

Case Study - Walerton & Elgin community homes ***Residents' organisation, landowner and developer all in one***

The Walerton and Elgin estates in West London were transferred from Westminster City Council to a community owned housing association in 1992, transforming service provision and democratic accountability.

Walerton and Elgin Community Homes (WECH) is a Community Land Trust - residents elect their neighbours to the Board, which can then appoint up to six independent members with appropriate expertise. The Board takes the policy decisions about rents, management, investment and development. WECH is a regulated registered provider of social housing. According to its 2018 satisfaction survey, 94% of residents were satisfied with WECH as their landlord.

WECH owns nearly 700 homes, 20% of which are leasehold, with the rest mainly secure tenancies on social housing rents. It employs 15 staff and its annual turnover is £3.5 million. In each of the three years from 2017 to 2019, around 130 residents from 20% of WECH's properties attended its AGM to elect the Board and appoint the Auditor.



Westminster Council Leader Rachael Robathan with Jonathan Rosenberg at the start of WECH's Elgin development scheme

Thanks to being community owned, WECH provides:

- Extra lettings to help meet local needs: low turnover of staff and residents coupled with estate-based management means the community landlord knows its tenants and stock sufficiently well to create a chain of several moves out of one letting opportunity, an outcome which rehuses several households to more suitable accommodation instead of just one;
- Independent income to support community services: while the Council had to end some local community services due to austerity, WECH spends £150,000 of its own money providing community services, including support for younger and older people and for those needing debt and related advice;
- A low rent home for occupation by a police constable; For more than two decades, WECH has worked with the Metropolitan Police to identify suitable occupants, who move into the home on condition that they will participate in the community - helping to organise social events and giving advice via the newsletter - and will contribute to the good working relationship between WECH and the Police.



An extra storey on each block in place of the pitched roof

Elgin estate development

1. Densification

The scheme adds 43 new homes to the 151 homes:

- In an extra floor on top of eight existing blocks - four two-storey and four four-storey;
- In two new five-storey infill blocks;
- In the top two floors of a new stand-alone five-storey building;
- Through conversion of WECH's former office; and
- Through conversion and addition of an extra floor to the two-storey building containing WECH's former community centre, pre-school facility and community organisation offices.

2. Tenure mix and affordability

All 43 homes are for affordable rent at the Mayor's London Living Rent levels, effectively social housing rents at their cap. There are no sales or market rents .

23 of the homes are for rent to Westminster Council nominees, 12 are for rent to key workers from Westminster Council's intermediate tenancy list, and eight are for WECH's use to meet its own population's needs.

3. Style

WECH designed the homes in the 'neo-modernist' style to restore and enhance the existing 1960s buildings, though it followed the planning authority's stipulation that the powder-coated steel façade panels be substituted with yellow brick (slips) on the new five-storey block on Elgin Avenue (which actually works quite well as a hybrid, transitioning the style between the outer and the inner part of the estate).

The scheme has transformed the mid-1960s core of the Elgin estate, which WECH modernised in the early 1990s, from a palette of beige render and yellow brick, to the white and black of its original 1960s modernist style. This restoration, along with the dusky blue powder coated windows WECH installed in the 1990s, fits seamlessly with the anthracite and copper palette of the new neo-modernist homes to present a unified modernist/ neo-modernist densified core.

The extra storeys are set back from the buildings' edges and accommodated within the height of the now-removed pitched roofs WECH installed in the early 1990s, thus minimising the impact of the intensification. A first-time visitor might not realise that what seems a single design is actually a palimpsest of the original construction layered with two subsequent interventions over 55 years.



New community-led homes, the Elgin Estate

4. *Environmental and quality of life enhancements*

The scheme is designed to meet the Code for Sustainable Homes, Levels 4 and 5. In the homes:

- High quantities of insulation in the walls, floors, ceilings and windows all but eliminate heating costs, significantly reducing CO₂ emissions;
- Fresh air, pumped in from outside and filtered, force-ventilates the rooms, reducing indoor concentrations of CO₂ and harmful chemicals emitted from cleaning products and cooking;
- Fashionable, high-quality open plan kitchen/ living rooms with extensive cupboard and storage space look out through walls of floor-to-ceiling French windows to attractive views of the estate, into central and out to West and North London, with nearly all flats opening onto generous private balcony/ external spaces.

Outside the homes:

- 415 roof-mounted solar panels, each rated 335 Watts, in total generate up to 140KW of electricity;
- Batteries will be installed to store solar energy to power - beyond sunset - WECH's office, Community Centre, Nursery, Community Offices, electric vehicle charging stations, communal lighting, and to feed any surplus electricity into the National Grid;
- Living walls of evergreens and perennials line the walkway to the Nursey's entrance and the closed end of the top deck of WECH's car park, and wildflower meadows fill roof spaces not covered in solar panels; and
- Eight communal gardens, each 40 SqM, provide roof-top spaces for residents to develop their own projects to grow food, reduce pollution and improve human and environmental wellbeing.

5. *New office, community and outdoor facilities*

WECH's new office, community, and youth facilities include:

- Spacious dual-aspect, two-part WECH office with reception staff and housing officers in one section and the rest of the team in small offices surrounding a large open plan space with more desks and equipment, and access to a full kitchen with six-seater table and large external terraced area looking into the Elgin estate;
- A new community centre that can be used by one, two or three groups at once, with a kitchen able to cater for up to 200 people, along with direct access to extensive underground storage for other community events' equipment;
- A purpose-built pre-school facility – nursery - with enclosed external play area open to WECH residents and families from the wider area for up to 30 children;
- Offices and space for organisations supplying community services such as sports activities for young people, debt and welfare advice for WECH's residents, and storage, office and operational space for the North Paddington Food Bank. These three non-residential floors were decorated with a lime-based paint which uses Graphene instead of petrochemicals to achieve durability. Rather than giving off volatile organic compounds in the first couple of years following application, it hardens by soaking up CO₂ from the air; and
- A renewed five-a-side football pitch and basketball court, bespoke deck seating, outdoor gym stations, and open space accessible to the public during daylight hours from the Harrow Road.



Solar panels and...



...a new green wall on the Elgin Estate

6. Scheme cost

<i>Cost</i>	<i>Pre and post build</i>
<i>£1 million</i>	<i>Invested by WECH working up the scheme over several years before letting the building contract</i>
<i>£17 million</i>	<i>Total cost of construction works</i>

There was no land cost because WECH developed this scheme on land it already owned.

7. How is it paid for?

At the point of letting the contract in 2017, WECH had £1 million in the bank and no debts. WECH borrowed £9 million from a consortium of two banks. The loan is secured against WECH's total portfolio of around 700 properties and its term is 25 years with a break clause at 10 years. It will be paid back by WECH continuing to generate operating surpluses. The £11 million from WECH is supplemented by grant:

- £4m from Westminster City Council's s106 monies;
- £2.6m from the Mayor of London's Housing Programme; and
- £0.4m from the Government's Community Housing Fund.

The total grant from public funds of £7 million is towards the cost of building the housing. The non-residential elements, such as the office and community facilities, are funded entirely by WECH.