

## Welsh Streets

On September 11, Liverpool Business News announced that developer Placefirst had completed the sixth and final phase of its £42.8m scheme for the regeneration of part of the Welsh Streets area of south Liverpool. In partnership with Liverpool City Council, Placefirst developed a masterplan in 2016, which, it is claimed, has delivered a 'refreshed neighbourhood' and transformed the deprived area, and is intended 'to continue to enhance communities through the growth of 'Placefirst's single family portfolio'.

This followed a report in May 2022 of how housing association Plus Dane had completed a £17m scheme to create 99 'modern, contemporary affordable homes' in a separate Welsh Streets scheme. That redevelopment project saw 127 former terraced homes in Pengwern Street, Gwyndwr Street, High Park Street and Kinmel Street, transformed after being empty for a number of years.

Originally built in the 1870s for Welsh workers relocating to Liverpool, many of whom were involved in building the terraced properties that characterise the Toxteth area. The Welsh Streets estate eventually fell into dilapidation. Early in the early 2000s, large swathes of property were earmarked for demolition as part of the Labour Government's Housing Market Renewal Initiative (HMRI) and its associated rebuild programme.

MCS members may like to be reminded of the role played by the Society in campaigning to preserve the Welsh Street properties and encouraging the City Council to pursue measures to secure their retention. The City Council had initially favoured the HMRI approach of clearing older properties, consistent with the clearance policies of the 1960s, as a means of making sites available for development by the private sector. It was a matter of regret that such developments were frequently constructed at densities that were simply far too low to support essential local services (including shops and health facilities), as well as public transport – issues which were not addressed in the brief to which the house building developer was typically working.

MCS launched a campaign which sought to secure the refurbishment of Welsh Street properties and the retention of the communities that occupied the streets and many of which provided a much-needed self-help capability for the benefit of deprived residents.

As MCS Chair at the time (a capacity in which I served between 2000 and 2016), I had occasion to question Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, who had championed the HMRI scheme, about its objectives. This I was able to do during a Radio 4, World at One phone-in session, while he was attending the annual Labour Party conference in Manchester.

Subsequently, I was invited to provide evidence to, and to attend, a House of Commons Select Committee on 'Housing Pathfinders', an expression used to describe areas, like Liverpool, where the HMRI was being pursued. Together with others, I was able to put across the argument, which eventually came to be accepted, that 'demolition should be treated as a last resort, only when all other efforts to secure the refurbishment of properties had been exhausted'. From a personal perspective, it was quite an experience to appear before the Select Committee in a Committee Room in the House of Commons.

It was some time after this that Liverpool City Council changed its policy with respect to the Welsh Streets area and sought to adopt measures to secure the large-scale refurbishment of properties. It was apparent that many residents were eager to take up opportunities to obtain financial and other support for the renovation of their own properties. It was also practical for basic utilities (gas, water, and electricity) to be replaced or renovated on a street-by-street basis. Reroofing and other structural changes could also be undertaken more cheaply on a street-by-street basis where properties had been vacated.

MCS Council member Trevor Skempton drafted a green paper that set out the virtues of the terraced house, as a flexible property format that could be readily adapted to meet the requirements of contemporary residential living. Versions of the green paper were presented at MCS evening lectures to elicit comment and constructive criticism. It was widely circulated for stimulate further discussion. In due course, consistent, or parallel with, the procedure adopted by government, the amended 'green paper' was adopted by MCS Council as an MCS White Paper or official statement of the policy of the Society which could be cited as a reference in support of MCS responses to consultations on planning policy matters. READ [Terraced Housing in the Liverpool City Region](#)

This article illustrates very well how MCS members have become involved in responding to planning policy issues as they have arisen. Members of the Society have sought to provide reasoned responses to those issues. These responses have typically drawn upon past efforts to reflect on the direction taken by policy. We have chosen to comment on topical policy matters, as well as specific proposed developments, at both the local and, where judged to be necessary, at the national level. It is hoped that this experience, in successfully lobbying to bring about change, will prompt other Society members to maintain this tradition of engaging in critical reflection on issues of concern. In this way, we should welcome fresh contributions to the continuing evolution of this constructive feature of the Society's role.

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