

Rowan school site and the '£60k challenge'

Recognising the need to deliver sustainable housing developments that provide wide-ranging benefits for the community and the environment, the council prepared a planning brief for the former Rowan school site and has worked in partnership to progress the Government's £60K homes initiative.

The site, in Mitcham, is to be developed as part of the Government's successful 'Design for Manufacture' competition, where developers were challenged to build a house with a construction cost of £60,000. The brief's revision provides more urban design focus with clarity on site specific and affordable housing issues. The council's planning, transport and housing departments worked with DCLG to select a preferred developer. The developers will carry out a pre-application consultation in November 2006 and the planning application is expected at the start of 2007.

The scheme will result in a wide range of community benefits (a new park, new community hall and GP surgery) as well as providing a unique development which will raise the profile and perception of East Mitcham. This is a particularly deprived part of the borough. The development will provide much needed affordable housing and health provision and a park to meet a need identified in Merton's Open Spaces Strategy.



The scheme will comprise:

- 217 homes, 30% of which will be affordable for key workers and rent and a further 10% available for first time buyers;
- the original school building will be retained and converted to flats;
- a new health facility will be built on Rowan Road;
- a new scout hut will be provided within the development;
- one third of the site will become a new local park for East Mitcham; and
- approximately 10% of the entire development's energy needs will be met by renewable energy on the site.

Beyond these community benefits, the homes will also have renewable energy systems and a sustainable urban drainage network to alleviate flood risk for the site and surrounding houses.

Once planning permission is secured, Merton's profile will be raised nationally for having provided an exemplar sustainable housing project. The scheme's designs are on a budget and easily replicable by volume house builders. Already, the council has received requests for information from other authorities wishing to drive forward the sustainable housing agenda and looking to Merton for guidance.

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