



Contemporary good looks: left, bigger homes for residents, plus extra flats sold to fund the new building



We rebuilt our council block and it paid for itself

The story of the neighbours in Hafer Road, Clapham Junction who wanted a better life and bigger homes is a lesson for all Londoners, discovers **Vicky Richardson**

FOR Adam Street, everything is different at home in Hafer Road, Clapham Junction, except for the position of his new dining table. He's put in the exact same spot where all of its predecessors stood – it is the building that has changed dramatically.

Numbers four to eight in the Victorian terrace were destroyed in the Blitz and replaced in the Fifties with a plain council block of flats. Today the block in its turn has been replaced with an interesting-looking contemporary building that features bold windows and cantilevered and recessed balconies.

Now Adam, 42, and his wife Billi, 45, can invite friends and relatives without having to keep some of them standing outside because of the lack of space. They have room for their family to

grow, and they are surrounded by neighbours who have become good friends. How the Streets and a group of neighbours redeveloped the former council block, more than doubling the size of their homes in the process, is a remarkable story of entrepreneurialism and community spirit.

A BIG, RISKY IDEA

Adam's grandmother was one of the first council tenants in the block when it opened in 1957. During the Eighties his parents purchased the flat from Wandsworth council under Right to Buy. So it was only natural that Adam should want to bring up his family – the fourth generation of Streets in Hafer Road – in the area he had known and loved since childhood. By the time Olivia, now nine, and Emily, now eight,

came along, space in the old 900sqft maisonette was getting tight. But what hope was there for the Street family to move to a bigger home in the area when nearby properties of a similar size were on the market for £1.7 million?

Mulling over this problem with neighbour Carl Johnson, a builder, whose grandmother had also lived in the block, Adam did a "back of the fag packet calculation" and came up with the crazy ambitious idea that they should get the neighbours together, demolish the block and start again.

They worked out that by adding eight flats and selling them, they could use the income to subsidise development. "The premise was that we'd all get more space for free," explains Adam. He admits it was a huge risk. Yet when he put the idea to his neighbours, remark-

ably, they all agreed to give it a go. Five years later, in March last year, the householders moved into their new bespoke homes. Adam admits now: "If you knew all the challenges involved in a project like this, you'd never attempt it."

The scariest moment was when the old block was demolished in January 2015. "I knew that if I screwed this up, the people who'd trusted me would have nowhere to live," confesses Adam. But reassured by his penchant for spreadsheets and the "kitchen cabinet" of professional advisers he'd roped in, the neighbours put their trust in him.

A lynchpin of the community, June Flood, 77, says she trusted Adam and Carl to spearhead the project because she had known their grandmothers, and "everyone was in the same boat. If it failed we'd all lose."

HOW WE DID IT

Adam explains: "We all sold our flats to a special purpose vehicle company, then bought them back. Every flat is bespoke, and we tried to create a commercial model that would work for all the residents."

The eight extra flats sold easily and the profit was ploughed back into the development to give everyone a bigger home. Designed by Peter Barber Architects and made from rustic yellow brick, the new building is striking but works well in the Victorian street. It is deceptively simple in form; the dwellings slot together like a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle.

There are 16 flats and maisonettes in all, each with its own private outdoor terrace or courtyard. Inside, the spaces are generous and conform to the Mayor of London's housing design guide. Corridors and landings are almost like rooms in themselves.

The whole community joined in choosing the architect, inviting Peter Barber to interview because one of them happened to walk past his office in King's Cross. Billi says: "He got the mass-



Room for the family: Adam and Billi Street with their daughters in their new, bigger Clapham home



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ing right and knew how not to make it feel like a block of flats." Local planners were supportive and, with 30 objections and 26 letters of support, the proposal was approved without a hitch.

Adam and Billi now love the simplicity of the space and the huge glass windows, which break down the division between inside and out and create a breeze in summer. Their parents can stay over, the girls have their own rooms and there is even space for a new family

member, Lexi, a black Labrador pup. The main challenge for project architect Phil Hamilton was to deal with the needs of a diverse community, who all had their own special requests. June Flood, for example, wanted her own front door and huge amounts of storage space. The scheme design relied on excavating a basement in order to increase density on the site. These rooms have extra-high ceilings and light wells at the front so that they don't feel remotely poky.

Simplicity of style and plenty of glass: the new maisonettes and flats are all bespoke, with extra-high ceilings and light wells at the front. Any feeling of pokiness is gone

THERE'S an inspiring spirit of optimism here. Adam is convinced the experiment is repeatable and has written a paper to share with anyone who wants to try. At the launch party, his mum and his daughter Olivia cut the ribbon. Architect Peter Barber recalls: "Adam did a speech and there were tears. Looking back, it was a time-consuming project. But I wouldn't have missed it for the world."