# Controversy over ecological and social impacts as Woodberry Down regeneration reaches final phase



The final phases of the Woodberry Down regeneration masterplan have recently been approved by Hackney Council, despite significant objections from residents and community groups. At a planning sub-committee meeting held on 3 September, conditional outline planning permission was granted to Berkeley Homes for the last four phases of the extensive redevelopment, which has been ongoing for two decades. The decision marks a critical juncture in a project that aims to deliver thousands of new homes and improved public infrastructure but has sparked fierce debate over social housing, environmental impact, and community preservation.

Those opposing the latest proposals included residents from Woodberry Grove North and representatives from the Woodberry Down Community Organisation (WDCO). Frances MacFarland, speaking on behalf of local residents, expressed surprise and dismay that the masterplan had recently expanded to cover parts of their street. While generally supportive of phase 6, he underscored the environmental and financial imprudence of demolishing homes that had already been refurbished privately by residents to accommodate their families or businesses. Berkeley Homes responded by stating that Woodberry Grove North, including the disputed properties, had always been within the project's site boundary as defined since 2008, and that all masterplans were subject to extensive public consultation. They also highlighted recent communications from Hackney Council affirming these properties’ inclusion in the latest regeneration phase.

A major point of contention remains the reduction in social housing. The approved plans call for a maximum of 3,083 new residential dwellings across the four remaining phases, with an overall target of 43 percent affordable housing. However, the social rent component accounts for just 20 percent of these new homes. Objectors pointed out that this represents a significant drop from the original estate makeup, which featured around 1,520 council homes in 2008. The new figures propose 1,325 social homes, marking a 13 percent reduction and raising concerns about displaced tenants and the future of social housing stock. Barbara McFarlane, an architect and member of Sustainable Hackney, warned that such a decline contradicts urgent needs to provide homes for less affluent residents amid growing temporary housing pressures in the borough.

In response, Berkeley Homes spokesman Tom Anthony defended the scheme by citing binding contractual obligations under the initial development agreement that set affordable housing tiers. He emphasised that the original promise of around 41.7 percent affordable housing remained intact at 43 percent in the latest application, though the division between social rent and shared ownership had shifted. Nevertheless, the community's fears resonate with earlier criticisms raised by WDCO and others, who have continually expressed doubts about affordability and the right-to-return guarantees for existing tenants. Residents remain apprehensive that the development could lead to gentrification and weaker community ties.

Environmental concerns have also featured prominently in objections. Campaigners highlighted a potential net biodiversity loss of approximately 9.25 percent, falling short of the mandatory minimum requirement of a 10 percent biodiversity net gain under current planning guidance. McFarlane criticised the proposal’s reliance on "privatised green space podiums" elevated six metres above ground level, which she argued would limit wildlife thriving. These points contrast with earlier acclaim for the regeneration’s sustainability credentials; the project has previously won Green Apple Environment Awards for incorporating low-carbon technologies, such as solar panels and air-source heat pumps, and delivering a 142 percent biodiversity net gain during its initial phases. Critics contend, however, that recent plans show a regression on ecological commitments amid increased building density.

The Woodberry Down regeneration, first approved in 2005, aspires to replace outdated housing with 5,500 new homes, alongside community facilities and green spaces. Hackney Council highlights the development’s broader benefits, including a £12 million contribution to local infrastructure improvements covering roads and drainage, and investments in education and skills via apprenticeships and job opportunities. Facilities such as the Woodberry Wetlands—an acclaimed nature reserve opened by Sir David Attenborough—and Spring Park represent tangible community assets delivered through the scheme. While WDCO generally supports the regeneration in principle, it remains critical of the latest masterplan’s reduced social housing, increased density, strain on infrastructure, and environmental impact.

As the project moves forward with conditional consent subject to legal agreements and referral to the Mayor of London, the debates encapsulate the challenges of balancing urban regeneration goals with social equity and ecological responsibility. The controversy around Woodberry Down reflects broader tensions experienced in London and other cities where long-term regeneration projects seek to revitalise neighbourhoods while safeguarding affordability and community identity.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2025/09/26/final-woodberry-down-plans-approval-fears-loss-wildlife/), [[5]](https://hackney.gov.uk/woodberry-down/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2025/09/26/final-woodberry-down-plans-approval-fears-loss-wildlife/), [[6]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2024/02/19/community-group-alarm-woodberry-down-masterplan/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2025/09/26/final-woodberry-down-plans-approval-fears-loss-wildlife/), [[2]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2025/08/27/residents-community-groups-woodberry-down-masterplan/), [[6]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2024/02/19/community-group-alarm-woodberry-down-masterplan/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2025/09/26/final-woodberry-down-plans-approval-fears-loss-wildlife/), [[2]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2025/08/27/residents-community-groups-woodberry-down-masterplan/), [[6]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2024/02/19/community-group-alarm-woodberry-down-masterplan/), [[7]](https://wdco.org.uk/2025/03/the-2024-masterplan-application-for-woodberry-down/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2025/09/26/final-woodberry-down-plans-approval-fears-loss-wildlife/), [[3]](https://www.berkeleygroup.co.uk/news-and-insights/news-and-features/2023/woodberry-down-receives-best-practice-award-for-sustainability), [[7]](https://wdco.org.uk/2025/03/the-2024-masterplan-application-for-woodberry-down/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2025/09/26/final-woodberry-down-plans-approval-fears-loss-wildlife/), [[4]](https://www.berkeleygroup.co.uk/news-and-insights/news-and-features/2020/hackney-council-and-berkeley-provided-funds), [[5]](https://hackney.gov.uk/woodberry-down/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2025/09/26/final-woodberry-down-plans-approval-fears-loss-wildlife/), [[2]](https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2025/08/27/residents-community-groups-woodberry-down-masterplan/), [[7]](https://wdco.org.uk/2025/03/the-2024-masterplan-application-for-woodberry-down/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2025/09/26/final-woodberry-down-plans-approval-fears-loss-wildlife/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2025/08/27/residents-community-groups-woodberry-down-masterplan/> - Residents and community groups have expressed deep disappointment in Hackney Council's latest masterplan for the Woodberry Down regeneration. Concerns include a reduction in social housing, with the regeneration set to deliver 200 fewer social homes than the original development. The Woodberry Down Community Organisation (WDCO) highlighted that the initial masterplan promised 34% of new homes as social housing, but this figure has now fallen to between 14% and 18%. Additionally, fears about the right-to-return policy for existing tenants and the potential loss of community bonds have been raised. The council has committed to providing a new social rented home for all 1,115 occupied secure council tenanted properties on the estate, but residents remain apprehensive about the implementation of this promise. The final phases of the project are set to go before councillors in early September, with the community urging for a reconsideration of the plans to better meet the needs of existing residents.
3. <https://www.berkeleygroup.co.uk/news-and-insights/news-and-features/2023/woodberry-down-receives-best-practice-award-for-sustainability> - The Woodberry Down regeneration project in Hackney has been recognised for its sustainability efforts, receiving two Green Apple Environment Awards in the Regeneration category. The awards highlight Berkeley's commitment to environmental best practices and sustainable development. The project aims to deliver 5,500 mixed-tenure homes and includes a 15-acre network of public parkland, nature trails, and wildlife habitats. The first two phases have achieved a 142% Biodiversity Net Gain on-site, incorporating features like blue and green roofs and native planting. The development also integrates low-carbon technologies, including electric car charging, solar panels, air-source heat pumps, and an on-site district heating energy centre. These initiatives demonstrate a holistic approach to regeneration, balancing housing needs with environmental sustainability.
4. <https://www.berkeleygroup.co.uk/news-and-insights/news-and-features/2020/hackney-council-and-berkeley-provided-funds> - In June 2020, Hackney Council and Berkeley Homes announced a funding boost for the Woodberry Wetlands nature reserve, a key component of the Woodberry Down regeneration project. The reserve, which had been severely impacted by the coronavirus pandemic, received match-funding donations from the public up to a total of £55,000. The Woodberry Wetlands, opened by naturalist David Attenborough four years prior, transformed two previously inaccessible reservoirs into a tranquil oasis rich in wildlife. The funding aimed to support the London Wildlife Trust, which manages the site, in maintaining the reserve and ensuring its continued operation for the community. This initiative underscores the commitment to preserving and enhancing local biodiversity amidst urban development.
5. <https://hackney.gov.uk/woodberry-down/> - Hackney Council's official page on the Woodberry Down regeneration outlines the comprehensive redevelopment plans for the estate. Approved in 2005 and updated in 2014, the project aims to replace existing homes with 5,500 new, high-quality residences, including social rent and shared ownership options for current residents. The regeneration involves multiple partners, including Berkeley Homes, Notting Hill Genesis, and the Woodberry Down Community Organisation. The development includes over 2,900 new homes, with 1,130 designated for social rent and shared ownership. Additionally, the project contributes £12 million towards local infrastructure, such as roads and drains, and £5 million towards education and skills, providing apprenticeships and job opportunities. New green and open spaces, including Spring Park and the New River Path, as well as community facilities like the Redmond Community Centre and the Woodberry Wetlands, are also part of the regeneration plan.
6. <https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2024/02/19/community-group-alarm-woodberry-down-masterplan/> - The Woodberry Down Community Organisation (WDCO) has raised concerns over the latest masterplan for the estate's regeneration, highlighting issues such as increased building density and a reduction in social housing compared to initial promises. Geoff Bell, a representative from WDCO, criticised the plan for resulting in fewer social homes than before the regeneration, despite a significant increase in overall housing density. He expressed worries that many 'affordable' units would be unaffordable for local residents, potentially forcing families out of their community. The community group also highlighted that more than 50% of the homes are planned to be privately owned, raising concerns about affordability and the potential for properties to be purchased by private investors. A spokesperson from Berkeley Homes stated that the developer is committed to delivering 41.7% of homes as affordable housing across the development, aiming to create a mixed and balanced community at Woodberry Down.
7. <https://wdco.org.uk/2025/03/the-2024-masterplan-application-for-woodberry-down/> - The Woodberry Down Community Organisation (WDCO) has outlined several concerns regarding the 2024 masterplan application for the estate's regeneration. Key issues include the potential for increased population density to overwhelm existing services without clear plans for improvements, a reduction in genuinely affordable social housing compared to initial promises, and the impact of tall, densely packed buildings on natural light for both existing and new homes. Residents have also expressed dissatisfaction with the design quality of previous phases, describing them as bland and over-densified, leading to unwelcoming public spaces. Environmental concerns are also prominent, with fears that the increased number of buildings and residents will pressure green spaces, worsen air quality and noise pollution, and create an 'urban heat island' effect. The WDCO has called for specific assessments and guarantees before the plan moves forward, including infrastructure improvements, maintaining promised levels of social housing, proper light studies, design reviews with resident input, and environmental impact assessments.