

24, Oakley Lane,
King Edward Walk,
London S.E.1.

4th November 1976.

PROGRESS REPORT
OF THE
WELLINGTON MILLS HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE
THE STEERING COMMITTEE

PERIOD
DECEMBER 1975
To
NOVEMBER 1976

PART I THE GOOD AND THE BAD.

PART II LIVE AND LEARN.

S. Woolf Esq.,
Senior Assistant Director of Housing,
Housing Department,
Greater London Council,
County Hall,
London. S.E.1.

THE GOOD AND THE BAD

GOOD: In almost 11 months of occupancy we can be proud of the fact that there has been no outright act of vandalism committed at Wellington Mills.

BAD: It took until early August to set the Dryer Room in Oakley Lane to 100% order. This is a totally bad reflection upon the G.L.C. - This situation would never have been tolerated in a large House of Commerce - Neither will it ever be tolerated again at Wellington Mills once we are a fully-fledged Co-operative.

GOOD: The architecture of the Dwellings and Walkways at Wellington Mills is, to say the least, wonderful. The Architect should be applauded !!

BAD: The overall workmanship put in by the contractors in the construction of Wellington Mills is, to say the least, diabolical - examples -

The ceilings in Mead Row.

The kitchen Units in all dwellings.

The drainage and sewerage system, W.C's adjustments.

The contractors should be given 12 months for taking money from the Rate Payers of Greater London by false pretences. We do look forward with apprehension to the culmination of the 5 year plan advocated in the forthcoming Agreement. Looking skywards, we hope and pray we stay together - in more ways than one.

GOOD: We have steadfastly refused to have any dealings with local Action Groups i.e. "The Waterloo Action Group". After much soliciting by the latter, we have resisted in the form of ignoring. It is our policy to put our own House in order first.

BAD: We find that the liaison between the District Office at Renfrew Road and Wellington Mills leaves a lot to be desired. All future Co-operatives, in their conception, should be given 100% co-operation by their appropriate Office. - If this dream come reality - this brainchild of County Hall, be wished to be sown to fruition - this must be so. From avid experience, agreement will be achieved much more quickly if this desired policy is adopted.

We were told at the outset that Europe as a whole would be looking to the success of Wellington Mills - From your point of view, how would it look if we told Europe that the fruition of Wellington Mills was 90% our doing.

GOOD: Looking to the future of Co-operatives, we feel that much credit is due to Morley College for their Video Tape Recordings of activities at Wellington Mills. In their wisdom, also with our sanction, they engaged Mike Kingham (Institute of Community Studies) who is a Research Officer paid by the Department of the Environment, to look on, as it were, as an observer on the broader aspects of co-operative development.

We feel that this Video, combined with research, will be a blessing in disguise for the Steering Committees of future Co-operatives. We feel that copies of the work should be optioned in future exercises.

BAD: The situation regarding Pets at Wellington Mills - This is a grave concern as regards the Steering Committee. In a letter dated 2nd June 1976 Miss Miller assures us that the District Office will investigate the problem and write to us - To date, not a word has been received from them, we are inundated with Cats, Dogs and Rabbits, clarification is needed.

THE GOOD AND THE BAD

GOOD:

Although at the initial planning stage, or even in the interim period, there was no provision of an office for Estate Management use, we have, after pointing out the folly, secured 24 Mead Row for this purpose, Thanks to you. Also the provision of £500 for the servicing of this office is a forward step which we applaud.

BAD:

Although we gave the Architect high praise earlier, we give no marks for the planning of recreation compounds for children. The compound for the under five year olds gives foresight to danger from Mothers of toddlers.

The compound for elder children we feel we could have done without. The local Park is so nearby it makes it a mockery. On further with this subject brings this to mind - upon this space an office could have been built - therefore releasing 24 Mead Row and depleting the housing list, furthermore giving Wellington Mills its fully proposed 138 tenants.

GOOD:

We did, at the beginning of October, see the need for an Evening Patrol against vandals and intruders at Wellington Mills. After consultation with the local Police, who gave us their sanction and blessing, we set up patrols of male volunteers in pairs.

8.00 p.m. to 9.30 p.m.

9.30 p.m. to 11.00 p.m.

We have to date over 60 volunteers for this duty - One interloper was escorted off recently after the correct procedure of calling the Police was adopted. We feel this is a most valid point of security - with the emphasis toward future Co-operatives.

BAD:

On 19th May 1976 the tenants of No. 20 Oakey Lane, Mr. & Mrs. Roffey, were subjected to an upsurge of sewage into their dwelling. The damage caused was most considerable - compensation was promised, but to date nothing has emerged. We at Wellington Mills consider the conduct of the G.L. C. in this matter as appalling. We will advise the tenant to refer this matter to the law if it is not resolved shortly.

GOOD:

We have, among the ladies of the Estate formed a "Social Committee". They are doing very well to date with the aid of raffles within the Estate. They have proved to be a very industrious band of ladies. Established functions for the future are:-

November Fair - Jumble
Sale of Work
Bric-A-Brac
Teas & Soft Drinks.
Guess the name of the Doll.
Raffles etc.

20th November = Venue! Holst Court Garage.

11th December = Venue!- Morley College

Xmas Party for children

followed by

Xmas Party for adult tenants.

Further proposed functions!

THE GOOD AND THE BAD

GOOD: Contd.... Added to this we have:

A "Garden Committee" led by a Professional Gardener.

A proposed 'Wellington Mills Boys Club' led by ex-Wrestler and P.T.I. Mr. F. Bailey.

BAD: From the date of tenancy 13th December 1975, Mr. & Mrs. Lawrence of 40, Oakley Lane have been subjected to a continuous humming noise from above a bedroom in their dwelling. The bedroom - as such - is inhabitable. This noise is definitely caused by faulty installation of Air Extractor Unit.

GOOD: So as to enable freedom of access and protection from vandalism, we have been promised fitted yale locks to our Drying Rooms, together with this a yale key for every tenant.

We have already advocated strict times for opening and closing of these premises.

We must give absolute credit to the G.L.C. for "seeing it our way" and furnishing us with yale keys.

BAD: In March 1975 we asked that fencing be erected at the rear of 1 - 11, Mead Row, this was to protect the tenants from intruders and vandals.

We have had two letters of confirmation assuring us that this work was to be carried out - the latest was dated 28th May 1976.

GOOD: We have inovated a system whereby all cars belonging to tenants and their immediate families can be identified by means of a windscreen sticker - eventually we shall keep out the unwanted un-official car parker.

LIVE AND LEARN

We realise that as we live, so we learn.

We do hope sincerely that the learnings and lessons gained by all concerned, in the formation of the Wellington Mills Co-operative, can be put to good stead in the make-up of other future Co-ops - we have learnt! and we are still learning!!

In the first instance, when we attended the first big meeting at County Hall as prospective tenants, we could not, at that stage, have realised what a big thing to our future way of living the Co-operative idea was. Acceptance was one thing, living it, developing it, became the name of the game.

The G.L.C. - or certain members of - came up with this idea, lets call it ideal - of giving us the tanancies at Wellington Mills in the hope, the charitable hope, that we as selected families could get the ideal off the ground, make it work, show the final product to all the doubting Thomas's with a positive view of launching the same new way of life to other less fortunate G.L.C./local Authority tenants.

In the period December 1975 - January 1976 the initial 50 tenants moved into Wellington Mills, hardly knowing each other, and those that did had probably not met for a number of years.

Contd....

L I V E A N D L E A R N

However, as we have learnt, through smiling faces, "Good Mornings" and "Good Nights", visiting each other and various exchanges of pleasantries a common bond was found, the feeling was "we are all in this together - lets make it work".

At a meeting of greeting and explanation by G.L.C. Officers and the tenants, which was held in Morley College, various theories were expounded towards the Co-operative way of living.

Mr. Woolf asked that a Steering Committee be set-up among the tenants. This was received by the tenants with some awe because really, to be truthful, we did not know each other that well to be able to elect with truth as to each others capabilities. However, an address was made to the tenants - by the then unknown future Secretary, to the proposed Steering Committee -. His plea followed these lines:-

"Let us really get to know each other before we form a Steering Committee - let us bring back the old days of "The string in the Door", resurrecting the old, bring back companionship and neighbourliness, lets get the real feel of old Lambethians and South Londoners back together again - lets get away from apathy and vandalism - lets be together as one happy family".

This seemed to clinch it, and the tenants resolved to meet again shortly to elect a Steering Committee.

Later that evening over a drink in the Morley College bar - and still later in the tenants houses, the bond between them strengthened.

Shortly after, Morley College invited the tenants to a Film Show of Documentaries towards the Co-operative way of life. Together with this an open invitation was offered to the tenants to join in the activities of Morley College. The kindness shown to the tenants of Wellington Mills by Morley College has to be recorded here. The spirit of good neighbours and charity towards newcomers became so evident.

Later at this meeting, a Steering Committee of 8 was duly elected.

The Committee having taken up the offer of a Committee Room from Morley College, duly met, sorted themselves out and informed the G.L.C. of such.

Various advice came to the Committee from David Gater of the G.L.C. in the form of directives apertaining to the Co-operative, and needless to say the Committee picked up the responsibilities quite well - making themselves acutely aware of the future responsibilities of the Committee towards the tenants.

David Gater attended a host of Committee Meetings, expounding the relationship between the G.L.C. and Wellington Mills - also the rudiments of the final Agreement between the parties and the options open to the Co-operative in the form of Management or Non-Equity.

We did at this stage, begin to find that the tenants looked to the Committee for guidance in most matters, and so, inadvertantly our Committee Meetings began to be shouldered with domestic problems which in reality were the sole responsibility of the District Office.

However, rolling the whole issue into one parcel, it became an added chore on the Committee behalf to sort out grievances and grumbles with the G.L.C. on the tenants behalf. Some of these ventures into the halls of officialdom were successful, but needless to say, when one deals with a body as large as the G.L.C. one is sure to be faced with pitfalls. It is a question of "who is the person responsible? Who picks up the responsibility?

The learning to date in this respect is in the negative, responsibility for action within the make-up of the G.L.C. seems to be null and void. The system of "passing the buck" seems to have been well and truly adopted!! With the minimum of comment - the case of the collapsing ceilings in Mead Row is a classic!!

Contd..

L I V E A N D L E A R N

Nevertheless, we did have our first General Meeting of tenants - which, to say the least was a rumpass - From the writer's point of view I saw the point and meaning of "Rabble-Rouser" on my own door step, as it were, for the first time.

Grave issues were raised over domestic matters. A big point of issue was the "Children on the Green". The writer was adamant that it should only be used as its original purpose - a Green Lung. I must add that this correct view on this subject along with a few others eventually split the original Committee.

Needless to say, a lot of good points and theories were expounded towards the Co-operative way of life. We discovered the agitators, the could'nt careless types and overall the meeting was a success. The majority of the meeting got the message - we were hell-bent towards our goal - "The Wellington Mills Co-operative".

After a period the Committee were given copies of a proposed Agreement. We studied these and drew up our proposals and observations which we relayed to David Gater in Committee. One firm observation by the writer concerned rent rebates. The writer was adamant in his assumption, taking note of The Department of the Environment guide lines drawn from the Campbell Report that the Co-operative tenants could not be eligible for rent rebate if we opted for non-equity. The writer was firm in his assumption that if the Co-operative registered under the Companies Act - this was a loop-hole with which the Co-operative could squeeze through legislation. This view was met with a profound feeling of ambiguity.

At a later stage, with reference to the above, the writer was pleased to see published in a G.L.C. Directive, his insistence reiterated and established in the form of a guideline to tenants as to the difference between the options of Management and Non-Equity. The writer was pleased that as well as he somebody else was learning!!

About this time, a difference of opinion grew within the Committee - it grew to such an extent that the Secretary and a fellow Committee Man resigned. For 3 weeks the Committee soldiered on under the Chairwoman - but sorrilly; two more members were voted to the Committee to fill the gap, but no Secretary took office.

The tenants, as was their right, forced the convening of an emergency General Meeting. This was after they had approached the ex-Secretary to reconsider taking up his vacated role once again. This was considered by the writer and agreed to, with the proviso that a secret ballot be adopted to finalise the issue democratically.

At a very stormy meeting, after the advocating of the democratic secret ballot, and the adoption of same by show of hands, two more Committee Members resigned.

A few days later, the result of the ballot, under democratic scrutiny, re-elected the writer to Secretary.

Going on as before, the Committee, looking forward to the future lettings at Holst Court, the growing of the Estate, progress as planned, things seemed to be coming along nicely - the new tenant issue was very important, new blood, new Committee Members.

I think I should add at this stage that a proposed Article of Constitution was 1 in 12 Committee Representation, a 12 person Committee when the estate was full. At this stage we had a Committee of 7, the previous Minutes Secretary had resigned so we had co-opted the wife of a Committee Member as a non-voting Minutes Secretary.

L I V E A N D L E A R N

Also, at about this time, the question of Children on the Green had resolved itself, except for the odd moment. Children do now keep of the grass.

During this period we had a few ups and downs ~~and~~ all, but purely on domestic issues; one notable instance was the upsurge of sewerage into a dwelling - apart from the tragedy of the damage to property, and the worry of the tenants concerned - The outlook of most tenants was a joy to observe, togetherness was with us and the future looked bright (Housing-wise only I mean). The tenants as a whole were happy, the flower of Co-operation was really blooming - we were learning fast!!

We seem at Wellington Mills to have stumbled across an absolute fact.

If the elders in a family are not happy, then the children of that family will not be happy. Reverse this and what have we?? "Wellington Mills".

We saw Mr. Woolf in Committee upon the presentment in writing of the Committee's view towards the Agreement. Mr. Woolf endorsed our proposed constitution and left us in no uncertain manner that we were progressing along the right lines.

We greeted in the new tenants of Holst Court with vigour, expounding our proposed new way of life, endorsing how we had discovered the rapid change among the initial 50 tenants.

From a business point of view we embarked on details of the Agreement, the options we enjoyed and the freedom of choice - each tenant was given a copy of 10 proposed rules of the Constitution, added to this was the literature from County Hall. Progress so far was reported on, bringing them up-to-date.

The meeting was more-or-less repetitive of our first General Meeting - but, easier to handle because the Committee were becoming more responsible and experienced.

Having recruited two more Committee Members from the Holst Court intake we now had a Committee of nine members.

To be truthful in retrospective, it must be said that full co-operation does not emerge as a whole from the Holst Court complex - or to be more truthful - does not seem to emerge. The Committee did get the feeling at one stage where the Holst Court tenants seemed to want to go it alone. Perhaps these recent figures of our last General Meeting can enlighten.

Possible	105	Mead Row and Oakley Lane
Sick	1	56 attended from possible 71 - 80% attendance.
Working	<u>1</u>	Holst Court
	103	16 attended from possible 32 - 50% attendance.

Time will tell, but we hope against hope that all those tenants that are fully co-operative can show the non-triers the way in future.

We reach a stage when residents come knocking at the door asking if we have seen the latest edition of the 'South London Press'? Pursuing this question we are faced with a diatribe of derogatory journalism against the Welling Mills Estate. No other than the Steering Committee Chairwoman and the Financial Secretary have contributed to this tirade of the estate and its proposed co-operative.

With the silent anger of most tenants hanging over their heads, the two culprits waited in the wings for altercation and argument. The tenants and Committee, including the writer, rightly so refused to be drawn. Very shortly afterwards the Chairwoman and Financial Secretary handed in their resignations.

Contd.....

L I V E A N D L E A R N

Moving quickly, the writer filled a gap by co-opting a very able person as Chairman. Consequently our meetings since this episode have progressed as well as any in the same category.

Adopting a policy of "Lets wait for a full Committee of Twelve" before any further persuance of the proposed Agreement, we set about in earnest to put domestic matters within the estate on an even keel, with the latter wholly in mind, we have achieved some priorities. We give credit to Miss Miller of the G.L.C. for the unflagging help and guidance she has shown to us.

Welcoming the further intake of tenants to Mead Row became a formality. Much because of the repetition which persued these exercises, but also we found this intake to be a more readily acceptable responsible body of families.

Gaining two more Committee members from this intake we became a Committee of 12.

By this time also, the lady who had opted to become our non-voting Minutes Secretary earlier, also volunteered to become Financial Secretary pro-tem. We were by this time really learning, learning of this fact we really did have some dedicated families at Wellington Mills.

Establishing things the correct way, the Committee as a whole were now finding their job in hand more pleasant as they met mounted enthusiasm all around the estate - we were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the last intake of tenants to fill up Oakley Lane.

They came, we saw, and we greeted; A large proportion of the Committee met the tenants at the lettings, so the ice was already broken for us when we went through the exercise of official welcoming in to the estate. Asking the last intake for two Committee Members we were offered three. However, settling for two as required we became a Committee of Twelve.

We had learnt, once again, that patience can be rewarding.

Busying ourselves we cemented our friendship with Morley College in no uncertain manner.

Just recently, armed with the amended proposed Agreement we dug our heels in towards the final stage.

To conclude; Up to the intake of 105 tenants we find a reasonable, favourable, self-induced adoption of the Co-operative way of life.

We cannot, as yet, speak fully in the same view of the last intake of the remaining 32 tenants, but up to the present time the signs are very favourable.

It is the intention of the writer to have the Agreement ratified by February 1977.

With this firmly in mind we are approaching the last jump - as it were - just like a horse leading a three mile chase, let us get over the jump and we'll win in no uncertain manner!!

We, the tenants of Wellington Mills have not had it so good for years. At last, once again we really know our neighbours.

We shall be proud to stand up, to stand up fully to any public body in the land and prove our point, the point that we have succeeded in the Co-operative way of life. Yes, Oh Yes, at Wellington Mills we are truly living and learning.

For and on behalf of
WELLINGTON MILLS STEERING COMMITTEE

C.C.
Mr. L. Bennett, FRICS. FIRM.

Yours sincerely, .