

Hexagon Housing Association

Directors Group Report

September 2023 (*additional notes Dec 2023*)

Estate Grading Report

By Resident Voice & Engagement Facilitator, Amanda Walker

Summary

This report informs about the work of the most recent Estate Grading exercise carried out by residents.

Recommendation

DG is asked to note the contents of this report and are invited to comment on the report and the accompanying action plan.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Estate Grading took place on 13th and 14th June 2023.
- 1.2 An annual review of the process in collaboration with Estate Graders, Neighbourhood and Estate Services Lead and Responsive Repairs Manager informed a number of improvements:
 - Amended score weighting to better reflect resident experience - signage and noticeboards consolidated into one assessment area.
 - To enable a manageable, yet impactful, programme the number of Estate Grading days was reduced from three to two.
 - Agreed processes and SLA for responding to the action plan, including review meetings.

2.0 Grading process

- 2.1 A team of three residents undertook this round of grading, this included one new member to the Estate Grading Team.
- 2.2 There are four assessment areas aligning with the Estates Services Standard and Estate Inspection criteria. Residents individually complete an Estate Grading Record to rate each assessment area on a scale of 1 to 10 and detail any issues (providing photos where possible). The assessment areas are:

- Signs & notice boards
- Internal cleaning
- External grounds maintenance & waste
- Communal repairs

- 2.3 Residents then average and discuss their scores, including any potential downgrading as a result of a key H&S issue. This arrives at an overall panel mark which determines the overall estate grade of Gold, Silver or Bronze status.
- 2.4 The Resident Voice & Engagement Facilitator turns the issues reported into an Action Plan, which is issued to the relevant Managers for action and response.
- 2.5 Where possible, a resident notice is then compiled and put into notice boards, informing residents of the Estate Grading, the grade awarded and what actions have taken place as a result of Estate Grading.
- 2.6 This report is circulated to, and agreed with, the Estate Grading team before it is issued to DG.
- 2.7

3.0 Estates graded

3.1 The estates to be graded were identified jointly by the Neighbourhood Services Team and Resident Voice & Engagement Team.

Tracking all historical Estate Grading made it possible to see that a number of estates had never been graded. These were prioritised, along with estates that fell within the same geographical clusters and had not been graded in more than five years.

In total, 11 estates were graded in the London boroughs of Greenwich and Bexley:

Estate	Postcode	Units
20 Charlton Road	SE3	10
Abbotts Close	SE28	12
Bellfield Close	SE3	18
Britannia Close	DA8	24
Conway / Lakedale / Willowfields	SE18	29
Dryad House	DA17	37
George Albert Court	DA7	25
Greenhaven Drive (72-77 & 78-89)	SE28	18
Hollywood Way	DA8	14
Rodeo	DA8	9
Sunset Close	DA8	22

4.0 Findings

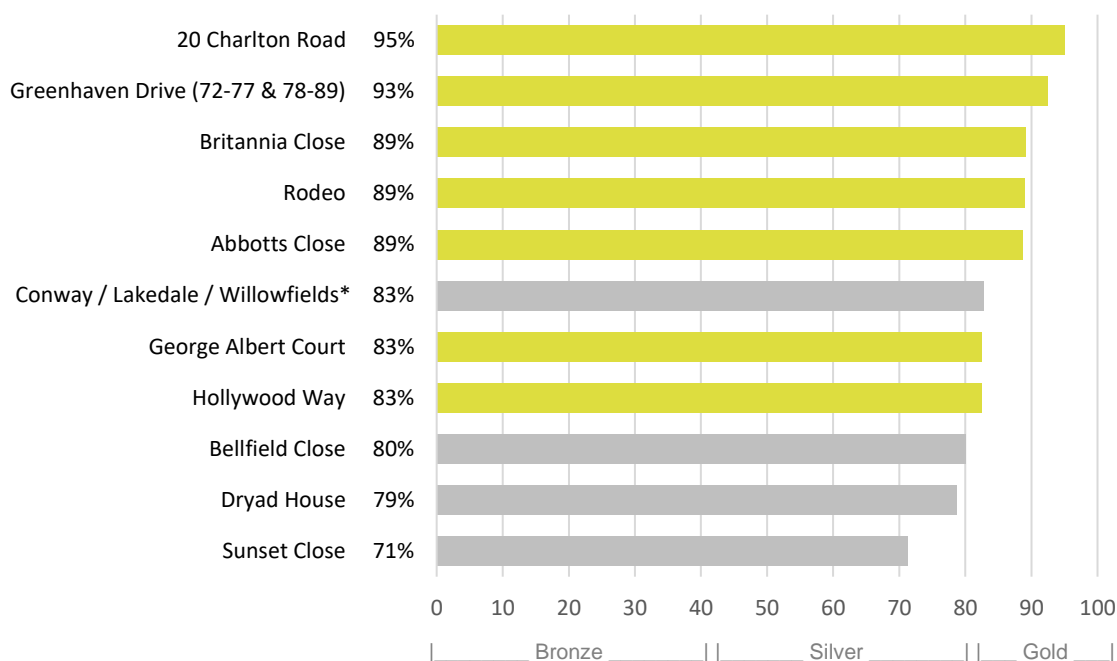
Of the 11 estates graded, the results were:

- 7 Gold
- 4 Silver
- 0 Bronze

The above includes one estate downgraded from gold to silver, due to health and safety issues highlighted. Further detail can be found later in this report.

4.2

Percentage of total possible marks for each estate

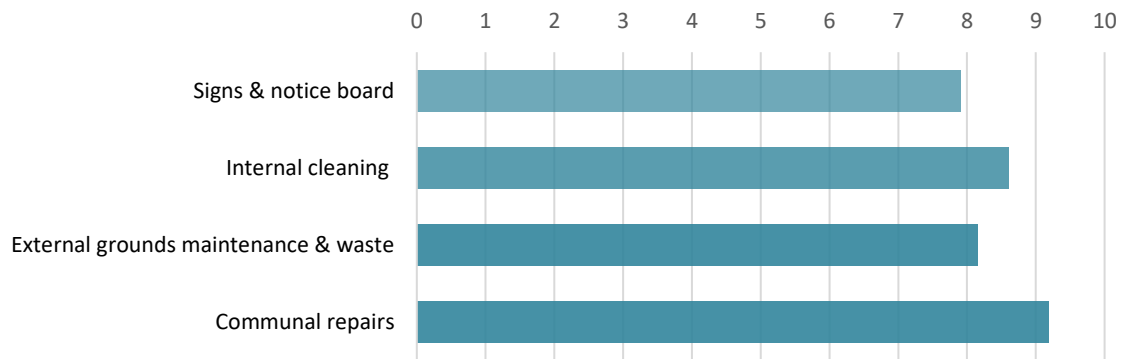


* = rating downgraded

4.3 Comparison to previous grading

Estate	Previous grade	2023 Grade	Trend
20 Charlton Road	Silver (2017)	Gold	▲
Abbotts Close	Silver (2016)	Gold	▲
Bellfield Close	n/a	Silver	n/a
Britannia Close	n/a	Gold	n/a
Conway / Lakedale / Willowfields	Gold (2016)	Silver	▼
Dryad House	Silver (2016)	Silver	=
George Albert Court	n/a	Gold	n/a
Greenhaven Drive (72-77 & 78-89)	Silver (2012)	Gold	▲
Hollywood Way	Gold (2016)	Gold	=
Rodeo	Silver (2016)	Gold	▲
Sunset Close	Gold (2016)	Silver	▼

4.4 Average scores for each assessment area / 10



4.5 Based on their findings, the Grading team has made a number of suggestions for improvement, the main points of which are summarised below.

An action plan has been devised to capture all the points raised by the Estate Graders and this has been actioned by the Neighbourhood Services, Responsive Repairs and Property Safety teams.

5.0 Gold Estates – summary

(where available, photos have been provided)

5.1 20 Charlton Road (SE3, RB Greenwich)

This 10 unit leasehold block was in excellent condition. However, there was one main issue which was old boilers left in the alley besides the building. Also, the cleaning attendance sheet was present but located on an unlocked electric meter cupboard door.



5.2 Greenhaven Drive (72-77 & 78-89) (SE28, RB Greenwich)

Two purpose-built blocks containing 18 apartments were generally in very good condition. The issues reported were plaster damage by one window, very bad smelling bins and one sign missing on each notice board.



5.3 **Britannia Close** (DA8, LB Bexley)

Comprised of 18 houses and six apartments in a supported housing block. The only issues raised were a net curtain that was grey with dirt and three signs missing across two notice boards.

5.4 **Rodeo** (DA8, LB Bexley)

The grounds for these 9 terraced houses were in good condition. No issues were raised however it was noted that there was no notice board, and it was questioned how residents in these properties receive relevant updates and information without a noticeboard.

5.5 **Abbots Close** (SE28, RB Greenwich)

These two blocks containing 12 apartments were in good condition. Issues raised included overflowing bins and a mobility scooter in the hallway, although it was questioned if this had been permitted.



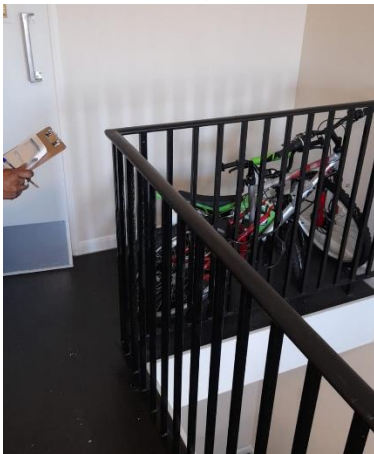
5.6 **George Albert Court** (DA7, LB Bexley)

Comprised of 25 apartments in two adjacent blocks (one general needs, one share ownership). This estate was generally in good condition, however issues raised included missing brick slips, large items dumped in the bin store, most signs missing from the notice boards and some toys in communal hallway.



5.7 Hollywood Way (DA8, LB Bexley)

Comprised of seven terraced houses and one block with seven apartments, generally in good condition. No issues were raised with the grounds for the houses. In the block there were some items in the hallways and a couple of notice board signs were missing.



6.0 Silver Estates – summary

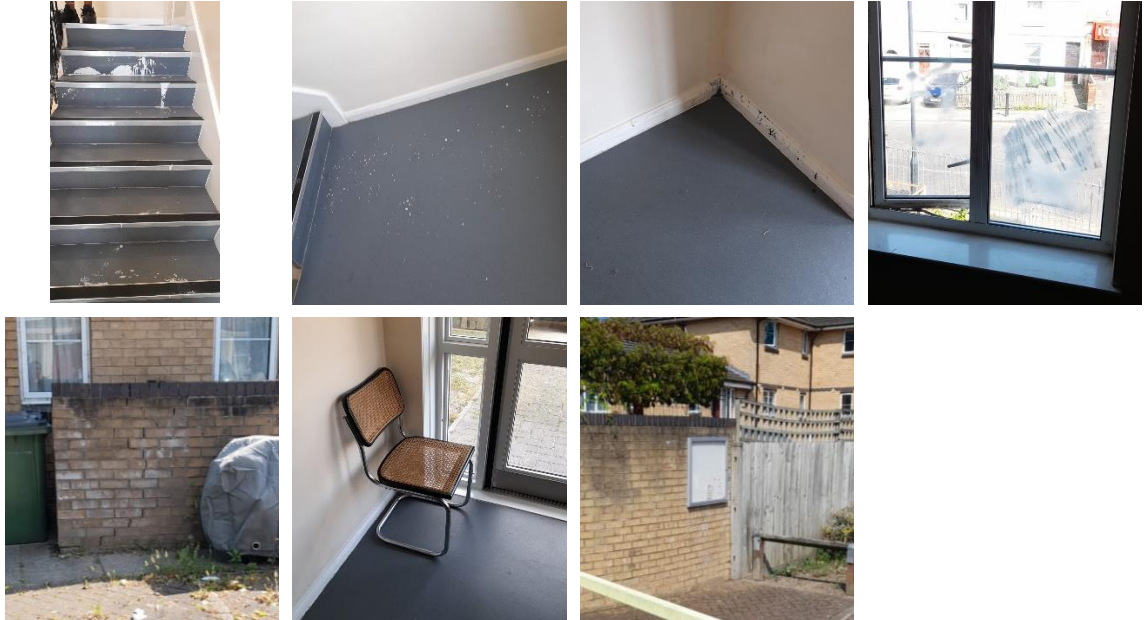
(where available, photos have been provided)

6.1 Conway / Lakedale / Willowfields (SE18, RB Greenwich)

29 homes comprised of two blocks and terraced houses. In one block there was significant spilled paint and poor-quality painting in stairwell. Some items were missing for the two notice boards and there was one empty outdoor notice board;

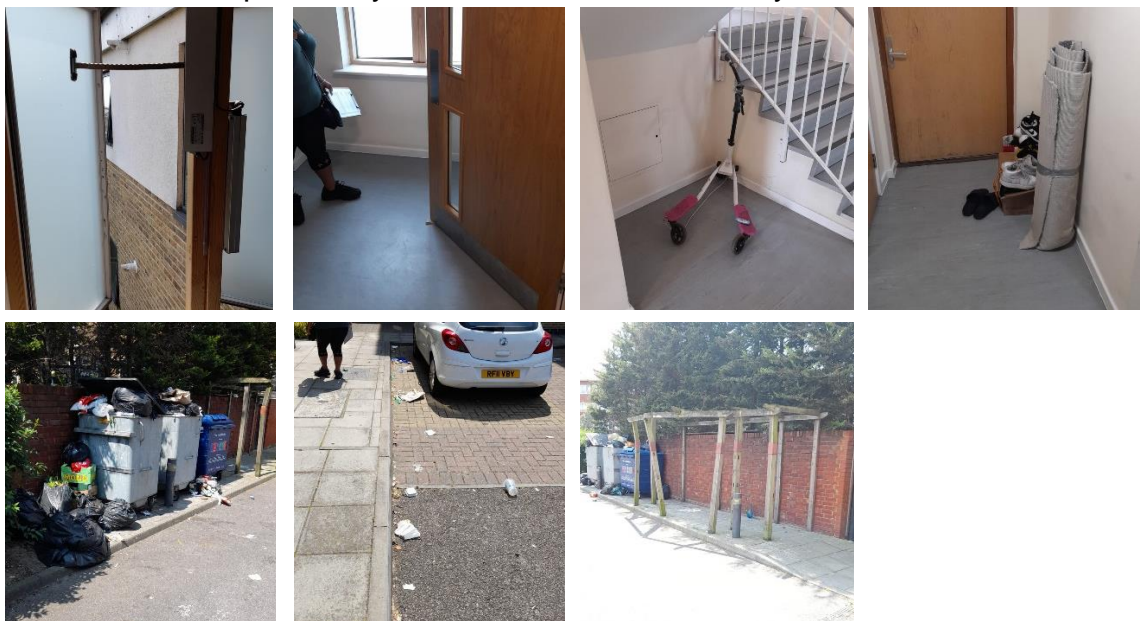
it was questioned how residents in terraced houses receive relevant updates and information without a noticeboard.

Grounds maintenance was generally very good apart from being overgrown in one particular area (subsequently we met the contractor who advised that sometimes they cannot access hedges in this area due to the volume of parked cars and have reported the issue). There were also a small number of maintenance / repairs issues in communal areas.



6.2 Bellfield Close (SE3, RB Greenwich)

These are two adjacent blocks including 18 apartments. A third-floor window automated closing mechanism was broken, highlighted as a health and safety issue. A small number of items were in the communal hallways and one fire-door was propped-open (removed). Three signs missing across two notice boards. Outside, the bins were overflowing, and litter was blown across the grounds. There was also a potentially unsafe wooden structure by the bins.



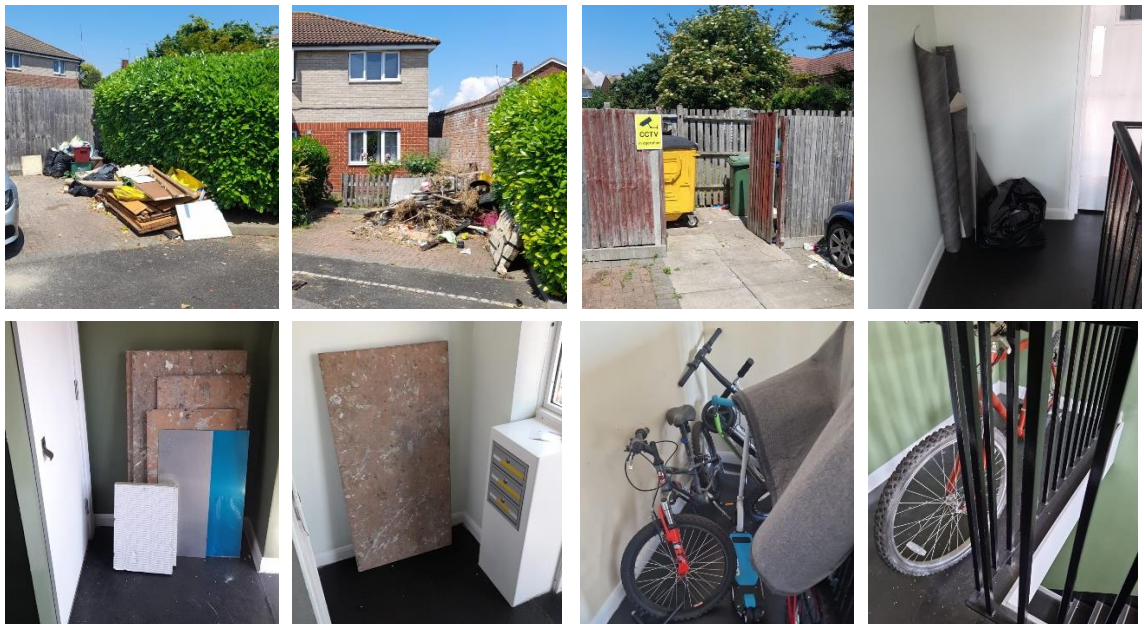
6.3 Dryad House (DA17, LB Bexley)

This is 23 apartments in a purpose-built block (Rosia House was not accessible on the day). The bin store had large items left in it, was messy and particularly smelly. There were also three signs missing from the notice board.



6.4 Sunset Close (DA8, LB Bexley)

There were 18 issues raised across these three blocks containing 22 apartments. In summary, these included: significant amounts of fly tipping, bin-store overflowing (and it was noted that there was no lock), items in the communal hallways (both residents' items and those that appeared to be left by contractors), poor cleaning standard in some areas and a sign missing in each notice board.



7.0 Key themes & recommendations

7.1 This round of estate grading indicates that, in this location, Hexagon is maintaining a good standard of estates. There are opportunities to learn lessons and grading highlighted a number of recurring themes and insights, which are summarised below, together with the Manager's response:

Consistency & improved standards

This years' grading resulted in 64% Gold standard, 36% Silver and 0% Bronze. This demonstrates a significant improvement to last years grading. Eight of the estates could be compared to previous gradings and of these, 25% showed a downward trend, 25% remained the same and 50% showed an upwards trend. This suggests a broad improvement in standards and also that there may be variation in the standards kept across different areas. It is acknowledged that area-specific issues may impact this however, can lessons be learned from the patches that are working well to help improve more challenging patches?

Manager's response:

Yes, we can review data on the well performing sites to identify any trends. We already review the data for lesser performing sites, and create action plans to address these issues.

We have also identified the need for a different approach regarding frequency of inspections. The new approach involves RAG rating our sites and focusing on underperforming sites by inspecting these monthly, instead of quarterly. Amber sites, will be inspected bi-monthly and Green sites will remain as quarterly inspections.

Part of the procurement process for our new Cleaning and Ground Maintenance contractor is that they are required to ensure all sites do not drop below a B grade between visits. Increased frequency in estate inspections will enable us to better track the performance of the new contractor.

Bin stores

The condition of bin stores was a notable issue, in some cases with large items left in the bin store / bins overflowing / access to bins blocked / very bad odours. It was also noted that bins stores are not always locked, leaving them more open to abuse. It is appreciated that this can be a challenging issue to manage with a range of variables including resident behaviour, site specific requirements, space available, fly tipping, local authority collection requirements and more. However, the Estate Graders would like to recommend a comprehensive strategy is developed to help address an issue that has been common across many inspections.

Manager's response:

We agree that the issues with bin stores are complex and multifaceted. We will devise an action plan which will assist Neighbourhood Officers in tackling these across their Estates.

We know that the longer bulk waste remains in situ, the more likely other residents are to add to this. The new contract will ensure bulk rubbish is removed within five working days of reporting, and we will proactively encourage residents to report this directly to the contractor, rather than waiting for a Neighbourhood Officer to address this during an inspection. Any sites that require replacement or renewal of locks will be reported to Gilmartins via the Neighbourhood Officer to ensure our bin stores remain secure at all times.

We will also explore recharging where we are able to identify who the rubbish belongs to. Targeting the small number of residents who don't dispose of their rubbish correctly should also assist in driving down this issue.

Notice boards

Every estate graded had at least one (often more) required signs missing from the notice board. The consistency in this trend indicates that something isn't working and it is suggested that the approach with Neighbourhood Officers on this is assessed to help ensure consistency.

It was also noted that street properties / terraced houses without internal communal areas tend not to have notice boards and it was questioned how these receive relevant updates and information without a noticeboard?

Manager's response:

We understand there is a lack of consistency regarding the information that is on noticeboards. This has been reviewed and we have agreed and launched a new noticeboard standard.

We have a number of vacancies which has contributed to the lack of consistency. We are nearly fully staffed and have informed all Neighbourhood Officers that their noticeboards should be updated during their next Estate Inspection.

Our Contract Monitors will spot check these and flag and further inconsistencies so these can be addressed urgently.

Those properties that do not have communal areas, or noticeboards receive updates currently via letter or email from the Neighbourhood Officer. Moving forward, once the resident portal is launched we will use this as a means of communicating with residents.

8.0 Actions & lessons learned

- 8.1 There were 65 actions identified through Estate Grading:
- 51 for neighbourhood services
 - 7 for responsive repairs
 - 7 for property safety
- 8.2 As of 15th September 2023, a summary of what's changed to date as per action status is:
- 41 Completed
 - 5 Partial completion
 - 6 Action not required
 - 3 In progress
 - 2 Long term / wider issue
 - 5 Not completed
 - 3 Update not provided

Additional update December 2023:

- *60 Completed*
 - *1 Partial completion*
 - *2 In progress*
 - *2 Long term / wider issue*
- 8.3 A status update on actions was initially requested within 4 weeks (by 14th July), all actions for Repairs, Property Safety and one Neighbourhood Team were updated within this timeframe. Due to vacant Neighbourhood Officer posts, an extension into August was agreed for the remaining actions, however some remain ongoing.
- 8.4 Lessons learned through the process have been in relation to actioning issues raised. Measures put in place over the past couple of years, and joint development with the respective teams have improved overall responsiveness to Estate Grading actions. However, this year delays due to resourcing challenges have had a significant impact on timelines. Consideration of known resourcing issues could help inform the estate selection process and/or updates on resourcing changes to help enable early responses.

9.0 Conclusion

- 9.1 This exercise remains a valuable scrutiny project and a good example of work partnership to drive improvement. Providing an independent, on-the-spot assessment of how our estates live up to our commitments under our Estate Services Standards, identifying where issues need to be addressed. Resulting in tangible benefits for residents. Although confirming delivery on the Action Plan has been delayed by Neighbourhoods resourcing issues.

The estates graded performed very well and demonstrated a good standard of estate maintenance. This was a significant improvement to last years' grading and although a general positive trend was noted, it also highlighted that there may be variation in standards across different areas. Other key themes raised were bin store management and missing notice board signage.

9.2 DG is asked to note the contents of this report and are invited to comment on the report and the accompanying action plan.