

North Benwell, Newcastle, U.K.

In 1997, after years of rising crime and property neglect, North Benwell was declared a Renewal Area. As part of the renewal works a homesteading scheme was commenced. Five pairs of contiguous, derelict, Tyneside flats were selected for the project. The scheme converted these properties from flats back into 3-story, family homes. In doing so it also changed an entire neighbourhood.



Ownership was granted for the symbolic price of £1. Over 180 individuals registered an interest in the scheme, and selection was made via a set of clear criteria, most notably financial need/ability, family size, and a strong commitment to the area. Owners had to contribute £12,000 towards

improvements, and further funds came from Housing Investment Programme grants and local government regeneration funding.

Owners agreed to remain in their homes for at least 3 years - any shorter period would incur a financial penalty. If a property was eventually sold on to another owner occupier, one third of the increase in value would be returned to the Council; if the sale was to a landlord, then full grant repayment would have to be made.

The results have been overwhelmingly positive. The five new homeowners took a long-term view towards their new neighbourhood, and their proactive presence has directly contributed to the ongoing regeneration of North Benwell. Crime has dropped and vacancy rates are at normal levels. A clear and classic example of how targeted homesteading schemes can plant the seed for broader regeneration efforts.