



BELFAST ■ Parkmount housing by Richard Partington Architects

A demonstration project for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive adopts ambitious eco targets. Photos: Timothy Soar.

In Belfast the tentative steps towards a more peaceful and integrated society have yet to be reflected in the physical landscape, which is still marked by the provocative murals, the painted kerb lines, and the oppressive walls that separate communities. Everywhere there are constant reminders that Belfast is a patchwork mosaic of neighbourhoods.

These are the characteristics of the southern end of Shore Road and the Parkmount site. To the south-west is the mainly derelict and notorious Mount Vernon estate, once scheduled for demolition. Immediately to the east is the Shore Crescent estate, a Protestant community planned in the 1970s around a series of

'secure' dead-end roads and cul de sacs. Further to the east is the new motorway, which runs parallel to Shore Road along the edge of Belfast Lough.

In 1997 The Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the main public body responsible for delivering social housing, established a project team to promote new ideas in housing design with the intention of building these into a demonstration project. The NIHE then looked to private developers, through a tender process, to deliver the project and take the risk for marketing and sales. A process of negotiation and discussion with the winning tenderer, the Carvill Group, clarified the aims of all the parties and set down the benchmarks for assessing the environmental performance of the scheme.

The accommodation consists of 56 two-bedroom apartments (approximately 60 square metres), with two smaller one-bedroom apartments, giving a density of 97 units per hectare (290 habitable rooms per hectare). More than 80 per cent (46) of the apartments have wheelchair access and internal dimensions that suit wheelchair manoeuvrability.

The key elements of the brief included:

- flexible apartment plans to anticipate



Above/left The nine-storey tower at the north end of the £3.2m project provides a beacon for the city's regeneration.

changes in work patterns and lifestyles;

- creation of a defined 'place' with landscaping and safe play area;
- a completely secure development with controlled access;
- a logical sequence for marketing and constructing the scheme in phased stages to limit the financial risk;
- simple, reliable technical solutions that will be economical to run and maintain;
- attainment of the BRE EcoHomes Standard;
- good design for maximising solar potential with a high research component centred around the use of photovoltaics.

The site is a long thin strip of derelict land, aligned north-south, 3.5 kilometres from the centre of Belfast. A flat area in the centre, approximately 35 by 160 metres, provides the only useful space for building. Along its eastern edge, where a row of semi-detached houses stood, is a continuous frontage to Shore Road.

Together with urban designers Llewelyn Davies, we proposed the concept of a 'linear community' for Shore Road, with shops, health, leisure and employment along with an intensification of the public transport corridor. We wanted the scheme to become a sort of beacon, to register sufficient presence and scale on the derelict landscape and to represent the new optimism and ambition of the City.

An array of 70 square metres of grid-connected photovoltaic panels was designed with an estimated annual output of 4,400kWh/year, which should provide equivalent electricity to meet the annual consumption of two apartments. The design for this sample roof area (fixing,



access, cable routing, inverter design etc) can be applied to all the low-rise units in the future. All the apartments have a predicted SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) value of more than 96 while 70 per cent achieve higher than 100, with the photovoltaic panels improving the score by more than ten points.

Project team

Architect: Richard Partington Architects; design team: Richard Partington, Ewa Maciejewska, Nick Bethune, Patrick Morel; urban design: Llewelyn Davies; structural engineer: Gilligan & Partners; environmental engineer: Max Fordham; client/developer: The Carvill Group; sponsor: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

