

The Marks Gate Story (December 2013)

An initiative led by St Mark's Church, Marks Gate, Barking & Dagenham, is set to become one of the first of its kind to tick all the boxes to bring regeneration to its local community.



With plans approved by the Local Authority the old church building will be demolished to make way for a new development which will bring housing, employment, apprenticeships and a whole range of community facilities to an area ranked in the top 7% of UK regions for deprivation according to the 2010 statistics.

The initiative was created in an initial partnership between Rev. Roger Gayler and The Berkeley Foundation, a Christian not-for-profit organisation whose vision is to see churches embark on development projects which bring major transformation to their communities. The partners then engaged with the Local Authority and Green Pastures who purchase properties for churches to enable them to house the homeless. Green Pastures have become the development partner in this scheme.

The project believes this is THE FIRST development of its kind across the UK where a church, and a Christian not-for-profit project management organisation, and a Christian Homelessness social enterprise, and a Local Authority are all working together – at no cost to the church.

After lengthy discussions with the Local Authority of Barking and Dagenham some disused garage units and some derelict land were brought into the scheme, and this has been crucial in making the project work. This means that the church's development will now see:

- 97 social and affordable housing units
- A new auditorium
- A fitness facility for community use
- Rooms for hire
- Employment and training opportunities for the local community
- Apprenticeship opportunities
- Ministry training opportunities

In addition, the local primary school which is situated just across the road will be able to maximise the facilities for events, celebrations and assemblies. A much needed additional facility for them.

With all sites included (including the Local Authority's disused garages) the scheme is thought to be around £15m.

The Bishop of Barking, The Right Reverend David Hawkins said "The Church exists for the benefit of all. This is because the transforming news of hope and renewal which the Church is here to share is for everyone. Our work of bringing people together to make a Christian difference is all part of God's mission for the world. By living out the faith we profess in our daily lives and taking action we can cross the boundaries which have grown up between the various sectors of society. We can make it easier for people to see the bigger picture, work creatively in partnership, and achieve practical results for

individuals, families and communities. The Mark's Gate project offers new and practical opportunities for everyone in an area which needs a lift."

A council spokesman said it was a "landmark regeneration model".

He added: "It will not only provide new affordable family housing in the area but also offer high quality community facilities benefiting local residents and bringing a new lease of life to the Marks Gate community"

THE SPEECH MADE BY REV. ROGER GAYLER AT THE GROUND-BREAKING CEREMONY ON 16th DECEMBER 2013

In 2007, the Berkeley Foundation was introduced to me through a contact they were working with.

This was to be the start of our journey for seeing our effort in the local community become even more effective. The Berkeley Foundation has been formed specifically to help churches with their vision of being even more effective in local communities by way of looking at the way in which development can take place. They were keen to support our vision and make the building fit the vision, not the vision accommodating the building. They were also keen on ensuring that minimal, if any, costs were incurred by St Marks since, like many organisations, the church operates on a tight budget. (St Marks are to get their new facilities and vicarage without cost).

Planning a scheme like this very much depends on a partnership approach. I am grateful to Paul Cunningham, CEO of The Berkeley Foundation for his dogged determination to ensure that the clear vision is adhered to, and that the correct partners are brought together to make it happen. I am also grateful to the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham for their willingness to enable this scheme to happen. Without any one of these key people, the scheme would not be where it is today.

In the economic climate in which we live, whether signs of improvement are being seen or not, dependent on your own view and of course your own circumstances, we are also grateful to Green Pastures for becoming our developer on this. Green Pastures are a national homeless social enterprise with 36 partners across the UK. They quite simply buy houses for churches in order that the homeless may be housed. Again, without their priming of the pump, this scheme would not have reached this point. Green Pastures have brought Huttons into the partnership as the building contractors, and we look forward to working with them over the next months. We wanted the scheme to be green, it will be green. We wanted it to be at little or no cost to us, it is. We wanted it to be a resource and a central point for local community. It will be. Thank you to all.

Thomas Edison once said "The body is a community made up of its innumerable cells or inhabitants." Marks Gate is just that, and we believe that this development will bring aspiration and increased hope to all its residents and those who come into contact with it. Employment, training, facilities to be used by all, housing, a new auditorium, children's facilities and a great community feel – all in one development.

As a church, we are delighted that we are leading on such a unique project, one which we believe to be the first of its kind in the UK involving so many partners. Look forward, work with us and let us together see this community thrive in the years that lie ahead.



Nick Talbot (Huttons, the Builders), Rt. Rev. David Hawkins (Bishop of Barking), Paul Cunningham (Berkeley Foundation, who developed the project with Rev. Roger Gayler), Liam Smith (Leader of London Borough of Barking & Dagenham) and Peter Cunningham (CEO of Green Pastures Housing, the developer) break the ground at a Ceremony on 16th December 2013