



CANARY WHARF. IT WILL FEEL LIKE VENICE AND WORK LIKE NEW YORK

NEIGHBOURHOOD NUMBER NINE

Summary

The Lansbury Estate is presented as a historic 'model' village, an exemplar of post-war urban living, presented as the famous Live Architecture exhibition at the 1951 Festival of Britain. But this was just one ephemeral moment in its development.

Lansbury Estate was conceived as a permanent place for inhabitation, not exhibition or spectacle, planned to become one element of a wider redevelopment of Poplar; Neighbourhood Number Nine. These neighbourhoods, as set out in the County of London Plan, were intended to form the backbone of the London being rebuilt after the War, a unique moment in coherent urban planning and a bold demonstration of how cities could/should be built, understood as part of a larger framework of connectivity. Yet Lansbury's resolution was then - and even more so now - unclear and unresolved.

Through this exhibition we intend to shift the accepted narratives surrounding the estate from the Festival of Britain. The aesthetic that remains is architecturally interesting but ultimately of only limited interest and relevance to the wider narrative of the Neighbourhoods. Our intention is to acknowledge the role of the architectural and urban considerations in creating these communities, celebrating the everyday, the more invisible elements of life, rather than the previously celebrated and iconic aspects.

Lansbury's placement within the historic County Plan can be used to ask questions about contemporary planning today, and in particular broadening the narrative beyond the segregated considerations for housing to explore the other fundamental elements that are needed to create a thriving community. Our exhibition will study the role of industry in Lansbury, presenting examples of manufacture past and present, placing work as central to the success of a functioning, networked neighbourhood.

The history of Lansbury

In London County Council's post war plans for the County, Poplar (along with Stepney) was marked as in urgent need of redevelopment due to social deprivation and extensive wartime damage. The exhibition will begin with life of Poplar in the 1930 and show the development of the Estate after the War, demonstrating how Lansbury was intended as a test bed for design, an experimental prototype where architects applied new standards and models for living. The aspirations of the LCC were brave and wide-reaching, leapfrogging legislation and funding to form a County-wide strategy to eradicate slum living, enabling healthier lifestyles, building progressive new schools, but also productive businesses and opportunities for industry, deserving of the people of who lived and worked there. Unlike the celebrated New Towns, Lansbury was not a self-contained entity, but was meant to 'plug-in' to the wider London area. Lansbury was intended not just as a housing estate but as a community, with consideration given to work, living, learning, transport and social spaces.

Despite its celebration as an exhibit, by the end of 1951 only 168 households had arrived in the new neighbourhood, a less than stellar achievement for a landmark attraction at a national festival of rediscovery and celebration. This stunted inauguration was to become a feature of the area's development, as successive housing and retail plans were delayed, curtailed or abandoned. Whilst the housing was heralded within the Live Architecture exhibition, many aspects of the industrial considerations were never realised, the effects of which are felt in the legacy of the estate today. Plans for a 1200 seat cinema were discussed for nearly a decade but were finally dropped in 1958. Incentives were offered to many businesses to leave Poplar and set up in the New Towns, particularly Basildon. Once these businesses left for modern new industrial estates in Essex, few attempts to actively fill the gaps can be identified.

Why was the consideration for work within the neighbourhood plan under resourced or under prioritised in Lansbury? Part of the new Chrisp Street proposal shows a housing block to the East of the market, currently in use as a car-park. This sliver of land was considered for several proposals during the 1950s, all related to the local economy - shops, a pub, stores for the market and a new site for Coppens the butcher – yet none came to fruition. Did the proximity of the docks (where 28% of residents originally worked) mean that other stimuli for employment or the expansion of new businesses were overlooked?

Our approach

Adopting multiple perspectives drawn out from research in Tower Hamlets, RIBA and Metropolitan Archives, the exhibition provides insight into those who affected and were affected by the estate's development. It will demonstrate the aspirations for the neighbourhood by drawing out and celebrating the original intentions of the council alongside those of the designers, the residents, and local business owners. In doing so, it will highlight the inherent points of conflict which existed, and poses the question as to how or if these might be resolved. We contend that there is a consideration which needs to be asserted, from the urban planning and architectural design, through to the design and manufacture of the goods made in these areas, from the macro to the micro, as part of a single process. By celebrating the role of making as part of our communities, we can champion these often invisible aspects, demonstrating that how we live (and work) is as much a part of our community as where we live.

Questions this exhibition poses:

- *Is this a model estate? Was this ever the case?*
- *What were the intentions of the original scheme?*
- *What are the factors which have prevented its growth in the past?*
- *What factors are missing to connect it to and accommodate the local community?*
- *What is the industrial and commercial history of the area and how has it impacted on the community as a whole?*

The exhibition

The exhibition will present historic images and documentation of the creation of the Lansbury Estate, featuring wall displays of archival resources and information, of drawings, photographic records and diagrams from intention to resolution. This display will reflect specific strands of the narrative, such as commerce and industry, highlighting links between historic contexts and the present day.

The vitrine would be used to display historic examples of local production and manufacture but also examples of contemporary production, celebrating the local making community that lives in Lansbury today. In addition we intend to track down artefacts once made in – and symbolic of – the local area, and map where production moved to, highlighting the changing economic landscape of the area and the impact that national planning policy had on local communities.



Festival of Britain first day cover, sent to the Phoenix Chemical Works on the Lansbury Estate.

Context

The national conversation is of a housing crisis, yet it would be more accurate to talk of an accommodation crisis; people need places to work as much as they need to live, and these should not be determined by financial pressures and private interests alone. Urban diversity is healthy, and a good city needs industry. Yet in the majority of today's development proposals, industrial and office space is being lost at an alarming rate. By documenting the history and development of manufacture in Lansbury we will discuss these national issues through a local lens.

Our research demonstrates the importance of a strategic planning overview, illustrating how local policy can conflict with national across different aspects of community life. A consideration which is ever more pertinent for our incoming Mayor in the consideration of how we can create thriving communities in the development of London, within the economic, political and social pressures of the contemporary context.