital and Development Capital.

[What challenges do you see G15 facing over the coming years?](#)

How long have you got?! The planned merger of the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships into Communities England will clearly impact upon our work. The merger offers considerable potential efficiency gains, by harmonising the agency that acquires and supplies publicly owned land with the agency for public investment in new housing. But we are understandably concerned the new agency is unlikely to be operational before April 2009, which may not help decision-making in the interim.

The Government's modernisation agenda

continues to influence us, as evidenced by increased competition from the private

sector. We also face challenging demands to improve our accountability and resident involvement, and pressure to produce more homes for lower public subsidy.

[What would you like the G15 to achieve during your term as Chair?](#)

I would like to continue to build upon the solid foundations established by my predecessor Rod Cahill. We are a much more structured group thanks to Rod's stewardship and we need to retain our focus if we are to continue to be an effective voice for our sector in London.

I would like to see G15 exceeding our combined development programme outputs, but not at the expense of our long-term financial viability. If we can achieve this, we will help more people in housing need and add to London's economic success.

[Anything else you would like to add?](#)

What is truly novel about G15 is that our members often face each other in fierce competitions and know that no quarter will be given, and none expected.

But outside the crucible of competition, we can still manage to collaborate, share good practice, and generally work together in an atmosphere of harmony and good humour. Long may this continue!



Service Centre tops peer group survey

A benchmarking exercise carried out in April 2006 by Mpathy, an independent survey company, which compared the operational performance of customer service centres run by 10 London housing associations, put the Group's Service Centre at the forefront of efficient operational performance.

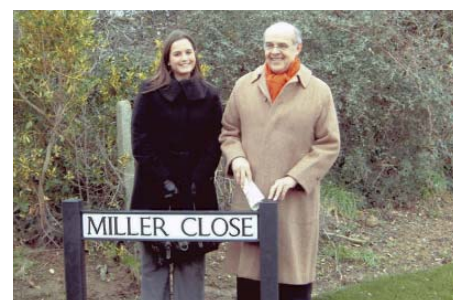
It found that the Group had developed the 'one-stop shop' approach more effectively than most and out-performed the participating organisations by answering the highest percentage of calls.

Close links with Peru

The Group's development at Miller Close in Wingham, Kent, was honoured by a visit from the Peruvian ambassador in February.

Ricardo Mendoza had flown over from Peru to attend a service at St Mary's Church in Wingham, where he unveiled a plaque to a general born in Kent in the 18th century, who is one of his country's national heroes. He was also taken to Miller Close, which has been named after the general. The visit featured in a BBC news broadcast.

General William Miller was born in Wingham in 1795 and joined the Peruvian army in their fight for independence from Spain.



The ambassador pictured at Miller Close, with Trainee Development Officer Laura Hodnett.

Miller later became a general and military hero. Wounded many times in battle, he was given 450,000 acres in Argentina for his services. Returning to England in 1826, Miller became consul-general to the Pacific Islands. He died at sea in 1861.

First scheme successes for Southern Space

Southern Space, the Group's commercial development company, is proving its worth in its second year of operation.

Southern Space was set up to develop and sell good quality housing on the open market and to provide an additional, independent source of funding within the Group.

The contemporary design of two Hackney projects, The Green in Stoke Newington and Portland Avenue in Stamford Hill have proved attractive to purchasers and all units are now fully reserved.

Luxury schemes at Tollgate Court in South Croydon (14 x one and two bedroom flats) and Crabtree Road in Crawley (14 x two bedroom flats) will go on sale this summer.

Future developments are planned as part of the continuing work at the Nightingale Estate in Hackney and at Hook Road in Surbiton.

Southern Space has also marketed homes for outright sale developed by Southern Housing Home Ownership at Wansey Street near Elephant and Castle, selling out within a matter of weeks.



Tollgate Court in South Croydon.

For further details about Southern Space, phone **08456 120 021** or email space@shgroup.org.uk

Infill sites to yield hi-tech homes

The Group recently secured over 20 development sites in LB Havering as part of a partnering agreement with the council.

The sites are challenging, because they vary in size from 500 to 3,000 square metres. They will now be redeveloped to provide innovative, mixed-tenure schemes, without grant and cross-subsidised through sales. The Group hopes to secure awards for design and plans to bring environmental improvements to the wider area.

The first 50 homes, at five sites, are now the subject of public consultation. A further four sites will follow shortly. Architects Proctor and Mathews plan to use a modular pod system to deliver high quality construction and insulation, a shorter time on site and cost savings.

Tuning in to the new Market Estate

The Group's £40m redevelopment of the Market Estate in Islington was one of two estates to be featured in a two-part Radio 4 programme called 'Knocking down the past', which was broadcast on 27 November and 4 December.

During the two half-hour slots, presenter Sarfraz Mansoor interviewed residents and Project Director Stephen Ross, to compare the estate's historical misfortunes and newly-regenerated future with those of Glasgow's formerly notorious Gorbals.



Residents were asked how they have been involved in plans for their new homes and about their hopes for the future, to see if architects are learning from the mistakes made with high rise estates in the 1960s.

BBC Scotland also arranged for exchange visits for staff and residents from the two estates, so they could compare notes.

The presenter found both estates moving away from their former notoriety, as new homes replace the old. Construction at Market Estate is well on track with the first 30 to 40 residents due to move into their new homes by June. In total, 359 homes for rent, shared ownership and outright sale are being developed at the site.

Market Estate transferred to Southern Housing Group in February 2005 after a successful resident ballot.

Market Estate is being transformed.

Roadshows battle with the elements

Tom Dacey, Group Chief Executive, battled gale force winds in Theale, snow in London and a bomb scare on the Isle of Wight to promote the Group's updated business philosophy to staff in every region in January.

"I was a bit anxious about potential damage to vocal chords, with a punishing schedule of eight roadshows over a three-week period, but I wasn't quite expecting to take on the elements too!" admitted Tom.

"In the event, my Theale visit coincided with severe gale force winds, my London meeting saw staff struggling to work in a snow blizzard and my trip to the Isle of Wight involved circumnavigating cordoned-off streets when a live hand-grenade was handed in at Newport Police Station."

Nothing daunted, Tom went on to make his presentations to over two-thirds of our staff, a total of 650 people, repeating an exercise first carried out four years ago.

The aim was to remind longer-serving staff of the key elements of our business philosophy and to include staff who have joined us more recently as the Group has expanded.

"As well as providing an opportunity to meet with a large number of staff over a condensed period, the roadshows were designed to allow staff to share their vision for the Group and to emphasise the central importance of our mission and philosophy as one of the largest social housing providers in the South," said Tom.

Focus on: Seacroft, Sandown, Isle of Wight

Site The original Seacroft building was owned by South Wight Housing Association and provided temporary accommodation. After transferring ownership to Southern Housing Group Limited, the old building was demolished and replaced with a new development of flats for shared ownership.

Partners Geoffrey Osborne Limited, Philip Pank Partnership, ERM Limited.

Funding Total scheme costs of £1.6m were met with a combination of Group and Housing Corporation grant funding.

Output 19 x two bedroom flats for shared ownership, with prices ranging from £127,500 to £147,500. The minimum share for sale is 40 per cent.

Design and special features The design took in the best aspects of the site by providing sea views for many of the flats. The site area was maximised to provide an aesthetically pleasing building with parking and communal grassed areas around the development. The building has a contemporary feel and the coloured boarding around the external brickwork breaks up the building mass.



Design award for Hills Farm Lane

The Group's internal Design Awards winner for 2006 was Hills Farm Lane in Horsham.

The selection panel, which included members of the Development Committee and a resident representative, chose Hills Farm Lane ahead of five other schemes completed between April 2005 and March 2006.

Selecting Hills Farm Lane, the panel referred to the good use made of a difficult piece of land. Previously home to an unofficial landfill site, it had needed innovative treatment to deal with severe soil contamination.

Despite the technically difficult start to the project, the final development provided a good mixture of 52 homes for rent, shared ownership and outright sale, with a similar high quality across all tenures.

The panel commented favourably on the use of materials and colours to lift and lighten the area, as well as on the quality of hard and soft landscaping. The scheme was commended for achieving an excellent EcoHomes rating at part of the site and

because homes received high SAP ratings, the Government's recommended system for rating energy efficiency.

Awards were also made to:

- a recent phase of the continuing Millennium Plus at the Nightingale development in Hackney, for its strong resident involvement, modern methods of construction and good detailing
- Solar Court and Chamber Street in Bermondsey development, for their clean design and suitability for the location.

The Group prioritises good design as a key element in its strategy for creating sustainable communities.



Strategic partnership tackles anti-social behaviour in Sussex

A new pan-Sussex group has brought together the area's 15 largest housing associations to play a strategic role in tackling anti-social behaviour.

The group was conceived by South region Anti-social Behaviour Officer, Mike Breare, and unites social landlords who manage a combined total of around 40,000 homes.

The group will begin by responding to the Information Sharing Protocol being prepared by the Criminal Justice Board, but will also look to provide best practice training and build a database to record members' skills.

The initiative demonstrates the Group's commitment to partnership working when dealing with anti-social behaviour and the experience it can contribute when sharing best practice.

New strategy promotes value for money

To address the Government's efficiency agenda in social housing and increasing competition in the marketplace, the Group is devising a value for money strategy, which is currently being considered by the main Board and the Boards of its subsidiaries.

The draft sets out the Group's strategic objective to provide efficient, improving services, by making the best use of resources, adopting best practice, benchmarking performance, and promoting the Group's progress in process improvement and procurement.

The strategy focuses on promoting a value for money culture throughout the organisation. It also provides examples of current initiatives which are improving

efficiency through tighter financial planning and budgeting, the use of systems thinking and economies of scale, the centralising of key resources, and the introduction of measures to maximise income and improve asset and treasury management.

Increasing resident involvement is also seen as a key factor in meeting the efficiency agenda, ensuring that services meet residents' needs and provide the value for money they expect.

Support for Durrington residents

A £20,000 project to provide support services for residents in Durrington was launched at an event held in February.

Funded by the Group, Servite Homes, Worthing Homes and Sanctuary Housing Association, the two-year project will offer the local community easier access to benefits advice, employment training, Age Concern, advocacy and mediation. As part of the mediation programme, residents will also be able to volunteer to train as neighbour mediators, bringing the service closer to home.

The launch was attended by local councillors, residents, the police, and support and training providers. As the start of a six-month consultation with local people of all ages, residents were asked which services they would like to see promoted by the project in future.

Guy Collar, South Region Director, said: "This is a great example of how housing associations and partnership working can bring wider benefits to an area where, in the past, some support services have been difficult to access. We hope that this will be heavily used by local residents in the coming months."

Sculpture in Stamford Hill



Residents at Stamford Hill Estate in Hackney saw their hard work come to fruition as they celebrated the official opening of their sculpture park in December.

Six sculptures designed in miniature by residents have been transformed into life-size artworks by Arts Express as part of the final phase of estate environmental works.

Residents have been working with Groundwork East London, in conjunction with Arts Express, since an art group was set up at Stamford Hill two years ago. The

idea of a sculpture trail was first suggested by architects Aedas Studio.

The Group provided funding of around £53,000 for the project, with an additional £29,000 in match funding from the Arts Council of England and almost £2,500 from the Learning Trust being secured by Groundwork East London.

Arts projects form part of the Group's social investment work, as a positive way to bring communities together, encourage ownership and promote sustainability.

Community hall for Vanston Place

Vanston Place residents in Fulham celebrated the official opening of a new community hall for their estate, last September.

The hall designed by architects Biscoe + Stanton replaces a dilapidated portakabin and provides a stylish contemporary space with a multi-purpose hall, crèche, kitchen and offices.

Undertaken as part of a rolling programme of estate regeneration works, the cost of £481,000 was partly funded by Fulham South Children's Centre, who will use the building one day a week to provide activities and access to information and a range of services for parents and children under five.

For the rest of the week, the hall will be used for community events, meetings, youth activities, art classes and keep fit. It will be also available for hire to residents for private events such as children's parties.



The new hall at Vanston Place.

Residents have been involved in the project from the outset and two of the oldest and longest-standing residents were invited to make the official opening.

The project demonstrates the Group's commitment to sustainable communities and that its priority is to provide facilities and activities for young people and their families.

Football in Sussex

In partnership with Worthing Homes and Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club, Southern Housing Foundation has developed a project to offer football as a positive activity for young people in Sussex.

The Foundation is providing funding of £15,000 for the next three years and applying to the National Sports Foundation for match funding of £50,000.

Brighton & Hove Albion will deliver coaching sessions through after-school clubs, evening, weekend and holiday sessions and annual tournaments.

In partnership with the Sussex County FA and Hove YMCA, the club will also provide free accredited coaching courses for young people aged 16 to 19.

Improving on complaints

To strengthen its commitment to dealing with complaints effectively, the Group has introduced a new system to deal with complaints and recruited a Complaints Service Manager.



Noel Khine joined the Group in January this year in this new specialist role to oversee the vital area of customer feedback.

Noel has a strong background in complaints management, most recently in the NHS in north-west London, where he was Patient and Public Involvement Manager. Noel previously held similar roles at the Royal Mail and with a telecoms company in the City.

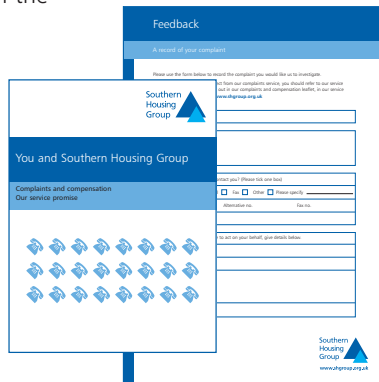
In his new role, Noel has primary responsibility for our complaints service and is taking the lead in introducing best practice from within and beyond the sector. He will also make sure that we learn from complaints and use them to make genuine improvements to services.

Commenting on his new post, Noel said:

"I'm passionate about customer services and see complaints as a goldmine of information and free feedback. I'm looking forward to applying the skills I developed in other sectors to a housing organisation with such an impressive heritage and reputation."

Noel's appointment is one of a series of changes made to the complaints service following a recent review designed to ensure a much higher level of customer care and satisfaction.

"Over 300 staff are currently undergoing training and the Group recently became the first housing association to buy Authority Public Protection, a software program used by 200 local authorities to record and track complaints," explains Noel.



A new complaints leaflet and an optional complaints form, for those who prefer to complain in writing, have also been prepared for residents (pictured).

The Group views resident satisfaction with services as a primary critical success factor.

WorkLife Plus

The Group further demonstrated its commitment to staff by introducing a third phase of WorkLife Plus, its flexible employee benefits package.

"Employees are being offered the choice between a number of new benefits, because we recognise that people's needs change during their working lives," says Karen Harvey, Head of Human Resources and Employee Development.



Benefits applying from April include:

- additional or partner's life assurance
- critical illness insurance
- work wardrobe
- travel insurance
- bicycles and bicycle safety equipment through the Cycle2work scheme
- PlusCard.

In previous phases, staff have benefited from life assurance, the chance to buy or sell annual leave, pension provision, personal medical plans and childcare vouchers.

"Strong support for our staff and recognition of work-life balance issues lie at the heart of our human resources strategy," explains Karen.

"We recognise the key role staff play in our sector and prioritise staff retention as one of our critical success factors."

Residents on Board

The Group is improving resident representation on its Board in a move that is also designed to reflect changes in the organisation.

The Group's governance arrangements allow for up to two residents to sit on the Board. Both seats are currently vacant.

In view of plans to integrate the management of rented and home ownership properties from September, the Board has decided to keep one seat for a renting tenant and to reserve the other, for the first time, for a leaseholder.

In December, an advert in the residents' newsletter invited tenants to apply for a seat. A comprehensive information pack and application form have since been sent to a number of prospective applicants. Interviews are due to be held during March or April and the successful candidate will be invited to observe the Board's meeting in June.

Jim Hitch, who is a leaseholder and member of the Board of Southern Housing Home Ownership, has been invited to take the second seat on the main Board.

Having residents on the Board demonstrates the Group's accountability as a publicly-funded body and provides an invaluable resource at the very top of the organisation.



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Printed by: Aldgate Press

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