

housing safe communities

an evaluation of recent initiatives

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NIDDRIE HOUSE ESTATE

DEFENSIBLE SPACE SCHEME

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Description of area

Niddrie House is a housing development of 617 dwellings constructed for Edinburgh District Council between 1969 and 1972. The majority of dwellings are contained within five-storey walk-up blocks. There are, additionally, a small number of five room semi-detached houses and two 14-storey tower blocks. Apart from the tower blocks, which are of system-built panel construction, the estate is of traditional rendered brick and block work, with mono-pitch timber and tiled roofs. The walk-up blocks contain 124 four-room flats, 224 three-room flats and 122 two-room flats. The development won a design award shortly after completion.

When fully occupied, the estate was capable of accommodating about 1,800 residents. Excluding the two tower blocks, which have been completely vacated in anticipation of demolition, there were 503 dwelling units before re-development. A census survey of these dwellings was attempted at the end of 1987 (Percy Johnson-Marshall & Partners. 1988) and achieved a respectable response rate (68%) from all occupied households on the estate.

The survey revealed a high level of unemployment on the estate — around 40% were unemployed and seeking work — a relatively high proportion (20%) of single parent families and a relatively youthful population (around one third aged under 26). Over half of those interviewed had lived in the area for more than ten years, but about the same proportion had applied to transfer away from the area. However, over 80% said they would be prepared to become involved in efforts to improve the area.

Niddrie House is part of the larger Niddrie/Craigmillar suburbs of Edinburgh, which also covers Niddrie Mains, Greendykes and Craigmillar Castle Estates. The whole area is isolated on the periphery of Edinburgh, well clear of major through routes. Niddrie/Craigmillar was built to re-house people from inner-city slums, but by the 1970s the whole area was in rapid decline. This was characterised by physical deterioration of buildings and surroundings, transfers-out by many residents, and rising crime, particularly burglary. Newer developments within the area, such as Niddrie House, made dramatic plunges from showpiece to squalor within the span of a single decade. In the early 1980s it was even claimed that some residents in the tower blocks were speeding up their transfer requests by setting fire to their own flats.

Description of the initiative

In 1987, the District Council recognised the urgent need to improve conditions in the high rise accommodation and decided in principle to allocate £1.3m of its covenant scheme money to building works for this purpose. Architects were appointed to prepare a feasibility study (Montgomery, 1988). However, in a later recognition that problems in the high rise could not be tackled in isolation from those being experienced in the rest of the estate, the District Council commissioned a further feasibility study. (Percy Johnson-Marshall & Partners. 1988b). Later in the same year, the Housing Corporation indicated its willingness to invest in the refurbishment of the low-rise housing through the establishment of a housing co-operative.

At the beginning of 1988, local housing officers and councillors convened a public meeting to announce their intentions for the area, and as a result of this meeting a local residents' action group was formed — the Niddrie House Planning and Rehabilitation Group (NHPRG). It soon became apparent that the residents had different ideas for upgrading the area and, with the help of sympathetic Housing Department staff* they successfully applied for a grant to appoint their own local development team. The NHPRG has a membership of local residents, elected members and housing professionals.

The rehabilitation feasibility study, the social survey and local meetings of the NHPRG stressed

two Important factors: 'Any physical upgrades would have to proceed hand-in-hand with socio-economic improvements for the resident population; local people should be involved both in determining what should be done to Improve the area and in implementation of the improvements.' (Percy Johnson-Marshall & Partners, 1988b)

The Niddrie House initiative is not an explicit crime reduction programme. It Is aimed at improving the overall quality of life on the estate, of which reduced crime would be a substantial contributor. Burglary, other types of theft and vandalism have been major problems on the estate for many years, and many elements of both the design and social programme are aimed at crime prevention. For example, *defensible space* theory is being applied to the courtyard layouts, phone entry systems are being fitted at the entrances to common stairs, and reinforced doors are being fitted to those flats with main entrances directly onto the street. Furthermore, developments such as play spaces and the community centre are Intended to offer constructive ou tlets foryoung people who may otherwise drift Into crime.

Implementation

Between 1988 and the beginning of 1991 the NHPRG.in conjunction with the District Council, has made considerable progress on a number of fronts (Niddrie House Planning & Rehabilitation Group, 1990a; 1990b):

- 76 tenants have formed a housing co-operative, which now owns 185 houses and flats in the area.
- AH of the houses and flats remaining in council ownership will be improved In line with tenants' wishes.
- A decision has been made to demolish two of the least popular tower blocks. Some other blocks will be demolished to make way for new homes for sale and rent.
- A new children's play area has been built, planned and developed in consultation with local children and local schools.
- A community centre Is being opened in one of the rehabilitated blocks.
- Local community businesses have been set up, most notably Unk Security Services which provides security personnel for local construction sites. Another business, Niddrie Housing Maintenance Service, aims to provide a fast and efficient local repairs service.

At the time of writing (February 1991) the physical rehabilitation programme is about half-way; the two tower blocks are still standing but have been completely vacated of tenants (demolition is anticipated In June 1991).

Elsewhere on the estate there has been a phased decanting of tenants, so that currently some tenants are in unmodernised property while others have already moved back into their improved homes.

Redesign programme — principal features

One of the main problems of the original estate design, in common with many other post-war estates, was the large amount of undefined open space and publicly accessible communal areas within the buildings. This resulted in a bleak, neglected appearance and caused major security problems. Individual dwellings also suffered from poor heating, ventilation and sound insulation.

The redesign programme was developed in 1988 and the following were amongst the improvement objectives agreed:

- To improve security to the estate and individual blocks by defining and controlling the spaces between buildings and within buildings.
- To define and control movement through the estate by incorporation of culs-de-sac and courtyards.
- To develop a strategy of defensible spaces.
- To break down the scale of both the buildings and the spaces between them to a human and manageable scale.
- To Improve the quality of the environment by colour, texture and variety Incorporating hard and soft landscape.
- To incorporate compatible flat types within each stairwell and to design a range of flat types which are tailored to the needs of residents.
- To Incorporate front door access to flats and lo Incorporate front and rear gardens whenever possible.

- To design and Incorporate full central heating systems and radically Improve the sound Insulation between flats.
- To establish an estate strategy which Incorporates all of the above and allows for the continued improvement and development of the environment and the community.

A number of these objectives are being addressed by redesigning blocks and their surrounding areas into courtyard groups. These courtyards are semi-private areas, acting as buffer zones before entering small clusters of flats.

The redesign programme began in September 1988 and the first phase was completed by October 1989.

Socio-economic programme — principal features

One of the most interesting aspects of the Niddrie House rehabilitation scheme is the equal stress put on both *physical* and *social* improvements. At the same time as the design work, various sub-groups of the NHPRG were developing proposals and implementing proposals for play areas, a tenants' housing co-operative, responsive methods of estate management, decanting and re-allocation of properties, social activities and community businesses.

All these activities are aimed at generating a buoyant social infrastructure to regenerate the quality of life on the estate. One of the big problems identified in the social survey was residents' despair and resignation about conditions in the area. It was felt that, as building works were seen to be commencing, morale would be raised and local people would be more inclined to invest time and energy in revitalising the neighbourhood. Four of the most interesting examples of this revitalising programme are: the play area, the community centre, the security firm, and the Housing Co-operative.

- The Play Area, linking closely with local children via the two neighbourhood primary schools, the NHPRG working group on play facilities prepared a design and raised funds for a *state-of-the-art* play space on the edge of the estate. At a cost of £91,500, raised from charitable and statutory sources, a custom-built space for adventurous, safe play was completed in May 1990. The NHPRG hope that this will be the first of up to nine recreational areas, to cater for all age groups from toddlers to teenagers.
- McGovern House Community House. One of the walk-up blocks in the middle of the estate has been purchased by NHPRG from the District Council for a nominal sum, as a derelict building. The NHPRG successfully applied for £550,000 from Urban Aid (topped up with £34,000 from Scottish Homes) to convert the building into a Community House and unit for all age groups. The building will contain play, meeting and administration rooms. The Scottish Development Agency has also contributed £74,000 towards the project.
- Link Security Services. With a start-up grant and support from Community Enterprise Lothian the NHPRG was able to establish its first community business on the estate. Rather appropriately, given the area's history of crime problems, the business is a mobile security firm, Link Security Services, as it is known, was set up in March 1989 and specialises in building and site security, and currently employs 12 local people, most of whom had been previously unemployed. In 1989/90 its turnover was £58,000 and in 1990/91 £156,000.
- Hunters Hall Housing Co-operative. 76 tenants of Niddrie House formed the Co-op in 1988. Their aim is to take control by buying their homes from Edinburgh District Council and to use the money from Scottish Homes to improve their houses, their environment and provide local job opportunities. In March 1989 the Co-op bought its first properties and now owns 185 flats and houses. The first 44 improved properties were let between June and August 1990. A further three improvement schemes will complete the work by late 1992. Lets are being made to Co-op tenants, waiting list applicants and council nominations. The tenants control the house designs, the rent levels, the tenancy conditions and the staff.

In addition, a further community business to provide a maintenance and repair services to the estate, which was unsuccessfully launched one year ago, is now planned for 1991.

Funding

Funding has come from a variety of sources, notably the District Council, Scottish Homes, Urban Aid and charitable foundations. In addition, private developers are investing in the rehabilitation of some of the dwellings, for sale, and will also be involved in the demolition and redevelopment of the tower blocks.

The current and future estimates of total investment in Niddrie House, from public, private and voluntary sources are shown below.

Current estimate of total investment in Niddrie House		£	£
Scottish Homes	to date	2,000,000	to come 7,000,000
Edinburgh District Council	to date	2500,000	to come 2500,000
Edinvar Housing Association (source: Scottish Homes)			to come 1200,000
Wimpey Homes (part source; Scottish Homes)		2X100,000	
Scottish Homes Environmental Fund		1,650,000	
Huntera Hal Co-operative (to be raised from private finance)		1200,000	
Edinvar Housing Association (to be raised from private finance)		200,000	
Scottish Development Agency (for environmental works & community centre)	to date	150,000	to come 70,000
Lothian Regional Council (Highways)			to come 50,000
Urban Aid: For Community Centre		550,000	
For Play Area		50,000	
Charitable Trusts		11,000	
Corporate donations		50,000	
Total		10,321,000	11,270,000

Crime changes

Lothian and Borders Police have provided recorded crime figures for the Niddrie House Estate, in the categories of 'theft by housebreaking and opening lockfast premises', 'theft of motor vehicles' and 'Vandalism', from January 1987 (before any works commenced) to December 1990. These figures are tabulated, at six monthly intervals, in Table 25. Unfortunately, due to re-organisation of police sub-division boundaries in 1989, it was not possible to obtain comparative figures for the wider area around Niddrie House.

Table 25: Recorded crimes — Niddrie House

	Theft by housebreaking & OLP	Theft — motor vehicles	Vandalism	Total
January-June 1987	53	4	22	79
July - December 1987	20	6	9	95
January-June 1988	65	8	9	82
July - December 1988	54	15	10	79
January-June 1989	51	4	7	62
July - December 1989	18	4	2	24
January - June 1990	25	2	5	32
July - December 1990	17	6	8	31

The overall recorded crime rate dropped sharply in the six months from July to December 1989. The rate at this time was 61% lower than it had been in the preceding six months and 75% lower than it had been in the equivalent period in 1987. This lower crime rate has been sustained.

The reduction in crime was mainly attributable to reductions in 'theft by housebreaking and opening lockfast premises', the rate of which was 65% lower in July-December 1989 than in the previous six months and 78% lower than in the equivalent period in 1987. Although the number of recorded incidents of vandalism were fewer, which makes it more difficult to be confident about trends, there appeared to be a sharp drop (59%) in July-December 1987, with the numbers of incidents remaining at this lower level up to the present time. The numbers of thefts relating to motor vehicles remained at a uniformly low level for most of the period from January 1987 to December 1990. Details of other crimes were not available from the police.

Changes in recorded crime need to be put in the context of changes in void rates on the estate. It is estimated that the estate was at best 60% occupied in 1987, due to voids resulting from transfers and letting difficulties. The first phase of re-building work commenced in September 1988 and residents started moving back into modernised homes from May 1989 onwards. During the whole period between 1987 and 1990 it is estimated that the estate had between 50% and 60% occupancy.

Assessing the evidence

The Niddrie House scheme is only half completed and a proper assessment of its impact is not yet possible. The early indications are that the scheme is transforming the management and appearance of the estate, engendering a great deal of community involvement and making substantial inroads into the local crime problems. The following are some initial conclusions about the evidence presented so far.

Evidence of reduced crime problems

Recorded crime statistics are the only measure of outcome available at this stage. These show a substantial drop in recorded crime (and burglary in particular) in the second half of 1989, sustained for the whole of 1990. The size of crime reduction is unlikely to have been accounted for by recording or reporting artefacts but some questions remain. In particular, we do not know if crimes of violence are rising or falling, as the police have not (as yet) supplied the necessary crime statistics and, probably more pertinent, because no residents survey has been undertaken; and we do not know if the apparent reductions in the major property crimes are reflected in residents' perceptions of crime (although local agencies are confident that residents' concerns have lessened).

Evidence of initiative's effect

The redesign and refurbishment programme began in September 1988 and the first phase was completed by October 1989. Elements of the social and economic programme of improvements began in March 1989.

These preceded the first sharp drop in recorded burglaries, which occurred in the second half of 1989. The sharp reduction in recorded incidents of vandalism, however, occurred about one year before any of these improvements were carried out on the estate and is not explainable in terms of the current initiative.

The extent to which the initiative has affected burglary rates is masked, to some degree, by changing levels of occupancy on the estate. The traditionally high void levels and, more recently, the need to decant prior to refurbishment, makes it difficult to work out precisely how many dwellings were occupied at any one time; although we do know that the occupancy rate in 1990 is little different from that in 1987.

Furthermore, we cannot be sure that the make up of the population has remained constant. The Council's allocations policy has not changed and nearly all (95%) of new tenants come from the Greater Craigmillar area. Not all decanted tenants have moved back in to refurbished properties on the estate — about 160% have done so — but there is no official policy of refusing re-entry to any tenants. The housing co-operative has a modified allocations procedure giving priority to co-operative tenants and those on their own waiting list, with a proportion of lets being set aside for Council nominations. However, it is difficult to judge the effect of tenancy charges on the estate's demography without survey data being gathered.

Evidence of effect of individual measures

The first phase of the ongoing redesign and rehabilitation programme began in September 1988 and was completed in October 1989. The Unk Security community business and the Hunters Hall Housing Co-operative began operating in March 1989.

These initiatives preceded or were coterminous with the dramatic reductions in recorded burglaries which occurred in the second half of 1989. Apart from any direct impact they may have had on burglary themselves, these schemes led to more people being on the estate during the day and this in itself may have had some surveillance effect. Other social measures such as the introduction of play areas and the building of the community centre did not get under way until early to mid 1990.

Evidence of permanence

The Niddrie House scheme will not be completed for a number of years but the substantially lower burglary rate has already been sustained for 12 months. Ideally, any monitoring period should extend to beyond the completion of the scheme.

Evidence of replicability

At a projected cost of over £21 million (equivalent to around £33,000 per unit), the Niddrie House scheme is not a cheap solution. However, it is important to note that a major part of the investment has been levered in as a result of the momentum generated by the District Councils Initial commitment and the subsequent efforts of the NHPRG.

Part of the reason for undertaking this case study assessment at an early stage was to point to a combination of measures which are unusual (as far as our other case studies are concerned) and which may provide useful lessons for future estate based initiatives. In particular, the control exerted by residents (through the NHPRG) over design changes and their direct involvement in initiating a range of social and economic measures (again through the NHPRG) appears to have been an important element of the scheme's progress. It is interesting to note that the neighbouring Mains Estate, which had a major programme of security and defensible space works completed five years ago, but without the local participation and control evident in the Niddrie House scheme, appears to be reverting to its former state of disrepair. Residents in two other neighbouring estates — Niddrie Marischal Grove and Greendykes — have formed their own action groups to campaign for improvements to their estates along the lines of those on Niddrie House.

The Initiation of community businesses and a housing co-operative by the NHPRG has fulfilled a dual role — it has provided a vehicle for the delivery of improvements to the estate and it has provided residents with a financial and managerial stake in their estate.

Postscript

By April 1993, the total investment in Niddrie House had risen to £16.6 million, with a further £5.3 million in the pipeline. The recorded crime rate began to rise again in 1991. The total of thefts by housebreaking, thefts of motor vehicles and vandalism was 168 in 1991, compared with 64 in 1990 (see Table 25). The total rose again to 212 in 1992. The increase was mainly due to increased vandalism, up 569% (74 incidents) in 1991 and up 915% (132 incidents) in 1992, compared with the numbers of incidents in 1990. The changes in recorded crime need to be put in the context of changes in void rates on the estate. During the whole period between 1987 and 1990 it is estimated that the estate had between 50% and 60% occupancy and only gradually moved towards full occupancy thereafter.

Source material:

Montgomery S (1988), *Niddrie House Multi Feasibility Study*
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Niddrie House Planning & Rehabilitation Group (1990a), *Annual Report*
Niddrie House Planning & Rehabilitation Group (1990b), *Report to Edinburgh District Council*
Scottish Homes (1993), *Crime Prevention in the Housing Sector in Scotland*, report by Safe Neighbourhoods Unit (unpublished)

Case study interviews:

Project Architect — December 1990
Niddrie House Planning & Rehabilitation Group staff — December 1990
Lothian & Borders Police, Divisional Superintendent — January 1991