



Elkins beats COVID to deliver for Southwark residents

Elkins was engaged by the London Borough of Southwark to make major renovations to 65 properties on its Brookstone Court estate in a deprived area of Peckham Rye. The £1.7 million project began in November 2019 but no sooner had work had started, than it stopped. The outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent UK lockdown in March 2020, meant works had to be suspended for two months.



Overview

Name: Brookstone Court

Client: London Borough of Southwark

Type: Refurbishment

Duration: 12 months

Value: £1.7m



Scope

- Scaffolding assembly
- Window overhaul
- Façade and structural repairs
- Roof replacement
- Electric main upgrade
- Communal walkways, repairs and coatings
- FRA works
- Communal decorations
- Lightning protection
- FED replacement



Benefits

- ✓ Residents fully engaged
- ✓ Effective COVID safety measures implemented quickly
- ✓ Delays minimalised
- ✓ No extra cost to client because of COVID-related issues
- ✓ Improved living conditions for residents

Rapid response to COVID

Of course, nobody could have predicted the dramatic impact of the pandemic but because Elkins has well-established processes for dealing with unexpected significant events, it was able to quickly create a revised programme of works and budget. Rather than merely reacting to programme slippage, the contracts, procurement and commercial teams replanned resources and deliverables, identifying and prioritising tasks on the critical path, and creating more time to cope with anticipated supply problems and any bad weather delays.

With effective COVID-19 safety protocols and working practices put in place to allow work in residents' homes, the site was reopened in (..) with a new realistic plan for completion in December 2020, just three months later than originally scheduled. Because of residents' concerns over COVID, the amount of internal work was reduced.

"It is always vital for us to have continuous communication with residents on projects like this," explains Elkins' contracts manager, Michael Bailey, "but in this case it was even more important because of their understandable concerns over COVID safety, and to manage their expectations on completion dates because of the delays and disruption caused by lockdown."

Additional support for residents

Indeed, resident liaison officer, Daniela Grozabu, was on site between 8.00am and 5.00pm every day throughout the project, operating an open-door policy, so anybody could come to the site office at any time to express any concerns or get information about the works. Communication with residents was frequent and wide-ranging despite the difficulties resulting from social distancing rules, including a virtual coffee morning and provision of a 'bike doctor' during half term, in support of regular telephone, email and newsletter communications.

Replacing the electricity main meant generators had to be installed for several days to ensure continuity of supply. This was vital not only because some vulnerable residents relied on power for their essential medical equipment but also says Grozabu, "because a number of tenants had tropical fish tanks."

Elkins also had to consider the wellbeing of vulnerable residents in other ways because COVID restrictions meant the local authority was unable to make carers or representatives available on the estate. So, Elkins had to act as the advocate for tenants through its contacts at Southwark social services, so they could make decisions on residents' behalf. Additionally, Elkins' diversity policy meant it not only had a range of language skills among the workforce at its disposal to reach residents for whom English was not their first language, but also to provide valuable insight into different cultural needs on the estate.

Successful project completion

The project was finished on the revised deadline and as well as a reduction in costs amounting to £200,000 because of the scaled-back interior works, costs for COVID protocols and time extensions for additional fire risk assessment and roofing works introduced late into the project, were also waived.

Anne Blackburn, Southwark's contract administrator for the project, was delighted with every aspect of the project.



"We have worked with Elkins for many years, and we know the quality and value of work is always first rate, but as important is the effort and commitment they put into their interaction with our residents. Obviously COVID made things especially difficult for everybody and people on the estate were extremely pleased with the additional safety measures put in place and that they were consulted at every stage of the project"

Anne Blackburn, Southwark's contract administrator

Elkins even took on a trainee roofer from the estate during the project and carried out some voluntary planting and gardening work on overgrown parts of the estate.

"One resident was concerned the scaffolding would block out the light from a quite spectacular pagoda she had in her garden," says Blackburn, "so Elkins erected the scaffolding around it. That really is going the extra mile."