

Cecil Rhodes House (now Park View), St Pancras Road, Somers Town, Camden, built by St Pancras DLO, late 1940s.

Overcoming barriers to large scale retrofit of council estates: the role of direct labour

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Barriers 1: Vocational Education and Training (VET): not workforce needed

- **Insulation**:
  - scandal, 30,000 homes with defects (e.g. damp and mould), 98% of those awarded Warm Homes grants.
  - only recognised L2 apprenticeship July 2026, no providers and not yet L3
  - recognised occupation in e.g. Canada and Germany for decades, 3-4 years VET

- **Low carbon heating technician** apprenticeship 2023 but few

- **Construction VET crisis** 100,000 construction students in FE Colleges but only 16% transition to apprenticeships (10% electricians) and 47% drop out – estimated require 240,000 over next 10 years but only 13,110 completions 2024/5

**Need comprehensive VET system for zero carbon construction in well-equipped FE workshops & classrooms and monitored work experience at L3 minimum and including climate literacy

Barriers 2: Construction labour market

- **Structure of firms**: 99% SME, 90% less than 10 employees, Plus, half workforce 'self-employed' (79% bricklayers and painters & decorators) not capacity, time, scope of work, portfolio of contracts to offer work experience/ apprenticeships over 2-3 years.
- **Fragmented employment** through subcontracting/sub-sub contracting impeding integrated teamworking
- **Exclusion of unions**, especially from VET system and in housebuilding
- **Exclusion of women** and many BAME: women c.1% site workforce

**Need direct, inclusive and stable employment and teamworking under union-agreed conditions for retrofitting, not fragmented, intermittent, exclusive employment

Why not DLOs?





- Already undertaking much or all of repair/maintenance of council housing, especially with insourcing e.g. Glasgow, Islington, Camden
- Built many post-war estates and refurbished street properties up to 1980s Thatcher restrictions











DLOs can train workforce and employ women





- Union negotiated employment and working conditions, including regular hours and safe conditions (e.g. fought against asbestos and oil-based paints)
- Can provide work placements for apprentices and L2 trainees and ensure good quality training and achievement of recognised qualifications
- Many already exist and are expanding





Table 1: Number of women employed by some Inner London DLOs in 1989

	Fully skilled	Adult trainees	Apprentices	Total
Camden	4		11	15
Hackney	12	29	6	47
Haringey	60	24	18	102
Greenwich	9	3		12
Islington	8	7		15
Lambeth	10	18	4	32
Lewisham	3	23	17	43
Totals	**106**	**104**	**56**	**266**

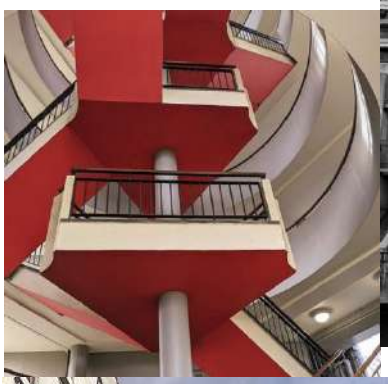
(After Pyke, 1989)

Retrofit schemes imagined, planned and in the process

- Camden:
  - scheme for Kentish Town
  - Alexander Road Estate
- Islington:
  - Half Moon estate
  - Bevin Court
  - Harvist Estate















What about local authority building departments for retrofitting ?

- **Maintaining social housing** e.g. *Camden* manages 32,000 dwellings, 34% of the population lives in social housing, *Islington* manages 36,600 dwellings, with over 40% of the population living in social housing, the highest of any English authority.
- **Providing VET** in partnership with Further Education colleges
- **Providing a check on private contractors**
- **Providing safeguard against bankrupt contractors**
- **Providing complete service** from planning, design to manufacture to retrofit
- **Carrying out comprehensive good quality retrofit programmes** under stable employment, safe working conditions and decent wage
- **Direct employment**, reduced subcontracting, union-organized
- **Inclusive**, challenging white male exclusivity of construction sector
- **Supported** by TUC, Unite, Greener Jobs Alliance, Retrofit for the Future
- **Politically and economically accountable**