

DESIGN

PRINCIPLES

Be First Design Guidance:
Hearts and Minds, Bricks and Mortar



**Barking &
Dagenham**



INTRODUCTION

At Barking and Dagenham we are building 3,000 new Council-owned homes over the next five years. These will mostly be homes to rent, and will be at prices that local people and other ordinary working Londoners can afford.

But although these won't be expensive Houses, we want to build them to the highest design standards so they are not only affordable to live in but are easy to maintain and pleasing to look at. We want to build homes that will last and create places that people will be proud to live in and call home. Places where people want to spend time, put down roots, bring up children and even grow old.

This commitment to getting the best possible design at an affordable price doesn't just extend to the buildings. What makes an enjoyable place is as much, if not more, about what goes on at street level and how external spaces work, as about what the buildings look like. For this reason, we want to build the best quality public realm possible and ensure that landscaping is not just an afterthought, or the traditional municipal expanse of grass and tarmac.

Good design for us also means being as sustainable as possible in terms of both the environmental cost of construction and living in our new homes. We therefore want to be innovative in the way we conserve resources and support biodiversity, both in and outside the buildings.

Wherever possible, we also want to use modern off-site methods of construction because we believe this not only gives better quality, but also delivers other benefits like a safer, more inclusive, workplace for those building our homes.

Barking and Dagenham has an incredible history, from its medieval beginnings, to the Becontree Estate and industrialisation in the 20th century, followed by successive waves of migration and demographic change.

We want to cherish and preserve that history, and the character that goes with it, while also modernising and upgrading the built environment of the borough, alongside the creation of entirely new neighbourhoods and communities for the next generation of Barking and Dagenham residents to make their home.

This guide articulates the principals that will guide us in designing and building these homes, and we hope our values and aspirations will be taken on across the construction industry.

[Be First is a pioneering, independent regeneration company, wholly owned by Barking and Dagenham Council.](#)

[Barking and Dagenham Reside manage the lettings process for all affordable rented homes built by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.](#)

Pat Hayes
Managing Director, Be First

Graeme Cooke
Director of Inclusive Growth, LBBD

A TRADITION OF CHANGE

The borough has a history of reinvention. Once a leading fishing centre and producer of jute, in the twentieth century both Barking and Dagenham became centres of industry and manufacture through businesses such as carmaker Ford, lemonade maker R White's and the May & Baker chemical company. The local population soared, fuelled by new residents from inner London and further afield who relocated to work for these new industries. Many thousands moved to the Becontree estate, which when completed in 1935 was the largest public housing estate in the world.



Barking Market



River Roding and Ice House Quarter

With these industries now gone or much reduced, the borough is moving on again as it redevelops its bounty of brownfield sites, including Barking Riverside and Beam Park in Dagenham, and regenerates large-scale housing estates such as the Gascoigne Estate near Barking town centre. The Council is also looking ahead to attracting new uses to the borough from wholesale food markets to film studios. A century on from the beginning of Becontree, it is essential that we create high quality, affordable homes hand-in-hand with this economic development in order to build a sustainable community where people will thrive, and will want to stay.

In doing so, Be First will play a key role in delivering Barking & Dagenham's Borough Manifesto, which sets out aspirations for the creation of 'a place people are proud of and want to live, work, study and stay.'

THE PRINCIPLES

There's no doubt that significant change is coming. The question is, how can it be done well to the benefit of the whole community, and in doing so tackle the inequality that currently exists? And how can the borough retain its long history of affordability for everyone, while rising to the challenges of both the present and the future?

We must aim high. There is a strong connection between good design and successful communities. While we must of course provide value for public money, now is not the time to design to the lowest common denominator. At this crucial moment for the borough's future, we need to invest wisely to create communities where people can live both well and affordably.

Be First and the Council are addressing this task by setting out a series of Design Principles in this document to steer such important regeneration. These key aspirations are supported by practical guidelines for architects and designers relating to the construction of high quality housing and public realm. All form part of a suite of documents known as Be First's Design Guidance - Hearts and Minds, Bricks and Mortar.

Young cyclists riding around the Becontree Estate



CREATE INTENSE, VIBRANT COMMUNITIES WITH A STRONG SENSE OF LOCAL IDENTITY

As detailed in the Greater London Authority’s London Plan, all new housing developments must optimise density. We want to ensure that Barking & Dagenham embraces density in a positive way while avoiding any potential downsides. This means benefiting from its increased critical mass to create housing that can sustain important other uses such as retail, leisure, health and community facilities. And, through careful design, create public spaces that are better over-looked, better used, and as a result, are far safer for all.

Optimised density does not mean denser developments everywhere. Instead, it is about appropriate density. Be First’s new housing must respond sensitively to the varied character of areas throughout the borough, from the more urban, London-facing parts of Barking town centre to the more suburban, Essex-facing areas of Dagenham.

While dense new development should be located to make the most of our excellent transport links into the centre of London, we don’t want to become a dormitory town full of generic housing. With the help of strong local governance, we have

the opportunity to be far more than this. Regeneration must make the most of local assets, such as the wealth of waterside sites, to reinvent the borough as a distinctive place in its own right.

Successful communities need to knit in well to their local context. We want to build housing that works well on a human scale, with particular attention not only to the treatment of the ground floor plane of the housing itself, but to the edges of the development and their integration into the surrounding area.



Young resident of the Gascoigne Estate



‘Places for Girls’ workshop with Year 8 students at Greatfields Secondary School

We want to create vibrant, inclusive developments that respond to the very particular profile of the borough’s demographic. Barking & Dagenham has one of the youngest populations in London with the highest proportion of under 16s in the UK. It is also one of the poorest – with 32% of children living in poverty and with higher than average levels of unemployment. It is therefore essential that the borough remains that rare and precious thing in London – affordable. Despite being just a short commute

With its relatively cheap land, the borough is a place of opportunity for regeneration.

into the centre of the city, Barking & Dagenham is one of the most affordable places to live in the capital, with house prices significantly below the average across the capital.

With its relatively cheap land, the borough is a place of opportunity for regeneration. It is important that the benefits of this redevelopment are felt not only by developers but by locals too. Barking & Dagenham has historically been an affordable, easy to live in place for everyone – whether fishermen, factory workers or heroes. We want to keep it that way, while at the same time creating a place attractive to investment and business growth.



Young family living on the Becontree Estate

DESIGN MIXED-TENURE DEVELOPMENTS THAT ARE TENURE-BLIND

Walk around London and it's often the places with a mix of different housing tenures that work the best. Be First is committed to creating developments that not only cater for a variety of tenures, but are also tenure-blind.

Affordable housing is at the heart of all our developments. Be First is currently delivering developments with approximately 75% of its homes as affordable tenures.

This is a mix of low cost rented for those in housing need, plus sub-market rent and shared ownership for working people who are unable to afford to rent or buy on the open market. While local people have priority, we are also encouraging new people to come to make a home in the borough.

We don't believe in poor doors or playgrounds accessible only by certain tenures. Nor do we feel that different tenures necessarily need to be accommodated in different blocks, but instead should be integrated throughout the development in conjunction with

effective estate management. While there may well be some variation in specification on the inside of dwellings, from the outside of the building, it should not be possible to tell the difference.

For this approach to succeed, we need to pay particular attention to the quality and robustness of the communal areas both inside and out such as the entrances, stairs and lifts, and also to achieving acoustic and visual privacy between the different homes.

We believe in celebrating the communal entrance through the use of well-crafted thresholds and a generous, welcoming lobby and circulation space. Entrances to individual homes should also be designed with special attention in order to encourage a sense of pride. Throughout, it is essential to prioritise the experience of the user.

Be First is currently delivering developments with approximately 75% of its homes as affordable tenures.

DESIGN A RANGE OF HOMES TO SUIT ALL AGES - FROM YOUNG SINGLE PEOPLE THROUGH TO FAMILIES AND SENIORS

Be First is committed to providing housing that meets the needs of all Barking & Dagenham's particularly youthful demographic. Our new housing therefore needs to include accommodation large enough to cater for families, as well as one and two bedroom flats, and also ensure provision suitable for older residents.

With the increased demand for housing across the capital, the way forward is for development far denser than low-rise single houses. Our housing designs will challenge the perception that flats are not suitable for families.

We believe that well-designed, apartment accommodation can make excellent family homes, especially when combined with good connections to communal play space such as a courtyard garden, and with the necessary visual and acoustic privacy. As a result, Be First's new housing will ensure that it will not be necessary to move out of the borough to find good quality, family-friendly accommodation.

We believe in creating well-designed homes that are flexible enough to accommodate different ways of living over time. In our Construction Guidelines, we have created a range of dwelling types of different sizes to demonstrate key qualities that make a Be First home special. All these homes comply with minimum space standards for single storey homes and we prioritise simple, conventionally shaped rooms.

Whatever the size, we should aim for dual aspect flats that are accessible, with no more than eight dwellings accessed from a single core, and with level access from the public realm.

We believe that well-designed, apartment accommodation can make excellent family homes



Traders and customers at Barking Market



Mayesbrook Park, Dagenham

CREATE SAFE AND ENGAGING PUBLIC REALM

Our open spaces are the public face of the neighbourhood, shaping our first impressions long before we get as far as going inside any of the buildings. As such, it's vital that we design these spaces carefully and sustainably so that they add social value. In this way, they can contribute positively to the success of any associated development and the surrounding area.

We need to encourage civic pride by making our public realm a place where people will want to go to spend their time. In order to understand what this might be, there needs to be a constructive dialogue with the community through a consultation process that opens up users' eyes to what is possible.

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Attractive, engaging spaces are more likely to be well used, and so will be far easier to keep safe. We need to keep things simple and robust by specifying resilient products and materials with secure supply chains, and by creating environments that are conducive to imaginative play, rather than relying on a tick-box approach for prescriptive catalogue play equipment.

These high quality communal spaces should prioritise people, not vehicles. They should promote well-being and healthy lifestyles by being accessible, inclusive and well connected to surrounding areas. They should be interesting and enjoyable and should aspire to make the most of local assets, such as Barking and Dagenham's ample waterside 'blue realm,' as part of a cohesive place-making strategy tailored to each context.



PRIORITISE BOTH ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

We are in a climate emergency. As we strive to accommodate housing growth, everything we build must aspire to be exemplary in terms of environmental sustainability. We are building robustly to last – but equally we do not want to design the dinosaurs of the future.

Our new housing will be compatible with the borough's low carbon energy agenda. This follows the draft GLA London Plan's energy hierarchy: Be lean, be clean, be green. This focuses on using less energy in the first place by taking a fabric first approach in order to reduce heat loss, connecting into district heating networks where available (or allowing for their future connection) and using renewables on site. Where it is not possible to achieve zero carbon, our new housing will achieve a minimum reduction of 35% beyond Building Regulations, with the shortfall provided through a cash-in-lieu contribution to the Council's carbon offset fund.

Our new housing will be compatible with the borough's low carbon energy agenda.

Our homes are already some of the most affordable in London. But by creating well-insulated, energy-efficient dwellings, we can in addition help reduce fuel bills and with it, fuel poverty.

Our developments will embrace Sustainable Urban Drainage systems (SuDS) as part of the landscape design to deal with extreme storm water. Redevelopment of brownfield land is also a great opportunity to improve

the biodiversity of these former industrial sites including the borough's many waterside areas.

We pledge to reduce the dependency on private cars by focusing mixed-use development around public transport and encouraging cycling/walking. The aspiration is for the borough to work towards the creation of '15 minute neighbourhoods' in which it is possible to access most day-to-day needs within a 15 minute walk of your home.

We are designing for social sustainability through the creation of inclusive and accessible housing supported by a variety of mixed uses.

It is also important to build scope for flexibility into our housing developments so that they can respond to social infrastructure needs over time.

In this way, the community can identify and curate what it may need, with Be First acting as the catalyst. Rather than assuming a wish for a community centre from the onset, for example, perhaps there will be a demand for incubator workspaces, or for a children's nursery, and maybe a variety of meanwhile and pop-up uses. All these, through their varied rhythms, will both provide amenity and in doing so enhance the vitality of the area.



Stall trader, Barking Market



Local artist, Ice House Quarter

EMBRACE STANDARDISATION AND MODERN METHODS OF CONSTRUCTION

We need to harness the potential for improved quality and greater cost-effectiveness of both standardised designs and innovative Modern Methods of Construction (MMC).

Our new Construction Guidelines ensure a consistent high quality across all Be First housing developments. This sets out Be First's design intent with the use of standardised design guidelines and construction parameters for the overall building structure plus common areas such as stairs and lifts, along with doors, windows and services. This includes the crucially important strategy for fire safety.

As well as issuing guidance for the main building, the document sets out design guidance for the individual dwellings. This includes exemplar layouts and dwelling sizes as well as detailed guidance on kitchen and bathroom layout and design. An exemplar material palette and specification references Barking's industrial and fishing heritage and prioritises economic materials that are well detailed and used pragmatically.

Already, we are looking to embrace the use of off-site manufactured (OSM) bathroom pods in our housing. There is potential to take this approach much further for other aspects of the build.

We should be designing for MMC as a default – even if the project ends up being built traditionally – in order to be able to benefit from the significant gains in quality and health and safety that factory-produced components can bring over conventional on-site construction. As part of this, we should also be considering designing for disassembly.

Be First aims to innovate pragmatically and with purpose for the benefit of its residents. This includes smarter use of digital technology such as connecting BIM Level 2 information with asset management.



New housing at Barking Riverside



Regeneration in progress at Barking Riverside

DESIGN FOR BOTH LONGEVITY AND CHANGE

Be First is creating long-term housing assets. As such, these must be built to last, prioritising durable, economical materials with high quality detailing, and should be robust enough to cope with the borough's high level of rental churn.

Housing should also be designed with ease of maintenance in mind in order to retain the value of the housing stock. It should not be designed for the worst-case scenario – to the contrary, designing environments visibly hostile to vandalism can provoke rather than reduce misuse. Instead, the communal environment should be tough but not too tough – it should still feel welcoming and human-centric.

While the building fabric should be designed to last, the building technologies within them should be designed for change.

To get the most use out of building technologies, systems should be intuitive and straightforward for residents to use. Nonetheless, systems such as the building services, lifts and alarms are likely to need to be replaced several times during the building's lifespan. These systems should therefore be designed to be easily accessible and adaptable by maintenance staff, ideally without entry to individual homes.

In this way, while the structural 'hardware' of the housing is built to last, the 'software' of the services should be designed with ease of maintenance and upgrade in mind.

BE FIRST DESIGN GUIDANCE

Hearts and Minds, Bricks and Mortar

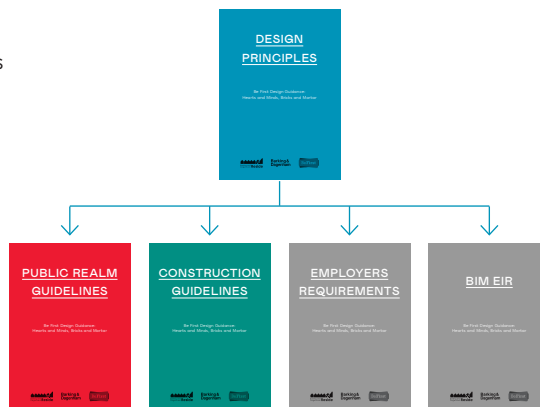
The design principles set out in this document are underpinned by detailed new guidance to help design teams achieve the highest quality of homes and public realm for the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

Be First Design Guidance - Hearts and Minds, Bricks and Mortar is a suite of five, interrelating documents.

Design Principles sets out Be First's aspirations and key design principles for future development. Four detailed guidance documents have been drawn up to deliver this vision.

Construction Guidelines and **Public Realm Guidelines** show how to achieve this design intent across all Be First new homes and public spaces respectively. **BIM EIR** sets out Be First's BIM Level 2 expectations and Employer's Information Requirements while **Employer's Requirements** gives a comprehensive specification for the tendering of Be First building contracts.

Both the Construction Guidelines and the Public Realm Guidelines are designed to interface with the Employer's Requirements. In doing so, they provide graphical representations of the requirements for the early design stages.



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