
Together in Thamesmead

**Co-producing outstanding, sustainable
public spaces with local people**

A large, light green circular logo containing the letters 'TM' in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

TM



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In early 2023, Peabody and the Mayor of London submitted an academic abstract for the EcoCity World Summit 2023, with the theme of ‘connecting communities’. Our brief was to show how ‘collaboration, participation, democratisation of design and transdisciplinary approaches can create better cities and communities’. This report expands on our abstract, outlining the work we are doing with communities in Thamesmead to create outstanding, sustainable shared spaces where people and nature can thrive.

Introduction

With a mission to improve, grow and look after Thamesmead for the long term, Peabody is taking forward an ambitious regeneration and placemaking programme across the town. Residents and partners are playing a key role in this.

Both Peabody and the Mayor of London recognise the value of including residents in making decisions that affect their neighbourhoods. Over recent years, they have joined forces with Thamesmead communities to co-produce outstanding public spaces. By enhancing and maintaining Thamesmead's natural and built assets, Peabody aims to improve people's health and wellbeing, restore biodiversity and respond to the climate crisis.

Thamesmead's natural assets

240+
hectares
of green
space

5
lakes

7
kilometres
of canals

2.5k
of river
frontage

54,000
trees

2x more
green space
per person
than the
London
average

Objective

To co-produce outstanding, sustainable public spaces with local people: places which meet the needs and aspirations of Thamesmead's diverse communities and enable nature to thrive.



Method

Across four projects, Peabody and the Mayor of London have moved from traditional practices of consulting and informing residents to newer methods of community collaboration and empowerment.

These projects are underpinned by 'test, learn, and adapt' approach which includes:

Encouraging a diverse range of people to share their lived experience of, and knowledge local priorities for, their neighbourhoods

Placing residents at the heart of design and decision-making

Exploring and testing the best ways to work in partnership with local people

Learning from this work to deepen community engagement over time

Case study 1

Claridge Way – A Common Plan (completed 2020)

Peabody collaborated with the local community to create designs to transform a bland cut-through into a well-used green space.

Funding: £250,000 from Peabody and a further £50k from the Mayor of London (Greener City Fund).

Community collaboration: Through conversations, hands-on workshops, a giant tea party and virtual reality design sessions, Peabody captured a wide range of ambitions into a Common Plan for Claridge Way. This led to the construction and installation temporary and permanent public realm equipment and activities.

Delivering improvements:

Improvements to the area include:

- new benches for seating and body weight exercises
- new fences, back gates and planters for adjoining residents
- a new gardening club at Hawksmoor primary School
- painted play route
- a woodland adventure walk
- a wildflower bee road

“Children respect it because they were involved in it, and we have many more links in the community as a result of the works.”

Headteacher, Windrush Primary School – Claridge Way



Case study 2

The Moorings Sociable Club (completed 2022)

A community-led refurbishment project. The Moorings Sociable Club, which had been shut to the community for more than 15 years, now offers a contemporary, flexible space to benefit local people.

Funding: £1m from Peabody and £1.15m from the Mayor of London (Good Growth Fund).

Community collaboration: Visual artist Verity-Jane Keefe was commissioned by Peabody to lead this project. She engaged with a core group of local residents, local schools, community groups and other stakeholders. Residents were involved in every stage of the design process – from identifying what has been missing in the Moorings and what could be improved; being involved with design decisions, building and programming; to considering how the spaces will be run, managed and maintained.

Delivering improvements:

Changes to the building have been informed by the community and underpinned by an ethos of repair and care.

The club's facilities include:

- a large performance space
- training room
- shared workspace
- local business displays
- alcove museum
- community café
- IT suite.

Peabody and its partners now use these spaces to run a range of activities and services, supporting local people with issues including housing, jobs and training, immigration and money management.



“We are so proud to be a part of the development of the Moorings Sociable Club. It was amazing to walk into the club and see a lot of the things that we’d hoped for become a reality. The community now has something that they can hold onto that represents the past, present and future of Thamesmead because the club includes all of these features.”

Deborah, local resident and design group participant

Case study 3

South Thamesmead Garden Estate

(phase one completed 2021, phase two to complete early 2024)

A major landscaping programme to transform underused green spaces into flourishing parkland in South Thamesmead. Covering more than three hectares.

Funding: £3.9m from Peabody supported by the Mayor of London and Groundwork. Additional funding from the Horizon 2020 European-funded project, CLEVER Cities, that has contributed resources for action research. CLEVER Cities looks at how nature-based solutions can help address the effects of the climate crisis, increase biodiversity, and help tackle social and economic inequalities.

Community collaboration: The project was led by Peabody in collaboration with a diverse group of residents, the Community Design Collective (CDC), and the wider CLEVER Cities partners of Mayor of London and Groundwork.

The CDC have been trained and paid the London Living Wage to participate, sharing their knowledge and experience with the design team led by muf architecture/art. To date they have invested more than 1,500 hours in design conversations, site visits and client meetings.



Delivering improvements: The first phase of works (completed 2021) include:

- edible garden for local people
- planting wildflower meadows
- high-quality planting, lighting, play equipment and seating across two large estates

The second phase, started in May 2023, will include:

- the transformation of a green chain walk into a biodiverse, healthy, interesting outdoor spaces
- planting and sustainable drainage to create ecological and climate resilient neighbourhoods
- refurbished pathways and new seating to improve accessibility

- planting for foraging, social, and cooking areas
- new lighting for improved feelings of safety
- an upgrade to an existing playground, new play for older children, and multi-use games areas

Next steps: Building on the success of the CDC, Peabody has created a governance structure integrating community members into decision-making as co-produce other spaces are co-produced. This includes the Pathways to the Thames project (see next page).

“Our plans for the South Thamesmead Garden Estate are both ambitious and exciting. It’s fantastic to breathe life into so many green spaces and see people enjoy them.”

John, CDC resident member



Case study 4

Pathways to the Thames (ongoing)

Working with residents to co-produce a safe, accessible, biodiverse route connecting Thamesmead and its residents to the River Thames. The route aims to encourage people to walk, wheel and cycle.

Funding: £50k from Peabody and £40k from the Mayor of London's Green and Resilient Spaces Fund.

Community collaboration: Peabody has recruited, trained, and paid a diverse group of 10 people to join a community working group. Committing to 10 hours' work each month, they gathered feedback about the current path, and developed and shared their ideas for an improved route.

"It was incredibly interesting to see how the principles of our project were founded from the original group and I am excited to be a part of the upcoming sessions. [The project] has been quite inspiring and have played a large role in my consideration of future careers.

Vanita, Pathways to the Thames & CDC resident member



Results

By taking a ‘test, learn, and adapt’ approach to our co-production work, we have deepened our understanding of community engagement.

These projects have shown that local people are agents of change. They have benefited from opportunities to learn new skills, build relationships, and create sustainable places. Teams at Peabody have also had the opportunity to strengthen their skills through mutual learning with our communities.

Work is also going on across other teams in Thamesmead to share further good practice.

The results and lessons from these landscaping and placemaking projects are being shared Europe-wide, for example, through the Future of London guidance on co-production; the new Mayor of London guidance on best practice in commissioning co-design; and CLEVER Cities’ EU guidance to support others with their co-production journeys.



Conclusion

This work has seen Peabody move away from traditional approaches to decision-making to new ways of engaging and collaborating with communities.

This work really matters. For too long, communities across the UK have felt excluded from opportunities to shape their communities.

Working in this way can be both resource-intensive and at times challenging. However, the benefits are huge, as local people and colleagues learn new skills, forge new relationships and see the impact of their work in their neighbourhoods.

Building on the success of this work, Peabody will be supporting and growing community leadership as part of its new five-year plan for Thamesmead (2023-28).

The learnings from the projects showcased above are informing Mayor of London policies, projects and programmes to create a more inclusive and socially just city.

References

- Grosvenor Britain & Ireland (2019)
'Rebuilding trust'
- Future of London (2023)
'Making the case for co-production'

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Pathways to the Thames: Sustrans



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