



Demolition costs came to around £750,000



Concrete from the original buildings was reused

Transforming dust into gold

One of the largest brownfield regeneration projects in the South East is taking place at the former Glaxo Wellcome site in Beckenham. Penny Kay visited the development

Hidden behind a screen of mature trees, it is difficult to see the scale of development taking place at Langley Park in Beckenham, Kent. Just 12 miles south of central London, the site covers more than 40.5ha (100 acres). Laing Homes is driving the project which will have an end-value approaching £90m.

A gatehouse and security gates mark the formidable entrance to the site – the shape of things to come on the luxury housing development. When finished, it will be protected 24 hours a day by a security guard and CCTV.

But behind the security barrier, it resembles an organised ants' nest, with construction workers moving from one half-built house to another as the buildings spring up across the development. Laing Homes is providing 208 residential units, ranging from two-bedroom apartments to seven-bedroom houses, across 9.3ha (23 acres) of the site.

Planning consent was obtained before today's more stringent requirements for "affordable" housing and this scheme is

clearly aimed at the top end of the housing market. The two showhouses are luxuriously appointed, and prices start at around £265,000 for these executive homes.

Looking across the vast expanse of the construction site, it is hard to visualise the jigsaw of Glaxo Wellcome's 130 research buildings, totalling 120,770m² (1.3m sq ft), which once filled the area. Laing Homes purchased the site from the company in December 1997 when Glaxo Wellcome decided to move more of its operations to Stevenage in Hertfordshire.

Mammoth preparation

Demolition works began at Langley Park in March 1998 and, to put the sheer scale of the job into perspective, it took 12 months to prepare the site before the first brick could be laid. In its glossy marketing pack, the company claims that "every aspect of the project, from site preparation to landscaping and construction of the homes, illustrates Laing Homes' implementation of the three Rs of conservation, 'reuse, recycle and reduce'."



Sean Ellis, land director of Laing Homes South Thames, was keen to expand on this policy. "Some of the existing Glaxo Wellcome buildings were less than five years old and we could recycle the concrete. By installing a concrete crushing plant on the site it reduced lorry movements by a third."

All this is very laudable but is it cost effective for developers to go down the recycling route? Demolition costs were around £750,000 and Ellis explains that savings were made by reusing 75% of the tiles from existing buildings; crushed concrete is being used in private drives and footpaths; and landscaping included the transplantation of semi-mature trees.



He says: "The recycling works are saving approximately £6,000 per property, which equates to a 5% saving on build costs."

Its experiences at Langley Park will be applied to future brownfield projects. Ellis says Laing Homes is building 80% of its new developments on recycled land and Langley Park is one of the case studies being used by the House-Builders Federation in its "Old Land, New Homes – Renewing our Towns and Cities" campaign launched last month. The HBF wants to show the commitment of the industry to develop recycled land; to highlight the difficulties housebuilders face and to look at the solutions available.

Ellis admits it is the largest single investment

by the company in one project and describes it as "a once in a lifetime opportunity". The units should give an average selling price of more than £430,000 per unit, but as Ellis concludes: "Where else can you find a site like this so close to London?"

Scale of site

Laing's 208 homes take only a small section of land

11ha	retained by Glaxo Wellcome
9ha	for residential use being developed by Laing Homes
7ha	owned by Joseph Samuel Developments – consent for B1 space
16ha	open space

Recycling works

After initial costs recycling yields long-term savings

Demolition costs – £750,000
50,000m ³ concrete crushed on site – 17,000m ³ reused; reducing lorry movements
500,000 roof tiles recycled – 75% saved from existing buildings
500 tonnes of "light" iron salvaged for reuse
500 tonnes of "heavy" iron salvaged for reuse
7,000 paving slabs being reused
860 out of 950 trees retained; plus a further 250 planted
Existing lamp-posts being reused
Mansion, chapel, dairy and coach house renovated
Recycling works save around £6,000 per property, a 5% saving on build costs

Langley Park in Beckenham is being used as an example by the House-Builders' Federation to show the industry's commitment to reusing materials