

MARKLAKE COURT

Courtesy of Igloo Community Builders and Leathermarket CBS

Marklake Court is new community-led development of twenty-seven genuinely affordable homes, just a stone's throw from the Shard. Through a uniquely collaborative development process, local residents initiated, designed, and delivered the project in partnership with the local authority. This truly community-led development process demonstrates a grassroots approach to densifying existing social housing estates and empowering residents to address the housing needs in their neighbourhood.

The story of Marklake Court begins with a strong local community, who took on the management of their own council homes in 1996 with the establishment of the Leathermarket Joint Management Board (JMB). The JMB remains a popular and trusted tenant management organisation (TMO). Led by elected estate residents, it manages tenant and leaseholder services for the benefit of around 1500 households in Southwark. The JMB secures a democratic mandate from the local community every 5 years, with 94% of residents supporting it at its most recent continuation ballot.

The lack of affordable housing in the local area became apparent in 2011, when the JMB was speaking to residents about an upcoming continuation ballot. Many JMB residents loved their neighbourhood and community, but were living in homes that couldn't meet their needs. Families were overcrowded, pensioners were under-occupying homes too large for them, and residents with health issues were struggling in blocks without lifts. Amidst the rising housing costs in a rapidly gentrifying area, however, these residents couldn't afford to move into the private rental market.

Residents asked the JMB to take action, and it began by commissioning a comprehensive Housing Needs survey of its residents. The JMB knocked on every door across its estates and found that:

- More than 1 in 3 households were in housing need
- 99% had an annual household income of less than £30,000
- 77% thought that staying in the JMB area was important
- 87% supported the JMB building new homes on underused areas of their estates

JMB residents, helped by development managers - igloo Community Builders, went on to set up the Leathermarket Community Benefit Society (CBS) in 2014, with the aim of building new, genuinely affordable homes by and for the local community. Tenants and residents on the Kipling Estate identified and suggested the first infill site, which contained 20 underused garages. The site was ideal for the development because it was small, within the JMB's management area, and bordered the homes of existing residents making it extremely hard for anyone else to redevelop. These factors meant the council recognised the CBS was best placed to deliver the "hidden homes" on this site as they had the support of local residents. Having recognised this, Southwark Council took a pioneering approach by transferring the land to the CBS on a long lease, enabling the community itself to develop the project and manage the completed homes.

The CBS appointed igloo Community Builders & Bell Phillips Architects to inform their approach and assist with the development. Consultations began with a blank sheet of paper, putting the interests of local residents at the heart of the project from its earliest stages. At the first meeting the community said what they wanted a building that embodied permanence, that was part of the estate, was genuinely affordable in perpetuity, high quality but reduced energy poverty. They wanted building they could be proud of.

Over the course of an intensive, year-long design process, residents took part in meetings, walking tours of the area, and visits to other affordable housing projects, designed to refine what

the community wanted in terms of building height, materials, and design details. The community worked closely with the design team at every stage, and were shown how each of their comments directly shaped the building design as it evolved. The homes were also allocated to those in housing need early in the process, enabling the new residents to co-design their own homes. Over a series of workshops, incoming residents customised their flats by selecting open- or closed-plan kitchens, flooring and carpets, and the colour of the worktops and walls.

The CBS's detailed survey data on housing needs across the JMB estates made it possible to optimise the development's impact on the local community. The design process encouraged downsizers to move into bespoke local homes, thereby freeing up larger council properties for other families on the waiting list – meaning that 27 “right-sized” homes ultimately helped many more than 27 families.

Community Right to Build funding from the GLA was used to carry out neighbourhood planning, consultation, and site identification across the JMB area, and then to take the Marklake Court project to the planning stage. Southwark Council met the construction costs as part of its council home building programme, and the rents for the new development match the council's rents for new builds.

The Marklake Court story illustrates how a community-led approach to development can add value in the process of densifying existing housing estates. Community-led housing builds local support, pride, and ownership, including the contribution of hundreds of hours of volunteer work. It also makes it possible to leverage valuable local knowledge, unlock otherwise contentious infill sites for development, and maximise the benefits for the local community. In addition, incentivising downsizers to move – thereby freeing up larger properties – creates a chain of benefit that maximises the value added by a new development. The community-led approach can bring additional funding and expertise into the borough and the local area, and delivering new homes in partnership with a TMO ensures long-term local stewardship.