

A photograph showing a man in a dark jacket and cap smiling while holding a young child in a blue jacket. They are standing on a paved path in a grassy area. In the background, several tall, grey and beige residential towers are visible under a cloudy sky. The towers have many windows and balconies. The overall scene is somewhat desolate due to the overcast weather and the nature of the buildings.

ONCE CLAIMED BY SOME TO BE THE TALLEST RESIDENTIAL FLATS IN EUROPE, THE RED ROAD FLATS HAVE BEEN PLACED ON DEMOLITION ROW. BUT BEHIND THE DILAPIDATED FACADES AND THE DEPRESSING HEADLINES, A MORE COMPLEX SOCIAL TALE IS TO BE TOLD, THAT CONTINUES TO EVOLVE TODAY. URBAN REALM INVITED PHOTOGRAPHER AND ARCHITECT TOM MANLEY TO VISIT TO GAIN A SNAPSHOT OF THE SCHEME IN ITS DYING DAYS

Many residents remain surprisingly upbeat despite less than salubrious surrounds

Driving towards Red Road a feeling of trepidation was heightened as I approached the towers. The estates troubled reputation for antisocial crime and the quick decline in the quality of the environment it has provided for many of its residents added to my feeling of unease. A familiar presence to the northern skyline as one enters or leaves the city, was suddenly now creating new perspectives, as I got close. On arrival a cost cutter store nestled beside a few other dilapidated and boarded up shops at the heart of the estate. It's perhaps now, with nowhere else to go, that the sheer scale of this place within the landscape is realised, looming above the predominantly suburban style surroundings.

I was here at short notice, my camera with me to capture what I could of the condition and current state of this area. Soon after arriving another photographer pulled up and quickly fired off some shots before retreating out of here. It is not clear for how long the physical scars and signs of neglect have been so prominent and there appears to be little concern for the remaining fabric and built environment that residents interact with.

Much research and statistics exist on places like this to highlight key problems they face. Although this information is crucial in fully understanding the facts shaping a place like the Red Road flats - in an attempt to put expectations and stereotypes to one side I was curious as to what extent the myth of the place rings true with reality here.

As someone who has lived in Glasgow for some time without visiting this place, I can only appreciate how complex the current situation has become, and the many sensitive issues facing the community here. The demolition of buildings integral to a community, along with the associated relocation of residents and regeneration of neighborhoods has echoes across Scotland and the UK, both historically and in the present wave of clearances, which form part of Glasgow City Council's regeneration programme. High Rise living may be coming to an end

in Glasgow, but new tensions are created, in expectation of individual's uncertain future and ongoing personal journeys. This is further highlighted with many residents often seeking asylum, becoming used to constant displacement and relocation.

There are parallels here with the ideals of the place as a whole. As if heralding a brave new world the area was declared to bring all the amenities of modern life to the area of Springburn and beyond. Constructed between 1964 & 1969 it was hoped that high rise living with lock ups, garages, and landscaping would provide a new alternative - a solution to the urgent housing needs of the time.

Staring into the sparse walls of the towers, a mesmerising grid of windows signifies the many stories and lives, which have been contained behind these facades. Perhaps not typical but symbolising the well documented failure and isolation of many of these areas "just knock me down with the building - Don't bother shifting

» Staring into the sparse walls of the towers, a mesmerising grid of windows signifies the many stories and lives, which have been contained behind these facades «

me" is a harsh reaction by one resident. An array of boarded up windows, now a poignant demonstration that the end of an era has been reached for Red Road. The impact of such an environment may be to blame for draining the identity out of communities and their sense of belonging, but many people here have shown strength and optimism for their future. A series of videos and artwork contributing to an exhibition 'Multi-Story' at GOMA reflects community art led programmes over the last few years, and goes as far as celebrating the legacy of the Red Road flats.

Despite all this, an ominous calm pervades the area whilst I was here; - courteous smiles, impeccable politeness and the sense of a community getting on with things manages to override the real crisis many residents have found themselves in. One resident told me he quite liked the towers, referring to

their magnificence amongst the wider landscape, - "they look better than a lot of the stuff nearby" hinting that perhaps leaving nature to take its course might be a more suitable and fitting end.

Of course personal circumstances can strengthen or isolate any attachment to an area and good quality, imaginative design can help to relieve pressure on a community like this. With the cost of continued repair and upkeep becoming unmanageable, and seeking a brighter future for the citizens of Red Road, the preparation for demolition has now commenced, and is due for completion by 2016/17. The future for the site has yet to be decided by Glasgow City Council, and the partnerships overseeing regeneration will need to decide how to respond to the legacy that these 9 towers will leave on Springburn and its wider location.

These buildings create a powerful sight on this city's horizon; their demolition will further scar the landscape and leave

a presence in the foundation marks and open spaces left behind. To me it would seem strange to concrete over and start again - filling in the gap with a sea of houses that seamlessly blend into the immediate and regenerated surroundings. As if Ground Zero, a sensitive response should be investigated that acknowledges the areas past and impact within Glasgow. Over the last 5 decades many different groups of tenants have come and gone and the future success of the area may well depend on establishing exactly who any future regeneration is for. How the needs of these users can best be provided for through design, infrastructure, cultural resources and the opportunities open to the community will be as bigger challenge as ever, especially to sustain a level of interest and development once all the hype has settled.

Tom Manley is available for photographic assignments and commissions.





Clockwise from top left - The estate is not highly regarded by many; two local kids, Peter and Danny, have a ball; tag you're it; Another local poses; You do not want to be put in The Brig





Top - Road to nowhere Above - As The Special's might say 'We're living in a ghost town' Right - Red Road is not for sufferers of vertigo

