

Property news

## "All ball games allowed": football stars Rio Ferdinand, Bobby Zamora and Mark Noble team up to build social housing with sport centres

After growing up on council estates, three past and present West Ham football stars have pledged to give something back by encouraging private investors to build public and social housing centred around sporting facilities and communities - with "no poor doors".

NICK CURTIS | 10 minutes ago | 0 comments



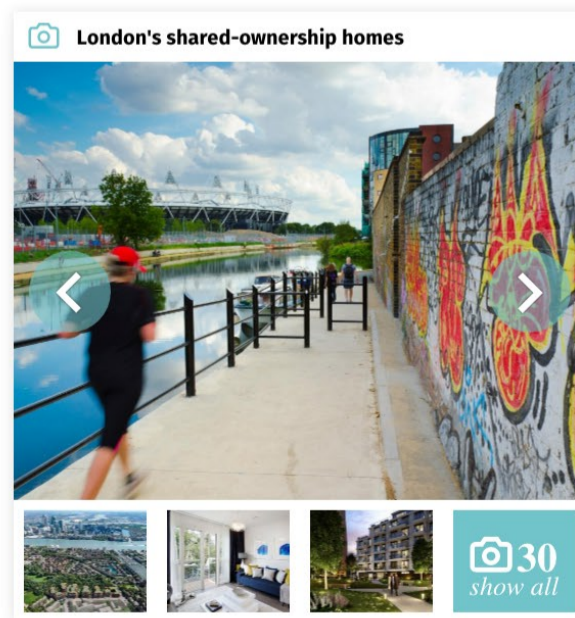
The Legacy Foundation: each scheme will be centred around sporting and community facilities on brownfield land owned by local councils in deprived areas  
Daniel Lynch

**You wouldn't necessarily expect three footballers to come up with a solution to the lack of social, affordable or key worker housing in London and around the country. But that's what Rio Ferdinand, Bobby Zamora and Mark Noble hope to do.**

The three current or former West Ham players have formed the Legacy Foundation to encourage private investors to build mixed schemes of privately rentable and public housing - with the emphasis on the public side - each centred around sporting and community facilities, on brownfield land owned by cash-strapped local councils in depressed areas.

"We all come from council estates, in poor boroughs, and we all wanted to give something back to the communities where we were brought up," says Peckham-born former England captain Ferdinand, 37. West Ham skipper Noble, 28, from Canning Town, says it's not just about housing, but putting "sport - not just football - and education at the heart of each scheme".

Zamora, 35, from Barking and now a striker for Brighton and Hove Albion, adds: "We don't want to use the word 'estate' for Legacy schemes: we want them to be communities."



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## LEGACY

Publication: Homes & Property (Evening Standard)

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Noble says he remembers “moving house seven times or so in four years around Newham, in social housing, when I was a boy”, and that the three of them want to provide the kind of facilities for kids that didn’t exist for them. “We can speak to a council quite comfortably about these issues, because we have lived through this system,” says Ferdinand. Their plans, currently focused on east London and Bedfordshire, involve community, continuity and longevity.

### **An inspirational guy**

The idea took hold when property investment adviser Richard Walsh mentioned to Ferdinand a similar model in the commercial housing market as an investment opportunity. Ferdinand, who already runs a charity in his own name, suggested a focus on social housing and introduced the “Legacy component” of the sports and education centres.

He mentioned the resulting plan to Zamora last year when the two were playing for QPR (Ferdinand subsequently retired in May).

“He’s an inspirational guy and it struck me straight away as a great idea I’d love to be a part of,” says Zamora. “I go fishing with Mark and we are really close and played together for a long time. We came from the same area, so I mentioned it to him the possibility of working in Newham. We all got together, chatted about the aspirations of where we wanted to be, and it has evolved really quickly.”

That said, they kept a lid on their plans while they worked out the details. “We need to make it clear we ain’t just three footballers who just sit here,” says Noble. “We understand the scheme. We have sat in rooms with Richard [Walsh, who shaped the business model] and some of the most influential people in the industry for the last 10 months, and we understand it fully. We’re not just the faces of it.”

Ferdinand says it’ll take three to four years to prove that the housing model and the legacy programme work and are sustainable. “I’m chomping at the bit to get started,” says Zamora.



**The lowdown:** the target is to have a minimum of 40 per cent social, affordable or key worker housing in each development, with an aspiration for 50 per cent

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### **Social, affordable or key worker housing**

Legacy and its partner investors and developers will build according to each council's dictates – with a higher proportion of three-bedroom flats for social-tenant families if that is where the greater need is, or affordable one-beds for key workers, or a greater proportion of commercially rentable flats. The property will then be let and managed by the council (there is no sales component to the scheme, though Legacy may explore shared ownership in future).

Zamora says that a minimum of 40 per cent of units will be social, affordable or key worker housing in each development, with an aspiration to 50 per cent. This accords with the 50 per cent target that's been kicked around between mayoral candidates Sadiq Khan and Zac Goldsmith, with whom the three players are keen to talk.

Room sizes and specifications will be uniform throughout each scheme, with different types of tenants mixed in together: there will be no "poor doors" or social apartheid. Councils will retain ownership of the land and will own the buildings at the end of a lease period of "30, 40 or 50 years", says Walsh.

### **Sports and community centres**

Revenue from rental will be split between the council, to manage the estate and fill depleted coffers; the developer and investors during the course of the lease; and the Legacy Foundation.

The latter tranche will be redeployed to fund the sports and community centres – and potentially schools and hospitals – in the schemes.

These will provide activities in the tricky period between 3pm and 6pm when kids have left school and their parents are still at work, plus subsidised crèches, adult education classes, and visits by Legacy's founders and other inspirational figures. "I hope the kids using the facility will one day be the community leaders running it," says Ferdinand.

There will be tie-ups with local sports clubs of all kinds, enabling talented youngsters to be scouted early. Noble jokes that their schemes will be covered in signs saying "All Ball Games Allowed".

The lives of Ferdinand, Zamora and Noble were transformed by football but they know sport isn't the answer for everyone. "It's not like there is nobody with any brains in inner London estates," says Zamora. "We want to pick up on the bright sparks, and get those guys on board, do courses in architecture and so on..."

Legacy is negotiating to build 1,500 homes in the Kingsland area of Houghton Regis in Bedfordshire. Noble adds that they have had encouraging meetings with Kim Bromley-Derry, chief executive of Newham, where their celebrity as Hammers players carries a lot of clout. Housing minister Brandon Lewis has backed their plans.

They hope to break ground on their first project in early 2017, with the first flats ready for moving into a year after that.

Visit [www.legacyfoundation.co.uk](http://www.legacyfoundation.co.uk) ■

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