

Temporary Homes, Permanent Progress? Resident Experiences of PLACE/Ladywell



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September 2019



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Citation information: Harris E, Brickell K, and Nowicki M (2019) *Temporary Homes, Permanent Progress? Resident Experiences of PLACE/Ladywell*. Royal Holloway, University of London.

Report design: Jen Thornton, Royal Holloway, University of London

Cover image: Courtesy of RSHP

Acknowledgements

The underpinning research for this report was funded by the Royal Holloway, University of London Research Strategy Fund. The time to consult the research, and the writing of this report, was supported by The Leverhulme Trust and Professor Brickell's Philip Leverhulme Prize (PLP-2016-127). We are thankful for this funding and the research assistance provided by Laura Shipp in the transcription of the research. We are also grateful for the ongoing support that Lewisham Council and Roger Stirk Harbour + Partners (RSHP) have offered us since we began the research.

Our sincere thanks is also given to the research participants who shared their time, energy, and life experiences with us.

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Executive Summary

PLACE/Ladywell is pioneering temporary accommodation developed by Lewisham Council, London, in partnership with the architecture company Roger Stirk Harbour + Partners. It uses off-site manufacturing processes to provide modular, mobile housing units, currently in use as temporary accommodation for 24 homeless families. There is a well-documented housing crisis in the UK and homelessness has been rising across the past decade, since the financial crash of 2008 and under the ongoing influence of austerity policies (Fitzpatrick, et al., 2018). London is currently experiencing an especially acute housing crisis defined by unaffordability in the private rental and sales market and a diminishing stock of social housing, for which waiting lists remain hugely oversubscribedⁱ. There is also a shortage of temporary accommodation, resulting in families being placed in accommodation far beyond their borough of origin (Watt & Minton, 2016). In Lewisham itself, there were over 9000 families in temporary accommodation in 2016 (Osborne & Norris, 2016). Working in this context, this report investigates the experiences of families living in PLACE/Ladywell. It questions the difference the development has and can make to their lives.

While PLACE/Ladywell has been widely acclaimed in the media and awarded multiple prizes, including the Mayor's Prize and the Temporary Building category prize at the New London Architecture awards (2016), there has been a lack of attention to what it is like to live in for residents. This report responds to that gap, drawing on in-depth interviews with residents conducted between April-September 2017. Our research explores routes to homelessness, experiences of temporary accommodation prior to being housed in PLACE/Ladywell, residents' initial reactions to PLACE/Ladywell, the positive, negative and ambivalent aspects of life in the building and the impact it has on residents' sense of security as well as the impact it might have on their lives going forward. Based on these findings the report draws conclusions regarding the potential of modular mobile temporary accommodation and makes recommendations to inform future developments.

Headline Findings

- PLACE/Ladywell is a significant improvement on other forms of emergency accommodation, despite some issues with its design and management.
- Greater dialogue and transparency is needed with residents, especially around schedules for moving in and out of the property.
- Funds for removal and storage services (or improved and additional council services) would take some financial pressure away from residents living in emergency accommodation.
- Many residents would benefit from the option for properties in PLACE/Ladywell to come furnished.
- Residents would feel more at home if they were able to decorate and make minor adjustments to the flats.
- Providing some non-open plan properties would help families for whom open plan living isn't ideal.
- Many residents were adversely affected by the lack of parking. On-site parking would greatly improve quality of life for most residents.
- Consideration needs to be given to the terminology used for temporary/mobile modular housing developments as the term 'pop-up' had problematic connotations for many residents.
- While the bright colours used for the building may have helped to generate debate and raise awareness, it also made some residents feel stigmatised. Experiences of stigma need to be taken seriously and factored into building design.
- The downstairs units could be used in ways more beneficial to residents, including providing a nursery or crèche and space for community activities specifically aimed at residents.
- While the construction of PLACE/Ladywell itself was rapid there were delays caused by address registration and service provision. As offsite manufacturing and modular building techniques become increasingly used, work needs to be done to speed up these processes, as well as the building construction itself.
- Offsite manufacturing techniques as showcased in PLACE/Ladywell could and should be used to build permanent council and social housing (as is now being taken forward in Dublin). Without providing permanent housing too, developments like PLACE/Ladywell run the risk of just being a better 'sticking plaster' for the problems of the housing crisis.
- More research needs to be conducted into the long term impacts of PLACE/Ladywell for residents and their housing futures. Evidence of best practice from PLACE/Ladywell should be transferred across to new modular housing developments.

Introducing PLACE/Ladywell



Figure 1: Artist impression of PLACE/Ladywell (Courtesy of Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners)

PLACE/Ladywell, completed in 2016, is a “deployable residential development”, built using “volumetric construction” methods (Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, 2016). It currently occupies a site in Ladywell, Lewisham (south-east London). The site was formerly home to the council-run Ladywell Leisure Centre, which was demolished in 2014. The building was designed in response to the vacant space left by the leisure centre’s demolition. The site is in a prime position in Lewisham, well connected by transport and close to local amenities (see Figure 2 for plan). Given the worsening housing crisis in Lewisham, and across the capital, it was decided that a good use of the site would be for housing provision. In 2017 there were 1,800 Lewisham homeless households in temporary accommodation, up 96 % since 2011 (Lewisham Poverty Commission , 2017). A large percentage of these families are in nightly paid accommodation, which is very expensive for the council, and many others are living in substandard private accommodation, underscoring a need for high quality, council owned temporary accommodation. It is more economically sustainable for the council to provide their own accommodation, rather than paying landlords to provide what is often ‘unsuitable, horrible accommodation’ for which they knowingly charge more than the Local Housing Allowance will cover, requiring the council to top up the rents, according to one of PLACE/Ladywell’s project managers.



Figure 2: Plan of PLACE/Ladywell (Courtesy of RSHP)

The idea for PLACE/Ladywell came about after members of Lewisham Council witnessed an exhibition piece at the Royal Academy, designed by the architects Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners (RSHP) which involved erecting a flat-pack three and a half storey building in 24 hours (Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, 2018). Inspired by the concept of moveable, modular housing, Lewisham partnered with RSHP to create the designs for PLACE/Ladywell. Like the “homeshell” created for the exhibition, PLACE/Ladywell is largely manufactured offsite before its modular components are assembled, rapidly, in situ. The building can then be moved to other sites in the future and assembled in different configurations to suit the different requirements of each place. As well as addressing acute housing need in Lewisham, PLACE/Ladywell is proof of concept for “pop-up” housing (as it has been widely described, including by Lewisham Council (Lewisham, 2018; Osborne & Norris, 2016; Bloomfield, 2015) as a strategy for emergency accommodation provision. The concept is being taken forward currently by numerous councils across and beyond London, including Ealing, Bromley and Reading, as well as elsewhere in Lewisham with the creation of PLACE/Deptford (Figure 3) (Barratt, 2018; Reading Borough Council, 2018; Ealing Council, 2017; Lewisham Council, 2018).



Figure 3: PLACE/Deptford (Image courtesy of RSHP)

The conception of PLACE/Ladywell as an idea to the building being erected was a two-year process. As well as drawing on the council's housing revenue and receipts from right to buy salesⁱⁱ, the project required further funding from the Council's general funds. Because secure tenancies are not offered at PLACE/Ladywell it is not being categorised as social housing but rather as temporary accommodation, meaning different rules apply about which funds the Council can draw on. According to the PLACE/Ladywell project manager, the rental income from the flats generates £330,000 a year, which equates to £220,000 net surplus to the Council. This means the building, which cost £5m in total, will pay for itself in 10 yearsⁱⁱⁱ. The building exceeds the specifications of the London design guide by 10% in terms of quality and size. It is clad with vibrantly coloured panels, and is very noticeable from Lewisham High Street (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Lewisham High Street (Photo by K Brickell, July 2016)

As well as alleviating immediate housing need for 24 families, a key intention of PLACE/Ladywell is that it serve as a proof of concept for the ideal of modular, mobile temporary accommodation. Osama Shoush, Lewisham Council's project manager for PLACE/Ladywell, described how "it's very difficult to have high quality meanwhile housing that you can only have for a certain amount of time", which has been a barrier to using vacant sites to meet housing need. PLACE/Ladywell solves this problem because while its occupancy of each site is temporary, the building itself is durable, designed to last at least sixty years (Osborne & Norris, 2016). This means the building can be moved around the borough to utilise vacant land in

central locations for housing provision, without compromising on the quality of the accommodation. This 'meanwhile' use model is also valued by the council because, as Shoush describes, it allows housing to be provided quickly without having to 'scupper the future potential of the site', as could be realised with a longer planning window. These potentials, as he clarified to us would include the potential to "build a larger permanent development" including "as much affordable housing as possible, by the Council, once PLACE/Ladywell moves." Yet the meanwhile model also retains the potential private sale of the site, or part of it, and indeed many other formerly council owned sites, including old community centres, or housing offices have been sold privately as the council 'shrinks'. Whether it leads to private sale, council owned developments or a mix, Shoush describes how "meanwhile use buys time to properly consider approaches, consult with residents and assemble funding". While the mobilization of meanwhile use of vacant council sites to meet housing need raises the question of what will happen when there are few remaining council-owned sites to be sold, it enables, in the medium term, land to be found for temporary housing at a time of limited funding and policy restrictions.

As well as providing 24 residential apartments, the ground floor of PLACE/Ladywell provides units for small businesses including shops, studios and a cafe. The commercial units are managed by Meanwhile Space, a leading company in facilitating temporary commercial rents in vacant spaces using the 'meanwhile use' lease template developed by the Labour government in 2009. The commercial units provide an opportunity for small businesses in Lewisham to grow, given the low rental cost of the units (£550pcm for an enclosed studio, and co-working desks from £140pcm). The Council makes no money from these commercial units, but the activities are intended to help 'animate' and 'change perceptions' of the space, as is the standard goal of commercial meanwhile use (Harris, 2015), as well as to provide a reason for local residents of Lewisham to visit the site and hopefully foster community integration and reduce stigma around temporary accommodation.

Another key rationale for including the commercial units, as well as for the high design spec of the flats themselves, is to draw attention to the building as a vibrant and desirable place to live and to visit. Because PLACE/Ladywell is designed to be a proof of concept for modular, mobile housing it was important that it was a positive, successful example of this format in order that future developments gain political backing. Shoush describes how 'understandably, the first thing politicians think about when you say to them moveable temporary accommodation...they think shipping container shanty towns...and there was a conscious effort, I think, in designing the project, to demonstrate that this was achievable without compromising on standards' (Shoush). One of the 24 flats in PLACE/Ladywell is still being used as a showroom (Figures 5 and 6) that demonstrates the architectural technology. Shoush described how almost every local authority in London had been to see the development or expressed interest in PLACE/Ladywell. Lewisham had also had visits from other parts of the UK, and international delegations from America, Australia, Ireland, India and Sweden. In 2016, the building won the Mayor's Prize and the Temporary Building category at the New London Architecture Awards, and there are plans for the GLA to develop 100 centrally-owned units which could be mobilized in any of the London boroughs. 11



Figure 5: Showroom living room (Photograph by K Brickell, July 2016)



Figure 6: Showroom child bedroom (Photograph by K Brickell, July 2016)

The 24 flats in PLACE/Ladywell are being rented to families eligible for two-bed properties. The rules for allocation of housing state that single adults (defined as people over 20), or children over 10 of different genders, can't share a room so this means that two-bed properties are usually rented to couples or single parents with young children or children of the same sex. The selection of families also considered need, including who was currently living furthest away or in the most unsuitable housing, in terms of overcrowding and/or quality. Another factor was the cost to the Council. It was more cost effective to provide accommodation to people considered to have a strong need to be in Lewisham. Additionally, priority was given to those people not in rent arrears or deemed to be trying sufficiently to pay overdue rent, to reward and incentivize timely rental payment. Another means of selection was that Lewisham selected families who hadn't been in temporary accommodation for too long, the rationale being that the longer you've already been in temporary accommodation the closer you are to being permanently rehoused, so families who had recently been placed in temporary accommodation and thus still potentially years from being permanently rehoused would benefit most from a relatively long term stay in PLACE/Ladywell while on the bidding list.

Situating PLACE/Ladywell

In exploring resident experiences of PLACE/Ladywell it is necessary to situate the development within the rise of temporary and mobile places more generally. While not its official title, PLACE/Ladywell has been widely referred to as a 'pop-up village' (Osborne & Norris, 2016) and its ground floor is managed by the company Meanwhile Space, frontrunners in the organisation of meanwhile usage in London.

Over the past ten years pop-up culture has taken London by storm. "Pop-up" refers to the temporary use of vacant buildings or sites for services and activities (Figure 7). Traditionally these have been in the cultural and commercial sectors, including venues like bars, restaurants, cinemas and galleries (Bishop & Williams, 2012; Harris, 2015). Pop-up has been acclaimed for its ability to 'animate' urban areas, restoring levels of footfall and economic activity after the decline prompted by recession and without the need for high investments of funding (Bishop & Williams, 2012). However, for this reason, pop-up has also been associated with the exacerbation of gentrification in London, given that it brings cultural and commercial events to run down areas, thereby attracting middle-class audiences and buyers (Harris, 2017). It has also been accused of normalizing precarious labour, by generating a growing body of 'pop-up people' working in temporary settings, and of making temporariness and uncertainty infrastructural to the way that cities operate through the codification of meanwhile use as a format of urban organisation (Ferreri, et al., 2017; Harris, 2015).

This building is not as temporary
as you might think!

If you have been watching this site over the weeks, you will have noticed the units arriving whole and being locked in to the foundations, and to one another, like lego.

This is the basic principle - the units are designed to be unlocked from one another, transported and relocated. So when this site is developed in four years' time, these homes and business spaces can be taken to another site and fitted together again. This approach, tested in the world but being used for the first time in London, minimises the noise and duration of construction and makes better use of public money.

To find out more about the building go to
www.insulshell.co.uk

Figure 7: Poster on the hoardings of PLACE/Ladywell during its construction (Photo by K Brickell, July 2016)

Recently, the pop-up format has been extended into the arena of welfare provision and, in particular, has been suggested as a format for housing provision. In a report from 2016, the Greater London Authority (GLA) Conservative Assembly Members proposed that pop-up housing could be the answer to London's housing crisis (Boff, 2016). Their report, entitled 'Pop-up Housing, a London Solution', suggested that because it 'will take years' before many sold-off sites in London are developed, it is prudent to use them 'in the meantime' to provide a 'range of housing schemes whilst developers await long-term planning permission' (Boff, 2016, p. 5). Their proposition follows the format that has, over the past decade, become known as 'pop-up'; their intention is that sites awaiting redevelopment be used to provide much needed housing, but on a temporary basis, so as not to preclude the profitable sale and development of those sites in the future. The GLA Conservatives describe three existing pop-up housing sites, one of which is PLACE/Ladywell, the others being YCube in Mitcham, South London, and a development for graduates in the Netherlands (Heijmans One Scheme, Amsterdam).

We argue that it is important to situate the rise in pop-up accommodation against the rise in commercial and cultural pop-up places, so as not to forget pop-ups association firstly with gentrification and secondly with precaritization. As a cultural and commercial phenomenon, pop-up places have been described as the 'shock troops' (Luckman, 2014) of gentrification. Due to their short term nature they can take the 'risk' of locating in an as yet un-sought after location and therefore often become the first places in an area aimed at a more middle class demographic. Equally, pop-up is a format that has codified precarious labour in the creative and craft economies; normalizing the short-termism of work in these sectors as well as short term access to land or units. Pop-up places, as Boff argues, are intended to exist only in the 'meantime' to the timescales of more profitable developments, bringing into question their appropriateness for providing essential services such as housing, as well as a format for labour and culture. Equally, if pop-up housing, like pop-up culture, is designed to 'animate' urban space (as is true of the ground floor units at PLACE/Ladywell), it runs the risk of exacerbating gentrification and thereby worsening the crisis in housing affordability it seeks to intervene into. At the same time, however, we recognise the immense pressure on councils to provide temporary and permanent accommodation in the face of widespread cuts to funding from national government, and a worsening crisis in the private housing market. This report approaches PLACE/Ladywell mindfully of both these contexts, and explores whether residents are able to feel at home and gain a sense of stability and security in such temporary and mobile accommodation.

The importance of feeling 'at home' is key to this report. Whilst clearly connected, 'home' should not be understood as another term for 'housing'. Whilst 'housing' refers to the material dwelling, 'home' relates to a much more expansive, more emotive set of ideas. Home as a concept resonates on a variety of scales, from dwelling to nation, and beyond. It can refer to both the material house itself, or the feeling of security and familiarity that the house might bring (Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

The stories of PLACE/Ladywell residents highlight the importance of securing and maintaining a home to personal wellbeing. In the context of homelessness, feeling “at home” enables people who have experienced homelessness to regain dignity and a sense of self no longer defined by their homeless status.

Research Remit and Methodology

In 2016 we were awarded a Royal Holloway Research Strategy Grant, to conduct a year of research at PLACE/Ladywell. The research consisted of interviews with residents and stakeholders including employees of Lewisham Council, architects from Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, two local MPs, the show flat interior designer and the graphic design company who created the promotional materials. We conducted interviews with 7 out of the 24 households in PLACE/Ladywell. The interviews were conducted between April and September 2017. Residents participating in the interviews were paid £40 for their time and were informed about the purpose of the research. In this report, their comments have been anonymized.

This report forms part of a wider research project exploring the role of modular construction technologies in the provision of emergency and social housing in the UK and Ireland. In 2017, we were commissioned by Dublin City Council to conduct research with residents of two modular social housing developments, termed ‘Rapid Build’, in the north of the city. Similarly to PLACE/Ladywell, the majority of Rapid Build residents were homeless families. However, unlike in Lewisham, Dublin City Council made the decision in 2017 to offer the Rapid Builds, which had originally been conceived as temporary accommodation, as permanent social tenancies^{iv}.

Routes to PLACE/Ladywell

Reasons for Homelessness

All of the residents we interviewed at PLACE/Ladywell had been moved there from other temporary accommodation and had been on the homelessness register for some time, often years. The vast majority of residents had previously been renting in the private sector and had been made homeless because of rent increases or because landlords had decided to sell or move back into the properties they were renting. In some cases this was because of hardship suffered by landlords themselves, for example in one instance a landlord lost their job and therefore had to sell the property. For some, job losses were also a cause of homelessness. Most residents, however, had been made homeless while working and simply did not earn enough to cover the immediate costs of relocation and the longer term costs of high rents in the private sector.

“You go on private market and you look at two bedrooms over £1000, and literally, I’m earning just over £1000 and I’ve got to feed two kids” (Clarissa)

The unaffordability of private rental was especially a problem for single income and single parent families. Many such families had been forced to live in very overcrowded rental properties because their incomes couldn’t cover the cost of a property with multiple bedrooms. One parent had been living in a studio flat with their two children for four years when the landlord decided they wanted the property back. In other cases, parents had been living with family but were unable to stay after having more children due to overcrowding.

Residents described how the private rental accommodation they had been forced to leave had been poor quality and badly maintained, yet unaffordable.

“I was paying £900 per calendar month, and he wanted like £1200.... the rooms were really small there, and he never fix anything...we had rats and mice and cockroaches...he didn’t take care of the flat at all” (Annie)

Residents were frustrated by their powerlessness in asking landlords to improve their living conditions. One resident had spoken to their local council and said the council were unable to do anything because the property was privately rented.

Previous Temporary Accommodation

Most of the residents we interviewed had moved multiple times, often between four or five different temporary accommodations, before arriving at PLACE/Ladywell. This included being moved between disparate areas of London; in the case of one resident, from Ilford to Maida Vale to Woolwich and then back to Lewisham in a period of under 18 months. Often they had stayed in properties for as little as three weeks before being moved again and for many residents their residence at PLACE/Ladywell had been their longest period of stability for some time.

Almost all the residents we spoke had negative, often very upsetting and destabilizing, experiences of being moved to inappropriate locations. There was a pervasive sense of helplessness, of being 'passed from pillar to post' without any say in the matter. Families who had been moved to various locations several miles apart within London were fearful of complaining or not taking up offers, which might result in them being moved even further afield:

"What choice do I have? Like, moving you outside London, because they've done that to loads of people" (Joe)

"I had a choice, East London or Croydon or Birmingham" (Ashely)

There was a frustration at the council's definition of what constituted an appropriate location. According to one resident the criteria was to be within 90 minutes of places of work and school, which was deemed an unfair expectation in terms of travel time.

"I was evicted and then luckily Lewisham Council took me on and then I was rehoused this far (gestures to show great distance), you know, from Lewisham, but these days, at the end of the day they don't care as long as they keep on telling you, as long as you are within 90 minutes of reaching of wherever you're supposed to go" (Annie)

Vicky Foxcroft, MP for Lewisham Deptford, also spoke, in our interview with her, about the unreasonable expectations placed on residents of temporary accommodation in terms of how far they should be able to travel to work and school. The long and difficult commutes faced by families had a direct impact on the school lives of their children. Because families were only temporarily rehoused in the various locations they were placed in it made most sense to keep their children in their original schools in Lewisham, so as to minimize disruption to their education. However the distances from Lewisham to which they were moved made getting to school regularly and on time very difficult, especially where siblings of different ages or with varying needs were not in the same schools or nurseries. Residents described how they were;

"Driving here and there and everywhere, phoning up, so sorry, they won't be in today, so sorry they're late today, just constant, but they don't put any of that into consideration" (Clarissa)

One resident felt lucky;

“because some people, they’ve taken them to like, Dagenham, and like, Ilford, I have some family coming and their children’s school is in Lewisham” (Anthony)

Vicky Foxcroft described the impact on children, as she had witnessed it, of these long travel times, explaining that;

“When their kids are going to school, they’re literally falling to sleep because they’ve been awake two hours before, two hours afterwards, they’re travelling, you know, when’s the time to do their homework, or their extra activities, all living in a one-bedroom place.”

As well as being moved to inappropriate locations, the notice period for movements between temporary accommodations was very problematic and difficult for families.

“And then, if they tell you you are moving today, they’ve not given you any notice, they just call you up and say by 2 o clock you must be out of there” (Clarissa)

“I literally got a phone call about half 8 in the evening and they said you’ve got to have everything out by 8 o clock in the morning and come to pick up the keys, and we didn’t know where or anything.” (Ashley)

These short notice moves were deeply unsettling, leading residents to feel like they had ‘lived my life in boxes, opening, taking back, putting things back and bringing them out, you know?’ (Clarissa). The frequency of moves made it difficult for residents to maintain jobs, to take out loans and to provide a stable atmosphere for their children. They described how the moves were confusing for young children and their struggle to not let the impact of the moves on their own mental health affect their role as parents;

“I’m only human, sometimes I’ve broken down and my daughter will find me in my bedroom asking me, “Mummy, why you crying” and I’m thinking, “no no I’ll just pretend this, get a story to tell.” (Joe)

The traumas of frequent moves were made worse by the fact that the reason for the moves was often not discernible for the residents.

“I’m thinking, okay, I been in a two-bedroom...and you are rehousing me back in, ummm, another two-bedroom temporary accommodation. Why? You know? Why are you moving me?” (Annie)

Moving often and at short notice also had high financial costs because, without knowing where they would be and for how long, residents were forced to keep belongings in expensive temporary storage costing, according to one resident, £400 a month. Another resident described paying weekly storage costs for several weeks because of uncertainty about their move dates.

“They told me it was temporary for two weeks. Two weeks turned into a month, then a month turned into another, and then my things were in storage for two months” (Claire)

The cost of hiring removal vans for frequent short notice moves was also a problem for residents. One described how

“You’ve got to try and keep something back just in case you get the phone call, and get told you’re being moved, because you get a phone call you got told the next morning you’ve got to be out, someone else is moving in mate, that afternoon, quick as that”. (Ashley)

Keeping money back for unexpected moves was obviously difficult for families on low incomes and they experienced no help from Lewisham Council with the costs of relocation. This dual unpredictability, of not knowing where they would be or when, and not knowing when they might suddenly need access to money for removals made it very difficult for families to plan ahead.

“You try so hard to plan, but at the end of the day, they just keep telling you if you are in temporary accommodation we can’t do much”. (Anthony)

The temporary accommodation families had been placed in prior to coming to PLACE/Ladywell was also frequently inappropriate for their needs, overcrowded and poorly maintained. One resident described to us how they had previously been allocated a one-bedroom property for three adults, two female and one male. The man, the uncle of the adult women, had been unable to sleep in the property with them for religious reasons. He had ended up sleeping in his car or taking night shifts at work because he was not able to sleep at home anyway. Another tenant explained how they and their family had been placed in accommodation that was unsuitable for a child with autism. The child was very sensitive to changes in their surroundings and needed a reasonable amount of personal space, but in this property had been required to share a room with their parent and siblings.

Much of the temporary accommodation residents had been placed in also lacked basic facilities or included appliances which were too costly to run.

“When we got in there, there was nothing, not even a bed cover, not a kettle, nothing, and then we never had no heating...he went and got us a fan heater, it just wizzed £20 on the electric, gone, in about an hour, two hours, it was mad”. (Ashley)

Frequently, properties were overcrowded. Many parents with two children had been placed in one-room properties for months at a time and one resident reported being provided with only two beds for them self and their two teenage children. Communal facilities were often overcrowded too and it was common to have to wait long periods of time to use bathroom and kitchen facilities. Some residents also felt unsafe sharing with strangers.

All the residents described to us how poor the condition of past temporary accommodation had been. Properties were cold, damp, and often infested with vermin, such as ants, mice and rats. For example, one resident mentioned finding rat droppings which made them scared for the health of their baby. What made these conditions worse was the inability residents had to complain about and fix the terrible conditions they were living with. One person had lost a job because of taking the day off to go to the Council and complain about the conditions in their accommodation. This illustrates the difficult position residents are often in; they are already at capacity in terms of the amount of time they are spending trying to sort out a tenable living situation, and the amount of stress they can deal with, as well as and often experiencing other forms of precarity (than housing precarity) such as job insecurity. This leaves them without the time, energy or security to push for better conditions. MP Vicky Foxcroft suggested that the Council sets the bar too low for what constitutes acceptable temporary accommodation and that the decision is made on the basis of one-off visits rather than how the property is maintained.

The housing system

Residents also felt powerless to complain about these conditions because they knew that if they refused to stay in the properties they could be deemed to be “intentionally homeless” (Shelter, 2018).

“I phoned up and they said like....that’s your accommodation, if you don’t take it you’re making yourself homeless” (Joe)

The rules around intentional homelessness are controversial. Numerous charities and advocacy groups, including the E15 Campaigners and Lambeth Housing Activists are and have been campaigning against decisions to deem tenants intentionally homeless due to their being in rent arrears or their failure to accept relocations (Fiaz, 2018; Urban, 2018). Residents of PLACE/Ladywell certainly experienced these rules as counter intuitive and, in particular, had been shocked to find, when being evicted from previous properties, that if they left before the day they were evicted they would be deemed to have made themselves intentionally homeless. They were widely frustrated that this rule left them unable to make any plans, even when they had been given advanced eviction notices. Residents were also upset that the system necessitated going through the intensely stressful process of refusing to leave at the end of their tenancy and then enduring the ensuing legal proceedings and bailiff visits.

“She said, if I was you, I would pack up your home the day before and have it, either go and put it in storage, or have it in a lorry ready, she said. And then, that morning of the eviction, they come, cause obviously there’s a procedure the landlord had to follow...so anyway I followed procedure, which was, I thought, crazy, I packed up the day before, went down and it was just, to be honest all I did was cry” (Annie)

“I was given notice, but these days with the council, I’m telling you, even though you’re given notice, until bailiffs come to your door they won’t do nothing....they won’t rehouse you until they know, okay things are outside the door and they’ve chained the locks on our door....I went to the council and they’re like....are you sure the bailiffs are there?” (Clarissa)

Residents also experienced other elements of the temporary housing system as irrational. For example, one resident was asked for up to date papers to prove that a child had a non-changing, lifelong medical condition that impacted on their housing needs. In addition, there was frustration at the variable quality of temporary accommodation and the lack of transparency regarding who was placed where and why.

Impressions of PLACE/Ladywell

First Impressions

Against the backdrop of their dire experiences of temporary accommodation in the past, most residents were highly excited about moving into PLACE/Ladywell. Many people who were living or working locally had seen the building going up but had not known it was intended as temporary accommodation. Residents described how they felt on hearing they would be moving into the building;

“I was trying to find the address, and I saw this place and I was like, no, it can’t be?” (Joe)

“I just jumped, I didn’t know at the time it was temporary or anything, but I just, I was ecstatic, honestly, and my friend was like dancing with me, I was like oh my god! oh my god! ...But it’s not forever, it is temporary, but I am still forever grateful” (Annie)

These reactions from residents indicate the excitement felt at moving into what they could see was a much higher quality property than other temporary accommodation. While the second quotation indicates disappointment at not being rehoused permanently, it also indicates a profound relief at the escape PLACE/Ladywell offered from their experiences of homelessness so far.

Moving in

However, despite the initial excitement of residents, many problems were faced when moving into the property, mostly because of delays with the building which resulted in residents moving in much later than the dates initially given to them. Shoush explained to us that delays were caused because although the offsite manufacturing of the building was very efficient, some of the on-site construction took longer than anticipated. This was partly because of weather conditions and partly because some elements, such as the walkways, took longer to build than first estimated (Figure 8). It was also discovered that the building was too near to some gas pipes so revised planning applications had to be submitted. Delays were also caused by the process of registering the address. Shoush described how the processes around registering buildings are slow, designed for the time scales of normal construction, not pop-up buildings, and so slowed down the process meaning, for example, that power couldn’t be connected even after the buildings had been otherwise liveable for two months. Some flats also experienced flooding, or delays fitting white goods, which meant that individual tenants had their move-in dates pushed back even further.

Residents described to us the problems that delays to the move-in dates caused. Many had incurred significant costs because they had to keep their belongings in storage for longer than anticipated.



Figure 8: PLACE/Ladywell walkway (Photo courtesy of RSHP)

Multiple residents also described losing money on the deposits for removal vans because of limits on changing removal dates, in one case losing £300 because the removal company wouldn't allow more than two date changes. One resident also lost money because they had bought a parking permit to begin in August, assuming they were moving in imminently but, because of delays, ended up paying for three months where they couldn't use the permit because they hadn't moved in. The resident was also unable to cancel the permit because, as they described "if I cancel it today, I could move in tomorrow". Indeed, it was not the delay itself that was the biggest problem, but the uncertainty as to when the eventual move-in date would be, which left residents unable to make informed, efficient arrangements.

Likewise, the uncertainty around move-in dates caused problems as residents had moved jobs or enrolled children in schools, expecting to be already living in Ladywell, but then found they weren't moving in for several more weeks. This caused problems with residents needing to commute long distances into Lewisham where children were already at school;

"The first letters I got were in July saying that I was supposed to move into the property by 1st of August, and this is literally 17th October...I told her literally, if by this Thursday the white goods are not ready, just let me in, let me in. I'll sleep, do laundrette outside, buy chicken and chips, but I just can't do the travel, it's just driving me crazy, I'm spending so much on fuel and the stress...I'm putting on my kids...my daughter missed out on breakfast three times because the traffic is just horrendous" (Sandra)

Others had secured school and nurse places for children but were unable to bring them to start when term began because of the distance, causing worries about the impact on their children's development and ability to settle into the class once they did start.

"I already had a school for my daughter this side, cause I just, she was starting reception. I had to change schools...already my daughter is late entry...and literally I'm at the nurse and I'm paying full pay because she's five years....and the government stops the fifteen hours" (Clarissa)

One resident working for a supermarket chain had arranged for a store transfer so that they could work nearer to PLACE/Ladywell but because of the delays ended up losing their job entirely;

"I'd just got settled in a new job....and literally we was supposed to move on the 17th and then it got delayed until the 22nd and then it got moved to the 28th and then the 2nd and then the 5th, we didn't end up getting in here until the 17th. I lost my job through that....I was on good money...it was night pay cause I was working through the night....I tried putting in for a store transfer but I had to start on the 26th or 27th and as I said we didn't get in here until the 17th, and the new job were having none of it" (Ashley)

PLACE/Ladywell: Positive experiences

“If this is the future of temporary accommodation I turn round and say well done to them” (Ashley)

Although residents were frustrated by the delays moving into the properties, their experiences of PLACE/Ladywell were overwhelmingly positive. Residents were impressed by the size of the properties which gave children space to run around. The bedrooms were also described as being big enough that two children could share happily. One resident commented that the high ceilings in the property made them feel “really special.” Most residents felt that the buildings had been built to a high quality, and seemed ‘almost like little penthouses’. They were pleased with the amount of natural light and the size of the windows. The properties were also generally found to be warm and easy and economical to heat, although residents did report that they became overheated during the summer months.

The large balconies were also a positive for the families living in PLACE/Ladywell. Although, as will be discussed, there were some issues with the balconies, families were very pleased to have some outdoor space, especially so that children could go outside. Most of the residents also found the store room in the property very useful. The wipe clean walls in the property were also helpful for families with small children, making it easier for them to keep the flats clean.

Residents were also pleased with the location of the property, highlighting the good transport links and amount and range of shops and amenities nearby. Most of the residents were returning nearby to the areas they had lived in previously, therefore they were well orientated and familiar with the area. For many families, PLACE/Ladywell had enabled them to keep children in the same schools or nurseries, a significant benefit in terms of continuity for the children. One resident described how they were ‘just so thankful they’ve not had to move schools’. Another described how being relocated back to Lewisham had given them much more time because they had previously been spending most of the day driving their two children to different schools and nurseries within Lewisham (while living out of the borough), leaving no time to work or go home between journeys. Staying within the borough was also important in retaining a sense of belonging for the residents. While they were not in permanent homes, being in their local environment allowed them to retain a sense of familiarity and comfort.

Most significantly, the high quality and spacious design of the flats in PLACE/Ladywell made them feel much more like a home for residents than any previous temporary accommodation. This was bolstered by the relatively long term contracts they had, ensuring they could remain in the flats for up to two years. While they were still unable to make long term plans, knowing they could stay at PLACE/Ladywell for an extended period allowed them to partially relax in a way they hadn’t been able to previously.

"It's lovely knowing that I've got a stable roof over my children's heads cause for me that was just priority OK. That's it, I just want somewhere that's clean and safe for my children." (Annie)

Not having to share communal facilities was also significant in making residents feel settled.

"This one's actually felt like home because it feels like a home, if you know what I mean. We've got our room, the kids got their room, there's enough space for the kids to run about, there ain't a garden but there's a balcony, we've got a big enough bathroom, we ain't sharing it, got our own toilet, it does feel like home....for the time being." (Ashley)

Furthermore, some residents felt that living somewhere as nice as PLACE/Ladywell prepared them for life in permanent housing, partly by helping them to remember what stability and autonomy feels like and partly by giving them a sense of potential and therefore motivation to work towards a better future.

"Being able to live in something of this quality makes you want to earn, makes you want to be like right I want something in life and this forever...I want a house with a garden.... a little swing and a paddling pool, have people round. If this is the future of temporary accommodation I turn round and say well done to them, cause it's given us just that little taste of life...and yeah, a bit of hope" (Ashley)

PLACE/Ladywell: Issues and Concerns

"I said, so you want us to live in boxes for up to four years?"
(Sandra)

"I wish they would just leave it, I wish they would just make this permanent for us" (Joe)

Although resident experiences of PLACE/Ladywell were overall very positive, there were several issues with the properties. These included broken or badly designed elements as well as certain features and rules which made residents feel less at home than they might have otherwise.

For all the residents we interviewed there had been persistent problems with the boilers in the properties. Many had not had any hot water for several weeks, including over the winter period, when they had been forced to use kettles to run a bath. One resident reported that the issues with hot water were still ongoing, and they were only able to get hot water by manually adjusting the boiler daily. Other residents had had their boilers fixed, although one described their ongoing and frustrating experience of trying to arrange this:

"It breaks down for two weeks, they come, it's taken them forever to get someone down here, even for me to get through to them online, it's been really, really, I have to hold on for thirty-five minutes, sometimes I just get fed up and give up" (Lisa)

Issues were also experienced in relation to the design of the balconies. Due to the balconies being directly on top of one another, and built with wooden slats, positioned identically for each balcony, rain water drains straight down from the upper balconies down through to those on the lower floors. This obviously meant that balconies couldn't be used in the rain, but also proved a problem for those wanting to store items on the balconies (Figure 9).



Figure 9: A balcony suffering from water leaks at PLACE/Ladywell (Photo by K Brickell, March 2017)

In addition, the doors to the balcony, and within the flat, are large and heavy and not fitted exactly to the frame, meaning they get stuck and can be very difficult to open. One resident also complained that the front doors are not self-locking, which caused them to worry that one of their children might leave it unlocked, making the flats easy to break into. They described how they would rather get locked out occasionally but feel they were definitely safe.

There was also a problem with the radiators installed in the flats which become incredibly hot to the touch;

“They’ve put these nice radiators on the wall but we’ve never used them since we moved in because literally you turn them on and they’re so hot you touch your hand on it and they literally melt your skin” (Joe)

This was dangerous for children, and especially concerning to residents with young children or children with learning difficulties. Equally, while the flats are well heated and well insulated, many residents explained how they could easily become too hot in summer time, making them uncomfortable to live in.

“When it’s summer you can barely stay in here” (Annie)

“We were putting the kids in the bath two or three times a day just to keep them cool” (Ashley)

The heat in the flats was also problematic because the position of the building on the high street means that the flats are highly susceptible to noise pollution when windows are left open, even at night. Residents also reported feeling exposed to passers-by if they left the curtains open, because the windows are large and many face directly onto the high street. Some residents said that they had requested to be moved to different parts of the building so that, for example, children could have rooms at the back of the property where it is quieter, or so that families with children with learning difficulties could be on a lower floor, making them less anxious about falling from the windows. However they reported that there was no flexibility regarding where in the building they would be placed, leading them to experience problems with noise or exposure to the high street which could have been avoided.

The open plan format of the flats was also problematic for some families. While residents described the flats feeling spacious there was a pervasive feeling that open plan was more appropriate for adults without children.

“I was panicking because the kitchen and the room, the kids are going to get to the kitchen, and I was worried” (Mary)

“Those things are really good for, you know, bachelors” (Clarissa)

Parents of children with learning difficulties in particular were anxious about their children being able to reach easily for knives and other kitchen equipment, or about not being able to leave things cooking unless children were under tight surveillance.

As well as the issues explored above, some features and rules regarding adjustments to the flats made residents feel like they weren't being encouraged to settle and relax. A key issue was that residents had been told that they couldn't hang anything on the walls and experienced this as damaging to their sense of home.

"I feel the house is just too empty without that. I'm that kind of person, to have personal hangings around" (Lisa)

Some residents had tried to get round the rules about making holes in the walls by using stick-on hangers, but found that they kept falling down. Others had decorated using peel-off wall stickers. This was preferable to having the walls as 'a completely blank canvas', but a compensatory solution in making the flats feel like home. Not being able to drill holes in the walls also prevented residents from installing Sky TV boxes, limiting their autonomy. Restrictions of adjusting and decorating temporary accommodation are standard practice, but, given they were staying in the flats for a long period of time, residents felt that it was unreasonable not to allow them to personalize the flats so that they felt like home. Some described how having pictures and ornaments up from past houses was important to build a sense of continuity for children, but was difficult given the regulations. In the same vein, although the store room was considered useful by everyone, some residents also saw it as symbolic of an expectation that residents wouldn't properly settle into the flat:

"I said....so basically you want us to just leave everything stacked in there, and basically they just said YEAH, so I said, so you want us to live in boxes for up to four years?" (Annie)

This resident's interpretation of the store room, as an unwelcome reminder and reinforcement of their temporary status, shows the significant psychological impact that restrictions regarding decorating have. Being housed in PLACE/Ladywell gave residents much more stability than they had had previously in temporary accommodation, but the impact of the longer term tenancies it offers on their lives would be even more positive were they allowed to respond to the opportunities of the longer contracts by creating a sense of home for themselves and their children.

The rules about making adjustments to the walls and fittings also hindered the autonomy of residents. One resident complained about not being allowed to put a door lock on their bedroom door. While seemingly a minor detail, this prevented them from having their partner over to stay, as they weren't able to ensure privacy from the children who could come into their room at any time. Again, this meant that while the family were settled in PLACE/Ladywell for a long period, certain elements of their life were still on hold, because they didn't have the autonomy they would have in a permanent

property. Academic geographical literature on temporary accommodation for homeless families has explored how residents can feel infantilized by rules that reduce their autonomy (Choi & Snyder, 2008; DeWard & Moe, 2010), which are felt to carry “the presumption that one is incapable of regulating one’s own affairs’ (DeWard & Moe, 2010, p. 120). In PLACE/Ladywell, we found that seemingly minor rules prohibiting, for example, the affixation of a door lock, had a significant impact on resident’s senses of autonomy, and therefore home. Within families, adults being able to demonstrate and enact autonomy is also important to the parenting dynamic.

Some residents were anxious about their ability to keep the properties clean. Because of the high specification and new fittings in the flats, residents wanted to keep them clean and tidy and, in some cases, felt they needed to do this to prove to the council that they could look after a nice property, and therefore bolster their chances of being rehoused in a good quality house in the future. However, this was difficult given the white walls in the property and trying to ‘maintain the white’, as one resident put it, was a source of anxiety especially for those with young children.

“I’m 24/7 cleaning...the white is too much” (Mary)

“There’s no way white walls are staying white” (Anthony)

Another issue experienced with trying to keep the flats clean was that residents had to walk around the whole property to take the bins out. Because the back gate had been damaged by people breaking in to park in the space behind the building, this involved walking around the front of the property and some residents felt embarrassed having to carry their bin bags along the high street in public, as well as facing the practical issues of trying to carry large, heavy bin bags, liable to split open, this kind of distance. For families who have experienced stigma around homelessness, such experiences of embarrassment may be heightened because of an internalization of public perceptions of homeless people as dirty and anti-social (Tyler, 2013).

For some families the fact that the flats came unfurnished was also a problem. While some residents had furniture they had taken out of storage, others had had to buy everything they needed when moving into the property.

“We buy it because where we was living before uh, it was, everything was inside...we must buy everything. Nowhere to sit, just sit on the floor, it’s not good” (Lisa)

Buying enough furniture for the whole flat was expensive and not necessarily a good investment given that residents didn’t know where they would be placed next and therefore if the furniture would be appropriate for future properties.

The most recurrent complaint from residents regarded the lack of parking provided at the property. Shoush explained to us that providing parking wasn’t within the ethos of the building, which aimed to increase sustainability.

The GLA has rules discouraging the provision of parking in properties near to central London because of emissions agendas and objectives to increase the percentage of public transport use in London. Bike parking had been provided instead to try and encourage residents to cycle. However, the aim to 'discourage car ownership' (Shoush), while laudable in most contexts, was not appropriate for the needs of residents. They experienced problems with doing the shopping and getting children to schools, which weren't always nearby.

"I don't understand how you give people with children.... accommodation, and you put spaces for bikes" (Joe)

"I don't even know how to ride a bike...and because my childrens' school is not around here" (Pauline)

"It is very awful, because sometimes....when I have the kids in the car...imagine it's raining, you have to bring the kids in, you have to be looking for where to park and drag them in, and then the rain starts coming" (Mary)

"I don't understand, why build such a thing actually? you're having a residence everybody would love....and then you put bicycle parking" (Clarissa)

"They will tell you, the place is near a good network of transport.... so what happens to us who have children running up and down" (Pauline)

Given that residents had been moved around several times previously they, understandably, had schools, jobs and commitments in different areas, making it very difficult to get around without a car. Some also found that the lack of parking limited their ability to have guests over, as they would need to get public transport in order to visit, which isn't appropriate for everyone.

This was especially a problem given that there is limited public parking locally and parking permits are expensive at £120 a year (Lewisham, 2018). One resident described how;

"Sometime you get into the bus, and I tell myself there is no point driving, I will take the bus and park the car somewhere, you can imagine when you parked your car and you can't even see the car for a couple of weeks. If you want to see if the car is still there you have to get into the bus and check if your car is still there..." (Joe)

The lack of parking provided had led residents to park, illicitly, at the back of the building. One person described how 'people are just like, rebelling', with another saying they had had 'no alternative....where do they expect us to park?' (Annie)

Lastly, the residents we interviewed almost all wanted their tenancies in PLACE/Ladywell to be made permanent. There was a frustration that, having finally been placed somewhere so much better than other accommodation they had experienced, they were going to be asked to leave again.

“I wish they would just leave it, I wish they would just make this permanent for us” (Joe)

This frustration was intensified by a feeling that, in building a mobile property, the council are prioritizing the sale of land to developers, which will ultimately result in unaffordable housing and make it even less likely that they will be permanently rehoused.

“One thing I don’t get is, when they have all this land, and they keep selling them because that’s what I’ve heard, or that’s what I’ve read....that this land is sold to developers.....I don’t get it, people are homeless, why sell it to people that, when they build it, people can’t rent it back from them, because it’s way too expensive.... they’re saying, oh it’s a big problem, but you are causing the problem” (Pauline)

Other Considerations

Resident opinions were divided on some elements of PLACE/Ladywell. One such aspect was the cost of the property. Some residents felt that rent was very expensive, costing, according to them, £265 a week before bills and council tax. Others however saw this as reasonable compared to rents they had been paying previously, including £306 a week and £440 a week. We also encountered mixed opinions on the quality of the properties. As discussed above, most of the residents were very pleased with the finish of the flats but others, as the next section will explore, felt that they were unsafe and potentially flimsily built. The noise levels in the property were also experienced differently by different tenants. Some reported the flats being nice and quiet while others, mostly those facing the high street, said it could be very noisy and made it difficult to keep the windows open.

An important area in which there was disagreement was around opinions of the colour scheme of the building. Some residents liked the bold colours while others thought the flats resembled Lego blocks. There were also divided opinions among the stakeholders we interviewed regarding the benefits and drawbacks of the colour scheme. As discussed in the introductory section, there was a desire on the part of Lewisham Council and RSHP that the building should stand out on the high street. This was partly to celebrate the building's anticipated achievements, and partly to garner interest in it from politicians and other stakeholders who would then, hopefully, be convinced of its merits and inspired to commission and create more modular and mobile properties. The high levels of interest in PLACE/Ladywell attest to the success of this. The bold design of the building certainly seems to have helped to bring interest in and excitement about its potentials. One London MP commented that "it's made a huge visual impact" and by looking different has managed to 'generate debate' and draw attention to homelessness and the need for solutions.

Arguably, the bold colours also celebrate the building as temporary accommodation, working to dispel stigma. However, other stakeholders thought, conversely, that the bold colours could reinforce and exacerbate stigma by drawing attention to the fact that the building was for homeless families, rather than allowing them to pass unnoticed in Lewisham. Indeed, our parallel research regarding Dublin's Rapid Build housing, which had brick-effect external cladding, emphasised this point. Rapid Build residents were pleased with the fact that their homes looked like they were made of bricks and mortar, as they felt this helped them to 'blend in' to the neighbourhood and not be singled out as living in 'housing for the homeless'.

The bold design may also have bolstered a sense we found among residents of feeling like guinea pigs. As will be explored in the next section, residents experienced anxiety deriving from a suspicion that the primary purpose of the building was not to house them but to showcase the building to others. There seemed to be a conflict of interest between the immediate purpose of the building, to address the housing needs of the families living there, and its longer term goal of serving as a proof of concept to encourage and facilitate other similar developments.

Downstairs Units

The commercial units below the flats at PLACE/Ladywell were also met with mixed opinions from residents. As discussed, the commercial units don't generate rental income for the Council and are intended to support local businesses while 'animating' the area and attracting people to the building. One of the hopes was that the units would 'break down some of the barriers' (Vicky Foxcroft) by bringing people who wouldn't normally encounter temporary accommodation to PLACE/Ladywell and making their experience of it positive. However, none of the residents reported having met people through visiting or purchasing things from the downstairs units. Indeed, one explicitly suggested that the units could have done more to 'build up the community', although this was primarily framed as an opportunity to build community between the residents at PLACE/Ladywell itself:

"Yeah they done a little cinema. I never actually went there cause, they didn't have anything to state sort of times and stuff, I think they should have had a sign on the door saying what film they was watching and what times and come along its either free or its only 50p or whatever, cause I would have knocked on [for a neighbour] and been like hey shall we take the kids?" (Annie)

The residents also felt that other kinds of amenities would have been better suited for PLACE/Ladywell, both practically and with the aim of generating community. Many residents thought a nursery or a soft play area would be a good idea. Others would have liked a grocery shop. More provision and communication of activities, both for residents and for the wider community, would have encouraged residents to use the downstairs units and to meet other local people.

Few residents seemed to have used the cafe downstairs (Figure 10). This was often on the basis of pricing.

Ashley: "It's ridiculous expensive and please tell me when you see how much a poached egg on toast is"

Interviewer: "I didn't notice that"

Ashley: "£7.20!....I swear down, for a poached egg on toast"

Others said the cafe was not often busy and didn't feel like an inviting place to sit. Some residents, however, did use the downstairs units and one person had had a dress made by the tailor occupying one of the workspaces.



Figure 10: Good Hope Café (Photo by K Brickell, March 2017)

As well as residents feeling like the units were not being put to their best use, some felt uncomfortable at the way the units reinforced the building as a 'pop-up' place, in the vein of other pop-up retail developments such as Boxpark or Pop Brixton. The pop-up aesthetics reinforced to the residents that their homes were temporary and the duration of their stay unpredictable.

"Everybody is like 'the pop-up village, the pop-up village, the pop-up village, I get it, pop-up, as in they're going to take it down again' (Annie)

Persisting Insecurity

One of our most significant findings at PLACE/Ladywell was that, while the housing had undoubtedly helped and improved the lives of families, it had not significantly alleviated the insecurity they felt, both in terms of insecurity concerning their ability to make plans for the future, on a practical level, and in terms of their 'ontological security', their feeling of security, stability and order which, as others have argued, is often threatened by insecure housing tenures (Giddens, 1990; Giddens, 1991). This manifested in anxieties regarding their safety in PLACE/Ladywell and regarding the future of the building itself⁹.

In terms of persisting practical insecurities, residents continued to find it difficult to make plans regarding the schooling of their children, and their own career plans. Residents were uncomfortable with placing children in nurseries without knowing when they would be leaving PLACE/Ladywell and where they would be going to because of the effect that frequent disruptions would have on the children. Not being able to arrange childcare then often meant that one of a parent couple, or single parents, were unable to work.

“Until we get our permanent housing we can’t really both go back to work” (Joe)

Not being able to put children in nursery also caused parents to worry about their educational development, given that children weren’t getting the stimulation they would have otherwise.

A lot of anxiety derived from the uncertainties of the process of bidding for permanent housing. All of the residents we spoke to were bidding for permanent housing but had little sense of when they would be successful.

“They’ve said it could be two years, it could be more, but at the moment I’m just bidding and hoping” (Mary)

“So it’s like, maybe before this year is finished, or maybe at the end of this month” (Lisa)

Many had no faith in finding an appropriate property, knowing that the demand was much higher than the amount of available properties.

“But you know, you might have one or two, sometimes three [properties], so maybe like 100, 200 chasing one building” (Anthony)

“If you’re not, like, really old and really sick, you’ve got no chance” (Clarissa)

Not having any sense of when they would be moving into permanent housing made it very difficult for families to plan their vocational futures, the futures of their children’s schooling, and even leisure events. One resident had planned a holiday for their child’s birthday and was very anxious that they would be asked to move that weekend, showing the high degree of anxiety caused by their housing uncertainty, making residents unable to even enjoy or feel secure in planning leisure time for their children.

The uncertainty regarding how long they would be in PLACE/Laydwell itself was also a source of anxiety. Residents had been told they could be in the building for up to four years, but had no idea how probable this was or when they might be moved if before the four year mark.

“I don’t know if I’ll be here for the whole four years, hopefully I will” (Sandra)

"We all signed a four year contract....well that's the maximum, because the property is going to be there for four years apparently, so you know...so it's long term temporary, but you should be bidding for your place...so you could stay there shorter, maybe six months, or one year, or even two months" (Joe)

This uncertainty made it difficult for families to settle into the properties, even though, in terms of quality, they were deemed very pleasant places to live.

"It's just annoying not knowing when you're going to be moved right" (Susana)

"You know, I can't fully relax...because it's lovely and it's home for now, it's not, I can't, you can't say yeah it's home and I can be here for as long as I like" (Annie)

There was also a lack of clarity regarding what would happen to residents after they left PLACE/Ladywell. While most assumed they would be moved to permanent housing, one person had heard that they would be encouraged to rent in the private sector. This again caused anxiety for residents who understandably wanted to be able to plan their futures.

As well as the anxiety inducing impact of uncertainties regarding their housing futures and their stay in PLACE/Ladywell, residents also experienced a number of anxieties about their safety and security in the properties that related to wider problems as featured in the news. Although the residents were broadly agreed that the building was well designed and the flats were nice to live in many of them still felt at risk, which we argue is a result of persistent experiences of stigma leading them to feel structurally undervalued and unprotected.

In particular, there was a widespread concern about whether there was a fire hazard posed by the building following the disaster at Grenfell Tower.

"I was scared...after all that cladding went up in Grenfell Tower, these are made out of wood and it aint like the fire exits are great in here" (Ashley)

"When the Grenfell fire happened and we saw the risk and we said oh it could be anybody, and when we saw this wood and the house surrounding us we start to panic" (Susana)

Even after we pointed out to residents that, as an award winning building, PLACE/Ladywell was unlikely to be at risk, they continued to explain and show us elements of the building that worried them in relation to their fire safety including the lack of straightforward escape routes, the wooden components of the building and the cladding.

As well as anxiety after Grenfell, multiple residents expressed concern about the safety of the building in relation to other hypothetical threats, such as hurricanes (Hurricane Irma had recently been in the news) as well as about the general safety of the building.

“If a hurricane was coming to London, I’m sure our house would be one of those ones that would be flying like paper” (Sandra)

“No, it’s not built to last, the safety is not there. It’s not safe at all” (Anthony)

Some of this anxiety came from miscommunication regarding the longevity of the building. One resident had understood that the building itself was built to last four years, rather than that it would be moved to a different site when they themselves were moved out. The anxiety about the fire safety of the block could also have been alleviated through better communication with the residents in the aftermath of Grenfell Tower, assuring them that the building had passed fire safety checks. However, we would also argue that the anxiety felt by residents regarding their safety in the building derived from their wider sense of being on the losing end of London’s housing crisis. As people who had been ‘passed from pillar to post’ and experienced multiple substandard, dangerous and traumatic living situations they, understandably, felt that they were more likely than other people to be the victims of disasters relating to housing safety, and this informed their heightened sense of anxiety after events detailed in the media, including the fire at Grenfell Tower, or the destruction done by Hurricane Irma.

Residents were also anxious about whether the building was going to be sold or rented privately and, ironically felt *out of place* in PLACE/Ladywell. This anxiety was rooted in the fact that a flat was still being kept for use as a show room, and was attracting frequent visitors.

“I think that’s why they’re keeping the show home open, yeah, I think as we all end up moving out of here I think they’re gonna end up privately renting them. I think it’ll be like that” (Ashley)

In part, this was concerning to residents because they felt the flat should be used to house another family rather than as a show room. However, the showroom also produced anxiety by making residents feel unsettled. Many had also mentioned, as quoted earlier, that the flats felt ‘almost like penthouses’ and more appropriate ‘for bachelors’. In this context, the showroom heightened a sense that the building was not designed for them. This feeling was further exacerbated by the downstairs units, which many residents deemed to be overpriced and to offer services and activities aimed at a gentrifying demographic rather than at themselves. They felt that they had been placed somewhere that was ultimately for private rental or sale and this made it difficult for them to feel at home and also worry that it was an anomalous, lucky experience of good accommodation rather than indicative of their housing futures.

The sense of PLACE/Ladywell being too good to be true also manifested in a feeling that the flats might be a test that would determine the quality of housing that residents would be allocated in the future.

“But I almost think that these are almost like a test, it’s like how nice can you keep these cause they do come round and do, every six months, they come round and inspect the property” (Joe)

This kind of suspicion indicates the level of stress that residents were under and the amount of anxiety they had internalised from “benefit scrounger” discourses (McKenzie, 2015), which made them feel like they had to prove themselves deserving of decent council housing. This anxiety made them unable to relax, even despite the comfort provided by the flats themselves and the long tenancies they had been offered in them.

Furthermore, some residents felt like the cameras around PLACE/Ladywell might be intended more as surveillance of them than *for* them.

“They’re really strict [the Council]. And I’ve had, I haven’t had any complain about, but I’ve seen my neighbours like, complaint that, “why is there camera everywhere?” I’m thinking it’s protection, but other neighbours, they obviously don’t like it as much like, they’re being watched or....” (Sandra)

Yet despite feeling watched, residents noted that CCTV footage wasn’t seemingly available when they needed it, such as when a bike was stolen or when there was a break-in to the property, which several people experienced. One resident noted that little was done about these instances but when there was a break in to the commercial units there were quickly multiple police officers on the scene. In the context of their existing experiences of stigma as homeless families, the pervasive presence of cameras that didn’t seem to help with their own security, merely those of commercial occupants, made the residents feel scrutinized and undervalued compared to the occupiers of the ground floor. This sense of scrutiny is perhaps not surprising in a system which does indeed monitor residents’ behaviours to inform decisions regarding their housing, as evident in the policy of selecting residents for PLACE/Ladywell based on who was not in rent arrears, or was perceived to be trying hard to pay debts back.

Most of the residents mentioned that they would like PLACE/Ladywell to be made permanent and to be given the option to stay in the property. This has been the case for Dublin’s Rapid Build developments which have been successfully turned into permanent social housing that is widely popular among residents.

Conclusion

This report has found that PLACE/Ladywell is a significant improvement on existing temporary accommodation. It is of a much higher quality than other temporary accommodation on offer in the borough, offers more space for families in terms of amount and sizes of rooms and is currently well located near to transport and amenities. Crucially, it also allows families to stay in Lewisham borough and thus to maintain local communities and keep children in local schools without long commutes. While there have been some problems with the building, including broken boilers and issues with balcony design, the feedback on the properties was overwhelmingly positive and residents wanted to stay as long as possible.

Delays moving into the building had caused many problems for residents, including job losses and loss of money as well as the stress of uncertainty. However, once they had moved into the building, the longer than usual contracts offered at PLACE/Ladywell gave them some stability while they await permanent rehousing. Residents did, however, experience persistent anxiety, in part related to uncertainty regarding their housing future, which PLACE/Ladywell does not resolve, and in part related to their continued feeling of being undervalued and unprotected. These later feelings were rooted, we argue, in long term experiences of housing precarity and stigma, but exacerbated by certain elements of PLACE/Ladywell, or lack of them, including the show-home, the context of gentrification highlighted by the ground floor retail units, the amount of surveillance, the perceived lack of security and the lack of reassurance after the Grenfell Tower disaster.

PLACE/Ladywell significantly improves quality of life for residents while they are in temporary accommodation. It is a good proof of concept for the potentials of offsite manufacturing in rapidly providing high quality accommodation. What remains to be seen is whether the development has a lasting impact on the lives of residents. Our concern is that without any increased availability of permanent social housing, PLACE/Ladywell can only make a temporary difference, as it cannot solve the problem of housing residents in good quality, appropriately sized and located properties in the long term. In addition, PLACE/Ladywell cannot in itself be a solution to causes of homelessness. The residents we interviewed had all become homeless following evictions from private rental properties due to rent increases, property sales or job losses. While private rental remains an insecure, precarious housing option there will continue to be high levels of homelessness. Initiatives like PLACE/Ladywell therefore need to be part of a broader range of interventions which include improved security in the private rental sector and increased availability of permanent social housing. As PLACE/Ladywell demonstrates, off site manufacturing techniques can be used to provide durable, high quality housing rapidly and we argue this should be extended to include the provision of permanent accommodation.

Recommendations

One: Greater Transparency and designated contact

As discussed, the uncertainty regarding moving into PLACE/Ladywell caused significant stress and financial losses to residents. Equally, anxiety was caused by uncertainty around when they would leave PLACE/Ladywell and where they would go as well as with what would happen to the building in the future. Understandably with this kind of project, the council will not always be able to provide certainty on these points, but increased communication and transparency would be very helpful in reducing stress and anxiety and allowing residents to plan as best as possible. We recommend that regular, scheduled updates on dates for moving in and out of the building, plans for resident's housing futures, and plans for the building itself are sent to residents and prospective residents. It would also be useful to have an ongoing designated person that residents can easily contact to ask questions about the building, the rules around its usage and any additional concerns such as around fire safety after the Grenfell Tower fire. This was the case in Dublin, where residents of "Rapid Build" properties had close relationships with an area manager.

Two: Removal and storage funds

The cost of moving and of storing furniture and belongings was a problem for many residents, especially because their unpredictable housing situations made it difficult to plan in advance. It would greatly benefit residents if there were funds allocated by the council for removal vans and storage services or indeed if there was a council run removal service. Some residents mentioned that there was council owned storage but that this wasn't secure, as there were not individual rooms or lockers to store possessions, and that the property kept inside was not well looked after.

Three: Optional Furnishings

Some residents had to buy all or significant amounts of their furniture when moving into PLACE/Ladywell. This was expensive and undesirable given that residents didn't know where they would be going next and therefore if the items would be useful. It would be helpful to have an option of providing basic essential furnishings, such as beds and sofas.

Four: Decorations and Adjustments

Not being allowed to decorate or make basic adjustments to the properties made residents feel less at home than they would otherwise have been able to. Given that many residents will be in the properties for multiple years, it is important they are able to develop a sense of home and feel that they have agency and control over their environment. We recommend allowing residents to hang pictures as well as to make minor adjustments such as adding door locks or putting up shelves. According to RSHP the panels are designed to be able to hang pictures without damaging the building. The

lack of agency tenants have in terms of decorating and adjusting properties is a pervasive issue in temporary and private rental accommodation (Choi & Snyder, 2008; DeWard & Moe, 2010). Given that, as RSHP have explained, the pop-up design of PLACE/Ladywell enables walls to be replaced at low cost, there is an opportunity here for Lewisham to lead the way in enabling greater agency and autonomy in home decoration for tenants in temporary accommodation.

Five: Design of the building

We found that the open plan design of the flats in PLACE/Ladywell did not suit everybody and in some cases caused residents to be concerned regarding the safety of their children, especially children with learning difficulties. Given that many families in temporary accommodation will have children with specific needs, in future developments options for separate living and kitchen spaces would be desirable. Given the modular construction of the building this could possibly be provided via the option of an additional internal wall. In addition, design flaws such as discussed in relation to the balconies and doors in the building should be fixed in future iterations.

Six: Parking

An important issue for most residents was the need for parking at PLACE/Ladywell. Although Lewisham Council understandably want to comply with environmental agendas to reduce car ownership and increase public transport and bike usage, we found that the lack of car parking space, and provision of bike parking instead, was inappropriate for the families in PLACE/Ladywell. Travelling by bike is very impractical with young children or for doing family grocery shopping. Additionally, the residents, due to the nature of life in temporary accommodation, have commitments in disparate locations and need to make frequent car journeys. In light of this, we would recommend onsite parking for PLACE/Ladywell and other similar developments.

Seven: Pop-up Terminology

Not all residents of PLACE/Ladywell appreciated the term 'pop-up' being used to describe it. The term reminded them of their provisional residence and also lead to fears over the quality and therefore safety of the building, as they assumed it wasn't built to last. Additionally, given pop-up's links with hipster culture and gentrification, the term pop-up, and the existence of commercial pop-up spaces on the ground floor, led residents to worry about being displaced from the building and priced out of the area and sometimes made them feel out of place in the building itself. In future, there should be careful consideration of the discourses through which modular off site manufactured buildings are framed and communicated.

Eight: Reducing Stigma

As discussed, the building was designed to stand out to increase its impact as a proof of concept. While this seems to have been successful the aesthetics of the building also increased the experience of stigma around homelessness for some residents who felt like they were on show. Other elements of the building also made residents feel scrutinized and out of place, such as the heavy presence of cameras and the existence of the show-home. It must be remembered that homeless families have often experienced stigma extensively, both in their day-to-day lives and through the pervasive media and political discourses around 'benefit scroungers'. The local authority should therefore be sensitive to such details that may seem insignificant, but that are important to resident wellbeing. Careful consideration needs to be paid in future to ways to reduce experiences of stigma and stigma related anxiety while living in PLACE/Ladywell. This could for example take the form of alternative aesthetics, such as imitation brick, rather than brightly coloured, external cladding: a design choice that proved successful in the Dublin context in terms of residents' sense of 'blending in' to the neighbourhood.

Nine: Downstairs Units

The downstairs units of PLACE/Ladywell could have been used in more appropriate ways to benefit the residents. Based on resident opinions we would recommend the provision of a nursery or crèche in commercial units as well as more provision and marketing of community activities aimed at residents as well as the wider community.

Ten: Speed of development

We found that one major reason for delays in finishing PLACE/Ladywell was that processes such as registering addresses and securing services work at a slower time scale than is appropriate for offsite manufactured buildings, presuming a long building process. As modular temporary accommodation becomes more widely used it would be sensible to work with the relevant stakeholders, such as the Post Office, and service providers for gas, electricity, phone lines and internet, to establish systems for registering and servicing such properties more quickly.

Eleven: Moving towards permanent solutions?

While PLACE/Ladywell significantly improves temporary accommodation it, as discussed, cannot solve problems in other areas of the housing crisis such as the precarity of the private rental market or the lack of permanent social housing. It improves lives for residents in the short term but doesn't give them anywhere to go once they leave. Furthermore, while, as Shoush explained, the intention is to use the PLACE/Ladywell site for "Council-led development to maximise the provision of permanent affordable housing", whether this development will give the current tenants of PLACE/Ladywell somewhere to go depends on what is meant by affordable and how that housing is allocated. Much affordable housing in London is still beyond the

reach of above average earners, let alone those currently on homelessness registers, so direct strategies would need to be put in place to make these future homes available and affordable to current PLACE/Ladywell tenants.

In addition, there is potentially a worrying contradiction in its model of housing provision, given that it relies on the existence of vacant council spaces, at a time when council housing, in particular estates, are being sold off. This could generate a 'musical chairs' effect, in that council-owned mobile buildings will have nowhere to go in central areas of Lewisham or London once there is no council-owned land left to sell. This will either result in the model being redundant or the council renting private spaces for the building to occupy, which undermines the aim of saving money by providing temporary accommodation directly. In this context, we would recommend that the offsite manufacturing techniques showcased by PLACE/Ladywell be used predominately to build permanent council and social housing. The achievements of PLACE/Ladywell should not be undermined, but without advances in permanent housing provision too, it will only be a 'better sticking plaster' (Vicky Foxcroft) for the problems of the housing crisis. The fact that 78 new council homes, built using the same modular off-site technology as PLACE/Ladywell, have now been approved in Lewisham is highly commendable and excellent progress towards extending the successes of PLACE/Ladywell into permanent solutions for the housing crisis (Lewisham Council, 2018).

Twelve: Future Research

The timespan of our research meant we were unable to trace where residents were housed upon leaving PLACE/Ladywell, but this is important data which it would be valuable to gather, so as to assess if the development has a positive impact on the housing trajectories of its inhabitants. Further research is needed in order to ascertain whether pop-up housing offers just temporary improvements to residents' lives or long term, positive changes to their housing biographies and wellbeing. As increasing numbers of boroughs in London and beyond, including Bromley (Barratt, 2018), Ealing (QED, 2018) and Reading (Reading Borough Council, 2018), look to develop pop-up temporary accommodation (as well as the additional creation of PLACE/Deptford within Lewisham), they will look to Lewisham, as the pioneers of this approach, for recommendations as to how to optimize the benefits of these developments. This makes thorough research into the issues, successes and long term impacts of PLACE/Ladywell even more pertinent, so that evidence of best practice can be transferred across to new modular housing developments.

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Endnotes

ⁱ In 2017, there were 9,596 households on the local authority waiting list in Lewisham (Communities and Local Government , 2017)

ⁱⁱ Introduced by the Thatcher administration in 1980, the Right to Buy policy encourages social housing tenants to purchase their homes for a fraction of their market value.

ⁱⁱⁱ This calculation is based on:

- A total build cost of £5.4m.
- £1.5m use of recycled Right to Buy fund
- £0.4m grant from the GLA for the community/commercial space on the ground floor
- £3.5m capital investment from the Council
- £220,000 net rent
- Plus £130,000 average savings over the cost of private temporary accommodation
- = £350,000 each year generated for the Council

Which pays off the £3.5m capital investment by the Council in 10 years.

^{iv} For more information on Dublin's Rapid Build housing, please see: Nowicki, M., Brickell, K & Harris, E. 2018. *Home at Last: Life in Dublin's Rapid Build Housing*.

http://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/content/HousingAndCommunity/PolicyDocuments/Home_at_Last.pdf . See also our connected work on hotels as temporary accommodation in Dublin (Nowicki et al., 2019).

^v For a more in-depth exploration of these anxieties see our paper 'On Edge in the Impasse' (Harris, et. al 2019).