

UNLOCKING REGENERATION AND CREATING COMMUNITIES



Situated within the former industrial heartland of Birmingham, the Crocodile Works site was undeveloped for many years and was unattractive to the private sector due to viability issues in this deprived part of the city.

A former heavy engineering site - the last factory on site produced machetes for exportation to France and Asia - the land itself also presented a number of challenges for development.

Following an area wide master plan and an options-appraisal conducted by Birmingham City Council and Urban Living; Midland Heart - one of the UK's leading housing and regeneration organisations - acquired the site to kick-start regeneration. It aimed to do this by providing badly-needed new homes in a 'flagship' residential development; engaging the community in the project; and catalysing wider regeneration in the surrounding Housing Market Renewal Area (HMRA) in partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).

The team also wanted the scheme to have a direct, positive and lasting impact on the local community by creating employment (through the project itself) and providing on-the-job training opportunities.

EC Harris was appointed as lead consultants to: maximise the potential benefits of the scheme for the local community; appoint an architect; and ensure its successful delivery.

Creating solutions

From the start, the process was collaborative, with all stakeholders working as one team to generate positive outcomes for the local community. This was important as the site was challenging and a number of issues were discovered which affected viability. These included:

- A large culvert
- An established waterway
- Major drainage diversions
- Site contamination
- An existing well.

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On top of this, archaeological investigations found remains of a 17th Century Furness immediately adjacent to the site and a number of locally listed buildings with facades that needed to be retained.

The successful design had to overcome all these issues as well as achieving best practice standards in design and sustainability, which were necessary to secure grant funding. These included:

- Achieving Code Level 3
- Meeting HQI, Building for Life and Lifetime Homes
- Achieving Eco Homes XB on buildings to be retained.

Glenn Howells Architects was appointed with the challenge of creating an inspiring but viable design. EC Harris also recommended early integration of a contractor at the pre-contract design stage to ensure that the architectural concepts developed for the site were deliverable. William Davis was chosen - following a robust procurement process - and we were able to work with the contractor's supply chain to further develop the design and assist with value engineering of the scheme.

Optimum value was achieved by leveraging cost-to-value, maximising the return from floor space, limiting core space requirements and specific design aspects such as floor-to-ceiling heights, window depths, sub and super structure design and proposed cladding options.

The finalised design was a mix of homes comprising townhouses and apartments. The initial build cost, without the land acquisition, was estimated to be £21 million. Midland Heart then set a total construction cost budget of £18.5 million and challenged the team to work collaboratively to achieve this.

Adding value

At the start of the process, EC Harris realised that Midland Heart was paying a significant amount annually on security and management for the site, but there were still issues with trespassers, crime and ongoing maintenance, all of which created much nuisance for the community.

Concurrent with the design development, EC Harris therefore recommended that the dilapidated buildings on site should be demolished in advance of the main development to reduce these on-going management costs (of circa £50k

per annum) and reduce the issues for residents. This also helped speed up the site-investigations taking place, enabling the project team to mitigate potential unknown risks with the subsequent design.

The team worked with the client to configure the funding in order to leverage grant and private finance, helping Midland Heart to secure £11.9 million of inward investment from the Homes and Communities Agency and £3.33 million from Urban Living.

The diversion of the major Severn Trent sewer represented a potential cost of £1.2 million to the project, which could have seriously impacted viability. By using our infrastructure expertise we suggested alternative solutions to Severn Trent Water, alongside William Davis, which were implemented, generating savings of circa £800k for Midland Heart.

By minimising waste and using local labour/suppliers, the carbon footprint of the project was reduced. This policy also had a direct impact on the local community, with 23 jobs created for local people, enabling Midland Heart to satisfy the requirements of its funders.

The whole community has got behind the scheme, with local community schools naming the streets around the site and local community members being represented on the site hoardings. Design team members also visited local schools, to inform them about health and safety, and a new community facility has been built for local people to enjoy.

The project is on track to deliver 168 new affordable housing homes (of mixed tenure) for the local community and has already helped to kick start wider regeneration. Its positive impact has been recognised by the industry, winning the Bronze award for the ‘Best Brownfield Development’ at the What House Awards 2010.

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