# Suburban intensification in Sanderstead sparks dispute after seven‑house infill replaces garden plot



No 158 Purley Downs Road is a compact example of suburban intensification: a single-family plot in Sanderstead, in the London Borough of Croydon, replaced by seven family houses arranged as two terraces. According to the Architects’ Journal, the scheme turns a long, deep garden and a corner position into a layout of one terrace of three houses occupying the original footprint and a second terrace of four houses running along the former garden, while retaining front and rear private gardens for each home. The report notes that the development was enabled in part by local guidance that at the time encouraged suburban densification to address housing shortages — guidance the council has since formally reviewed and revoked.

The houses are described as generous, well-proportioned family homes with high ceilings and large windows, designed to sit comfortably in a suburban context through domestic silhouettes, crisp detailing and a sculpted massing. The scheme provides two small car‑parking courts — one at the front and one between the terraces — together with cycle and refuse provision and landscaped communal areas. Planning records confirm the application envisaged demolition of the existing dwelling and construction of two three‑storey buildings to deliver the seven units, with supporting documentation lodged in 2021.

Project data published alongside the Architects’ Journal case study gives a clear picture of scale and programme: site work began in June 2023, completion is recorded as February 2025, and the scheme delivers about 885m2 of gross internal floor area at a reported construction cost of £2.4 million (roughly £2,750 per m2). Steven Harp, director of Harp & Harp, told the Architects’ Journal that the design intent was to be “neighbourly to their suburban setting” while delivering contemporary, durable homes.

Materiality is central to the way the project seeks to negotiate change in a largely traditional area. The architects adopted a limited palette of red brick, white brick chosen to emulate roughcast render, and clay quarry tiles for weight and proportion. The design team explains that a tactile white brick was selected to mimic the coarse texture of local roughcast without the maintenance liabilities of modern render, while a red multi blend was chosen to sit comfortably with the century‑old local red stock bricks. The rear terrace uses a clay quarry tile laid horizontally — treated like a heavyweight brick rather than a hanging tile — to achieve a more substantial sculpted form. The manufacturers’ product information for the red blend and the Staffordshire quarry tiles confirms the tonal variation and technical durability cited by the architect.

Harp & Harp’s own project page amplifies the practice’s description of the work as a contemporary reinterpretation of local arts‑and‑crafts precedents, emphasising vernacular motifs, proportions and a considered brick palette. That project listing also refers to a larger scheme for Purley Downs Road described as 27 new family houses, a detail that appears to differ from the Architects’ Journal and the formal planning record for No 158. The discrepancy highlights how single‑street or multi‑plot proposals can be presented differently in promotional material and statutory documents; in this case the planning application and validation documents for the No 158 site remain the primary public record of what was consented.

The development has not been without local controversy. Inside Croydon reported strong neighbourhood objections after the original house was demolished and questioned whether some pre‑commencement planning conditions had been satisfied before works began. The local reporting detailed a petition over changes to site levels and layout and criticised council officers for permitting post‑consent changes without sufficient scrutiny. Official Croydon council papers show the wider policy backdrop: the Suburban Design Guide that had encouraged intensification was reviewed and formally revoked by the council in mid‑2022, with officers citing the need to align local policy with national planning guidance and the revised London Plan and to revisit small‑sites policy.

The Purley Downs Road case therefore sits at the intersection of two recurring tensions in urban policy: the urgent drive to increase housing supply, including on suburban small sites, and the demand from communities for greater certainty, transparency and protection of local character. Council documents make clear the borough has been reassessing the policy tools that previously promoted suburban intensification; at the same time architects and developers argue that careful design and material choices — as shown at No 158 — can knit new, denser housing into existing streetscapes without resorting to pastiche.

According to the Architects’ Journal, the completed scheme carries a predicted design life of some 80 years and uses durable, low‑maintenance materials specified to sit sympathetically within the locality. Whether the Purley Downs Road development will be read in the long term as a persuasive model for suburban intensification — balancing higher densities with local fit, or as an example of contested change and process failures — will depend as much on the evolving planning framework and enforcement as on the physical performance of the buildings themselves.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/specification/case-study-purley-downs-road-housing-by-harp-harp), [[5]](https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=15904)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/specification/case-study-purley-downs-road-housing-by-harp-harp), [[3]](https://planning.org.uk/app/117/QQQLURJLHA400), [[2]](https://harpandharp.co.uk/work/purley-downs-road/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/specification/case-study-purley-downs-road-housing-by-harp-harp)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/specification/case-study-purley-downs-road-housing-by-harp-harp), [[6]](https://www.traditionalbrickandstone.co.uk/bricks/keswick-blend), [[7]](https://www.ketley-brick.co.uk/Quarry-tiles), [[2]](https://harpandharp.co.uk/work/purley-downs-road/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://harpandharp.co.uk/work/purley-downs-road/), [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/specification/case-study-purley-downs-road-housing-by-harp-harp), [[3]](https://planning.org.uk/app/117/QQQLURJLHA400)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://insidecroydon.com/2023/04/11/how-the-councils-planners-help-developers-dodge-conditions/), [[5]](https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=15904), [[3]](https://planning.org.uk/app/117/QQQLURJLHA400)
* Paragraph 7 – [[5]](https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=15904), [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/specification/case-study-purley-downs-road-housing-by-harp-harp), [[4]](https://insidecroydon.com/2023/04/11/how-the-councils-planners-help-developers-dodge-conditions/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/specification/case-study-purley-downs-road-housing-by-harp-harp), [[7]](https://www.ketley-brick.co.uk/Quarry-tiles), [[6]](https://www.traditionalbrickandstone.co.uk/bricks/keswick-blend)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/specification/case-study-purley-downs-road-housing-by-harp-harp> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://harpandharp.co.uk/work/purley-downs-road/> - Harp & Harp’s project page for Purley Downs Road presents their scheme for 27 new family houses in the London Borough of Croydon. The practice describes a contemporary reinterpretation of the local arts-and-crafts character, using vernacular motifs, proportions and a considered brick palette with crisp detailing to integrate with suburban context. The page includes images, brief project description and confirms the practice as designer. It supports the article’s assertion that Harp & Harp worked on a Purley Downs Road development and illustrates the architectural intention to create neighbourly, domestic silhouettes with contemporary massing, materiality and internal sections.
3. <https://planning.org.uk/app/117/QQQLURJLHA400> - The planning application listing records proposals for 158 Purley Downs Road, South Croydon: demolition of the existing house and garage and erection of two three-storey buildings providing seven dwellings, parking, cycle and refuse facilities and associated landscaping. The entry records receipt and validation dates around March 2021 and presents a project description and documents linked to the application. It corroborates claims that the single-family plot was redeveloped for seven new homes, and that the scheme included two terrace blocks, parking provision and associated amenity space, and application document links available.
4. <https://insidecroydon.com/2023/04/11/how-the-councils-planners-help-developers-dodge-conditions/> - Inside Croydon’s reporting on 158 Purley Downs Road documents local opposition and planning controversy after the developer demolished the existing family house to make way for seven units. The article outlines concerns about pre-commencement conditions not being discharged, the subsequent petition over changes to levels and site layout, and criticises Croydon planning officers for facilitating developer changes. It provides photographs of the former house, a timeline of applications and references to discharge applications, supporting the Architects’ Journal claim the site was intensively redeveloped, that the process prompted local objections, and issues around levels and planning conditions were contentious.
5. <https://democracy.croydon.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=15904> - Official Croydon council documents record the recommendation and decision to revoke the Croydon Suburban Design Guide (SPD2). Cabinet reports and committee minutes from June–July 2022 set out reasons for revocation, referencing national planning guidance, the London Plan changes and a need to revisit the Local Plan and small sites policy. The pages include reports, appendices and the SPD documents themselves, evidencing that the suburban design guidance was formally revoked or reconsidered by the council. This supports the article’s statement that the local guide which facilitated intensification had since been revoked and scrutiny measures introduced.
6. <https://www.traditionalbrickandstone.co.uk/bricks/keswick-blend> - Traditional Brick & Stone’s product page for Keswick Blend describes a 65mm dark red handmade textured stock brick, marketed as a red multi with tonal variation and texture suitable for housebuilders and self-build projects. The page provides technical details, durability and salt ratings, images and downloadable technical data and declaration of performance. Its description of a red multi brick with mottled hues supports the article’s assertion that a red blend with tonal variation was selected to sit comfortably within the local century‑old red brick context and to emulate the aged appearance of nearby stock bricks while offering durable facing performance.
7. <https://www.ketley-brick.co.uk/Quarry-tiles> - Ketley Brick’s quarry tile product pages explain their Staffordshire clay quarry tiles, available in several natural colours including Staffordshire red and blue. The site lists technical attributes such as 18mm thickness, high slip resistance classifications (R11/C), frost resistance, suitability for internal and external use and downloadable specification sheets. Case studies and details on manufacturing, longevity and sustainability are included. This supports the article’s statement that a Staffordshire clay quarry tile was chosen for tone and proportion, demonstrating Ketley’s product suitability for robust, long‑lasting paving or cladding applications and detailing.