

# Broadwater Farm Estate (BWFE), London

## The Active Community

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The BWFE is in Tottenham, in the London Borough of Haringey. The construction of the Estate began in 1967 using the Nielsen Larsen large precast concrete panel system on a site that was once a working farm, poorly drained on the edge of Lordship Park on both banks of the River Moselle corridor. The occupation of the buildings started in 1970 and was completed in 1973.

The Estate covers an area of 8.2 hectares, approximately 3 1/2 acres and is built to a density of 336 habitable rooms per hectare. A total dwellings of 1063 in 10 low rise blocks, two high rise and terraced houses comprising 6 bedsits, 463 one bedrooms, 466 two bedrooms, 112 three bedrooms, two 4 bedrooms and 10 shops (at Tangemere Deck level) in a high rise block, and 30 houses at Willan road. All the 12 blocks are named after RAF fighter bases from the Battle of Britain.

Considering the site as a plain of the River Moselle, there was a fear of flooding. The Estate blocks were built on stilts, and another key feature of the Estate was deck access linking all blocks at first floor level. All the under deck spaces were used for car parking at the ratio of 1.4 spaces per dwelling.

By the end of filling the homes with the tenants, problems started to emerge. The

Estate had a reputation of crime, insecurity and poor services by 1973. The problem of water penetration from the roof, leakages, pest infestations, electrical faults, lack of amenities, unemployment, litter, graffiti, drug problems, poor policing and isolation emerged. The GP surgery which was located in one of the shops had wound up. The small community hall was decaying. Security doors on the tower block were not in working condition. The deck walkways were flooding, limiting accessibility. There was a lack of prospects for residents, as many of the residents were poor, and the Estate residents were increasingly from minority ethnic groups. Many residents lived in constant fear of robbery, vandalism and violence.

The allocations refusal rate was between 53-55% and the Estate had the highest number of tenants applying for transfer and twice the turnover of tenants in the borough by 1976. The then Department of Environment studies of the Estate, after 1976 as part of nationwide difficult-to-let Housing Estates investigation, concluded that the Estate should be demolished because of the generally poor condition of the Estate due to design faults, lack of amenities, and social problems of inhuman proportions.

These and later developments contributed

to earn the Estate its unwanted reputation as the 'nightmare Estate' and later 'no-go-area'. The residents were perplexed about the professional decisions on the Estate for demolition. Relations between black tenants and management became largely confrontational. Between 1979 and 1982 there were clashes and disorders. Surprisingly the Tenants Association was all-white, despite the fact that half of the population were from minority ethnic origin. The Haringey Borough housing allocations committee allocated houses to couples, people who specifically asked for Broadwater Farm. The new access policy improved the Estate turnover within two years.

The process of environmental, social and economic regeneration of the Estate began in 1981 and was spearheaded by residents, and in particular local women and young people, led by a long-time resident of Jamaican origin and mother of six, who started the predominantly black residents Youth Association. In 1982 the Labour Party lost control of the BWFE ward. The Youth Association challenged the activities of the now disbanded Special Patrol Police that was creating a deep rift among young people, especially black youths. In 1983 the all-white Tenants Association agreed with the Council to set up an office in a shop, to work with resident groups, and deal with local problems which created suspicion from the black community. **The charismatic style of the Youth Association resident leader made her emerge as a forceful and respected leader among all the residents, and within the Council.** The Youth Association found funding as a voluntary Youth Association and then became the active mouthpiece for the residents. The Youth Association managed a youth club, advice centre, Estate watchdog and lobby group. The activities of the Youth Association, to a greater extent, and the



*Before refurbishment*

**Peter Antwi**

Resident and  
Former chair

Residents Association forced the council to set up a local Neighbourhood office on the Estate to deal with local complaints, base a full time repairs team on the Estate, and set up a special panel, with councillors, neighbourhood staff and residents to cut bureaucracy and report to the Chief Executive in 1983. The tenants empowerment agency, Priority Estates Project (PEP) was appointed in 1983 to help in tenants consultations over improvement of the Estate. The residents were given a say in Council staff appointments to the Estate on interview panels. There was a decision by the Council to offer the maximum Estate based jobs to residents. A resident Estate Superintendent was given one year training, that had a remarkable improvement on the cleaning and caretaking on the Estate. The superintendent was upgraded to Estate service manager, and was awarded the British Empire Medal by the Queen for his service to the community. By 1984 the crime rate on the Estate came down dramatically and the Estate was not hard to let. The number of empty units had dropped to 15, and the repair team responded quickly to all types of repairs. Council staff trained to work as a team with residents representatives. The Youth Association became established and expanded with the Urban Aid Grant.

#### *After refurbishment*



Visitors from all over the world travelled to the Estate by 1984. Princess Diana played pool with members of the youth club during a visit. Sir George Young, the then junior minister for inner cities helped to secure Urban Aid Funding. Coachloads of Germans, French, Scandinavians, British and American housing experts toured the Estate. The resident leaders were invited to conferences and the Youth Association was invited to advise other groups. The PEP used BWFE as a model. The deceased Bernie Grant (MP) became popular because of his support to the community. However most of the achievements were not sustainable. Some residents felt that

the new neighbourhood management of the Estate should be able to resolve all issues. There were reported cases of hostility and conflict between some residents and Council staff. Some of the measures the Council took were to ensure that the homes were let. There was a lack of social amenities, family breakdown, an unemployment rate of 42%, racial tension particularly with the infamous special police, failure of children in the estate to achieve good academic attainment, outstanding repair works and structural defects. There was also poor police relations with the black youths and the police were not eager to accept the activities of the Youth Association. The lack of a local budget was seen as hindrance to cost controls and hindrance to effective decision making. The Estate became difficult to manage under the emerging social, political and economic conditions by 1985.

Conditions however became normalised but there was anger among the youth. The leadership were in control of sometimes tense situations. However in summer 1985 the Youth Association organised a tour to Jamaica and the 'bad guy' took over. There were a series of antisocial activities including drug dealing and joy riding. The



*Childrens play*

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interlude of the early successes to improve the image of the Estate was shattered by the infamous riot on the Estate on Sunday evening October 1985, in which a police officer and a civilian died. The major disturbance took place mainly as a result of tensions between the police and the black youths in the area, as well as dissatisfaction by the community of the slow progress in resolving building defects, social and economic issues of the Estate. The uprising gave the area a notorious image of a violent and troubled Estate with bad media image calling the Estate a 'no-go-area'.

The residents did not relent in their quest to make the area a good area to live. The all-white tenants Association was then re-organised to include the minority groups and was led by the Jamaican woman as a dual community leader. The Youth Association taking the lead in all community activities after the riot. The aftermath of the disturbance brought home the enormity of the problems of the Estate following various inquiries. The pressure of the reconstituted tenants association initiated action for ambitious programmes for the rebuilding of the Estate as a multicultural community. One year after the riot the residents survey revealed a positive view of the Estate, crime had fallen dramatically below the rest of the borough, the community was friendly, tenants leaders were respected, police and race relations had improved. The Youth Association secured European Social Funding for training as well as community development and a community co-operative was set up to win contracts and provide employment on the Estate. Various funding was also secured. The landmarks in the activities of the Youth Association and the Tenants Association resulted in the achievement of the following:

- All whites tenants association formed 1970
- Local neighbourhood office and repair team established on the Estate 1983
- Haringey Council building design service team established on the Estate with instruction to tackle major building defects 1985
- Independent Inquiry into the riot of October 1985 1986
- Structural repairs of the buildings started 1987
- Broadwater Farm Youth Association secured contract for gardening landscape and painting 1998
- The Broadwater Farm Youth Association awarded contracts for the Shell Theatre on the Lordship Park refurbishment, Day Care Centre and Social Club 1989
- Bid of £33 million Estate Action Funding submitted to the DOE following extensive consultation with residents 1989
- Improvements of roads and gardens of the Estate under the Estate Action Programme first phase, initiated by Broadwater Farm Residents Association and Youth Association under the leadership of a Jamaican woman complete 1991
- Construction of a Community Centre completed 1992
- Construction of the 21 Enterprise workshops by Tenants completed to help unemployed residents set up their own businesses 1992
- Major phase of Estate improvement to all blocks under the Estate Action started with residents participation 1993
- Broadwater Farm Youth Association folded and Residents Association took over full representation of all tenants activities 1994
- Start of Estate Agreement between Haringey council and BWF Residents Association 1995
- Official opening of Broadwater Farm Community health centre on 2nd May, with the first qualified centre manager from the Estate 1996
- Start of neighbourhood learning centre with College of North East Learning with residents participation 1998
- Visit of Bill Clinton's Community Development Advisor 1998
- A guide to residents/contractors relations and how operatives should carry out works in residents homes drawn up 1998
- Broadwater Farm co-ordination Team of officer and Residents Association formed to tackle all problems of the Estate especially childcare, youth provision and unemployment 1999
- Opening of the Broadwater Farm new Neighbourhood Office, new Local Repairs Service and new Residents Association office 1999
- Redesigning of Childrens Play centre through 'Sure Start' programme 1999
- Options Study and Intentions of Tenants Management Organisation started 1999

1. Annual Multicultural Carnival representing about 50 nationalities living in the Estate in July yearly since 1993
2. Annual Childrens party since 1993 in December
3. Annual Pensioner party since 1993 in November or December
4. Annual Residents Association Election of all Officers
5. Residents Representatives attending various meetings, conferences and open days on voluntary basis
6. Residents producing their own newsletter (Broadwater Farm News) edited by a resident
7. Residents write various letters to Councillors, Council officials, especially the leader and Chief Executive of Haringey Council and Government Departments on matters that concern residents

*Carnival band*



**The improvement so far on the Estate shows what can be achieved when the Residents, Council officials, police and the central Government work together with a multicultural Tenants Association.**

# Common Lessons

What can be learnt from the 5 Beacons of Hope?

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The stories are virtually unedited to maintain their personal touch and power. However it is worth summarising the common themes as follows:-



## Reasons for Resident Action

- Physical decay
- Crime
- Unemployment
- Lack of facilities & services

## Resident Action

- Active group of residents
- Persistence with Local Authority
- Resident control & ownership
- Community orientated professional help
- Substantial funding in residents' control



## Results

- New & better refurbished properties
- Better environment
- Reduction in crime
- Job creation
- Training
- Community facilities
- Pride
- Sustainable long term community

Almost more important than anything, each Estate has one or more residents with authority to sort out any problem on the spot; someone personally known & respected by all residents. This is usually the Chair of the Residents Association or Estate Management Board Coordinator with delegated power to the Estate Manager.