

How the village will grow

Mark Smulian looks at the infrastructure built to turn the Olympic Village into a thriving community and part of its surroundings

Some of the worst disasters in UK housing have occurred when planners – with the best of intentions – created huge estates of new homes without amenities, sources of employment or even shops.

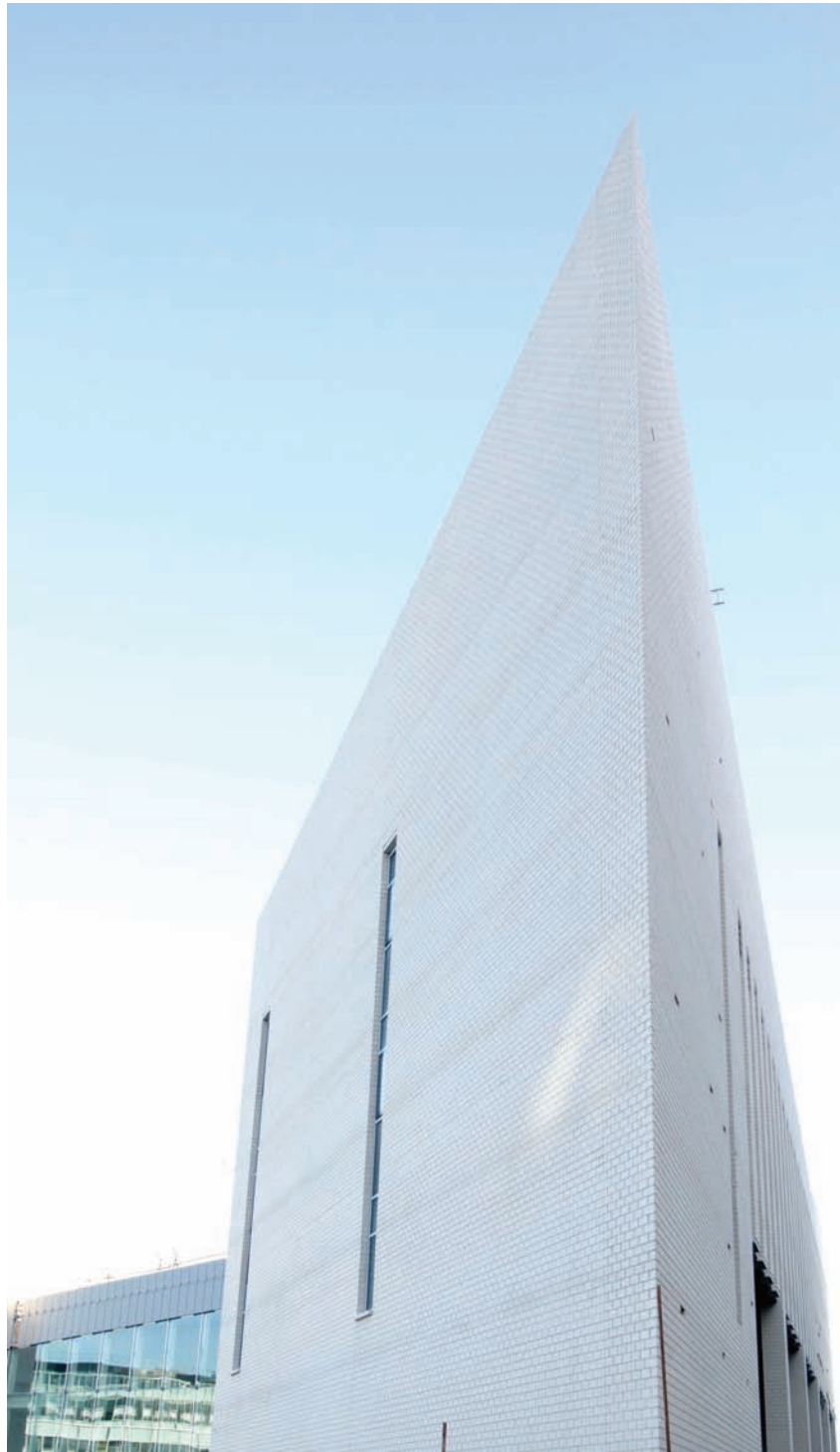
They have since had to be expensively remodelled, or in the worst cases blown up. The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games' Athletes' Village – now renamed East Village – will easily avoid this fate. It is by any standards a very large housing estate, with some 2,800 homes on a 73-hectare site, with just under half for affordable rent or shared ownership.

The Olympic site certainly presented the danger of isolation, being surrounded by railways on three sides and a river on the fourth. But close attention has been paid to knitting this new community into the adjacent old ones. Chobham Academy and the Polyclinic are two of the main weapons in this endeavour.

The academy will be the main school for the East Village, but much more than that it will be the community centre with facilities for sports, drama, arts events and meetings.

Close by is the Polyclinic: something short of a full hospital but a building that will offer dozens of kinds of medical services.

Significantly, both are sited to the village's north east, more or less adjacent to the long-established suburb of Leyton. People will be able to enter the village to use these facilities, then perhaps walk on through a pedestrians street and park, call in at convenience stores and cafes, then catch the Docklands Light Railway or continue on to the giant Westfield retail and entertainment complex and to Stratford station and high street.



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Steve King, Lend Lease's design director for East Village, joined the project four years ago when the land was occupied by old factories and derelict land. He says: "What has been done here is a fantastic logistical achievement not least as all the construction traffic for Westfield had to pass through our site."

Both the Chobham Academy and the Polyclinic are reinforced concrete frame buildings. The academy's main building has a precast polished concrete plinth and aluminium curtain, while its multi-purpose Specialism building is a combination of concrete and steel frames clad in precast concrete and aluminium curtain wall.

"The main teaching block has a Glulam timber roof to an atrium space covered with an ETFE plastic laminate pillow

roof," King explains. "The ETFE pillows are transparent with a translucent fritted pattern designed to reduce glare in the atrium and adjacent spaces."

"Studios in the Specialism building let in natural daylight from the north so that direct sun does not interfere with activities taking place. The Polyclinic has brick cladding and a steel supported three-storey glazed atrium."

Neither presented any particularly unusual features in the course of construction, although the curtain wall in the academy features bespoke acoustic air inlets, which allow fresh air to be brought into the building.

There was a policy to seek a BREEAM Very Good rating for all the village's non-residential buildings, and Chobham



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Academy has achieved this, while the Polyclinic has secured an Excellent rating.

Chobham Academy has three linked buildings, one for the youngest children, one for the main school and one for the community facilities, and has been designed so that it can be segmented, allowing the community in outside school hours without accessing the school itself.

As one walks from the academy and polyclinic into the East Village's heart there is a large empty space. This is one of the unresolved parts of the site. Planning permission exists for two residential towers, but it is yet to be decided whether these will proceed. If they do the plans allow for a health club and retail at ground floor level.

King says: "The rest of that space between the buildings forms

a large park so that one can walk right through the East Village on pedestrian routes. In fact the pedestrian access links up to the Olympic (Queen Elizabeth) Park and the Lea Valley beyond."

Another as yet unresolved area is the Olympic Basketball Arena, which looks permanent but isn't. "It's lightweight steel frame construction covered by a high-tech stretched plastic skin," King says. "It looks large but can be easily disassembled and many of the surrounding roads are temporary. There is lot of debate about how that land should be used once the Games end."

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While this will have some recreational use it is in fact part of the flood defences.



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The Village is built on soil excavated from construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link and is around 5m above the original height of the land, so is now above the flood plain of the River Lea. That posed a risk of flooding the river with runoff water when storms hit the village.

King explains: "Attenuation ponds are used to prevent the River Lea from flooding when there is a storm. Water feeds into a series of ponds at successively lower levels, the last of which lets water into the river, it also forms a public space around water."

Adjacent to this is one of two combined heat and power plants that will serve the village and wider park, so that it does not overload existing power networks.

Village residents will be well-served by transport. Indeed a currently little-used railway line between Stratford and Tottenham Hale had to be covered and parts of the village are built above it.

In the middle of the village is a bus and DLR station and also Stratford International. This station is the source of some contention since although Eurostar could stop there, it doesn't, leaving only high-speed services from St Pancras to Kent calling.

Eurostar does not want to offer stopping services at Stratford before the Games only to have to withdraw them when the Javelin trains for Games spectators fill the station this summer.

It is rather vaguely "considering" the idea of direct links to Paris and Brussels from Stratford after that time.

Jonathan Kendall, of architect Fletcher Priest, has been involved with the project since pre-Olympic times, when the housing was expected to take ten years to build, rather than the compressed timetable demanded by the Games.

He says: "This was not something put together suddenly for the Olympics but a long-term masterplan. The physical relation to Leyton and community integration was there from the start. That's why the school and the polyclinic are where they are, as they will draw people from the surrounding area as well as from the village itself."

After the Games end, areas to the East Village's north and east will be developed for housing and "when that happens it will be easier to see how it all links up," Kendall says.

Barry Jessup is a director at First Base, a partner with East Thames Group and Southern Housing Group, which make up Triathlon Homes, owner of the village's affordable housing.



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He says: “To make a community we have got a mix of housing types and tenures from one-bedroom flats to four-bedroom houses. It will have a mix from low to high income residents. Residents outside the village will use it and the sports facilities will be fantastic.”

Westfield could overshadow any other nearby retail facility, but Kendall says it was recognised that small shops and cafés will be needed across the site.

Jessup says: “People need convenience stores as well as Westfield and we want them all to be within five minutes of being to buy a pint of milk.

“There is also the ability to put in pubs and restaurants in the village. The pub is a very important part of most communities and space exists for it.”

The Olympic Park even has a new postcode, London E20, borrowed from the TV soap opera Eastenders, to help give it a community identity.

The park is designed to both give non-residents reasons to go there, and to make it easy for residents to flow in and out, yet to have the infrastructure on site that will make East Village a community of its own.

East Village’s striking architecture will always make it look different from the 100-year-old suburbs that surround it, but its careful planning should mean that it is not separated from its surroundings as are parts of London Docklands, but is an integral part of east London.

Client: Olympic Delivery Authority
 Architect: Fletcher Priest
 Main contractor: Bovis Lend Lease (Chobham Academy); BAM Nuttall (Polyclinic)