

'Estate Improvement Scheme' Progress Report - Year 4, 2022/23

Purpose and methods of the scheme

Begun in April 2019, the Estates Improvement Scheme (EIS) is a £5 million pot of capital funding for locally-led improvements to the Council's housing estates. Proposals must:

- add value to the estate as an asset, and
- not substitute for planned maintenance (though works from the planned maintenance programme may be incorporated where appropriate)

EIS has a dedicated surveyor. Its steering group includes council staff and police. They liaise with the Housing Development Agency to ensure projects do not conflict with future development plans. Successful EIS proposals meet at least one of the following objectives, but most proposals meet several of them:

- Build out future cost, as a 'spend to save' initiative with a better design
- 'Design out' crime and anti-social behaviour
- Make a visible and positive difference to the aesthetics of an estate
- Contribute to strengthening the community on the estate
- Improve the health and safety or well-being of those living on the estate

Most projects cost less than £10,000, while a few costing over £100,000. Ideas for applications come from resident engagement, walkabouts and ward councillors. Affected residents are consulted in writing before a project goes ahead.

Reviewing 2022/23, year 4 of EIS

The first three years, though slowed by Covid, saw about 75 projects completed. But the pace accelerated enormously by year 4. Stakeholders had accumulated a great deal of insight into the needs of the estates, and mechanisms for commissioning and delivering these small-scale improvements were now well-oiled. The year 2022/23 saw approximately the following numbers of EIS projects done:

- 243 local estate improvement projects
- 85 repairs or replacements to fencing or railing
- 295 street lights upgraded on estates

The upgrading of street lights cost about £700,000. The other improvement projects cost about £800,000 in all, making a total EIS spend of about £1.5 million in 2022/23.

Grassroots quotes describe the estates as being "transformed" by the scale and nature of this EIS work. Especially in the past year, unsightly problems that had lingered on are described as having been "blitzed" - as opposed to residents having to wait perhaps several years for a planned maintenance programme to reach or resolve them.

The year's EIS projects are too numerous to profile individually, as this report did in earlier years. Now, by year 4 of 5, it seems more useful to overview some themes and impacts that have emerged from the work. Although pace and output have increased greatly, the *type* of projects requested from EIS has not: about eight recurrent themes continue to dominate demand for EIS improvements. This report shows:

- examples of each theme
- the impact of solutions delivered by EIS
- the council policies and agendas served by these projects

- potential considerations ahead as EIS approaches the end of its five-year funding and work

EIS projects done in 2022/23

Many of this year's projects were the latest phase in layers of improvement that EIS has brought to specific estates over time. Examples were:

- installing more scooter stores at Lichfield sheltered scheme
- building on previous years' works to prevent anti-social behaviour at Barnwell Road
- adding hard standing or improving pathways around last year's installations, e.g. at Anstey Way

Some of this year's projects were improvements drawn from deliberate 'trial and error' projects of previous years. Many early EIS projects were done as 'trials'. Most worked well, and were replicated on other estates. Few turned out to be 'errors', but those were rectified this year, e.g. by removing a bike store from Augustus Close and installing it, renovated, into Atkins Close.

However, the biggest projects in terms of funds invested this year were the 'citywide' ones, which have grown in scope each year. They mainly involve:

- upgrading the street lighting on estates (the largest single spend this year)
- replacing fences and railings, or installing new ones

Themes that have emerged

Basically, EIS helps estates to move on from original designs that were laid out decades ago, towards improvements that are required by today's lifestyles and policies. So it is logical that cross-cutting themes have emerged. This year, as in previous years, these themes have been around:

1. bicycles and scooters
2. bins
3. gates, locks and security
4. obstacles to cleaning
5. pathways and thoroughfares
6. fencing
7. lighting
8. health and safety through defibrillators

Taken in isolation or viewed by an outsider, many of these themes - such as bins - can seem small issues. But the examples below show how they can cascade into further problems, degrading the quality of life and community on the estate. Often, the issue is only noticed by those living or working on the estate day to day. But unaddressed, it can cause persistent dissatisfaction among residents towards the Council. The examples show how the past year's EIS projects have often been able to solve these issues in relatively quick, inexpensive ways.

EIS has revealed how some of the most recurrent themes - like bikes, bins and fencing - may be hangovers from the original design of an estate, that haven't kept pace with changing lifestyles and expectations today. We see below how EIS projects are updating such facilities to reflect today's:

- lifestyle changes (e.g. pressure on bins as households have more rubbish to get rid of)
- new policy requirements (e.g. targets for recycling)

- new needs (e.g. pedestrians needing more protection as more cars pass and park near them)
- new official standards (e.g. the requirement for defibrillators at sheltered schemes)
- new aspirational standards (e.g. for more privacy and enclosure of balconies and patios, as life gets more hectic)

Strengths of EIS

The brief examples below show that EIS - standing outside the long cycles of planned maintenance work - has been able to fill gaps and meet these needs in ways that large-scale, rolling maintenance plans cannot do, either in such quick time, nor in such diverse ways. By comparison with long-term rolling maintenance programmes, EIS projects are designed to be:

- *quicker*: they can, as staff put it, “get a broken bollard replaced in a week”, as opposed to perhaps waiting for a multi-year fencing programme to roll around and deal with it
- *more responsive*: projects respond specifically and quickly to residents’ local request, whereas planned works can seem in residents’ eyes to ignore or delay that response
- *more flexible*: EIS has the freedom to use a variety of tailored, innovative materials and designs, and small, local contractors
- *more local*, with visuals specifically designed and commissioned to suit the needs of ‘that corner of that estate’
- *able to combine multiple improvements*: in some examples below, fences had been lying on the ground long-term, with grass broken up into mud; EIS was able to install a new fence, resurface the ground and do planting - all together in one corner - whereas in a rolling maintenance programme those could be separate work-streams, perhaps even done in different years

1. Bicycles and mobility scooters

Post-Grenfell, fire safety through ‘Zero Tolerance’ of items left in communal areas has become a cornerstone of council policy on the estates. A secondary policy is that the Council wants residents to do less driving and more cycling. Both these policies require estate infrastructure: residents need safe, secure and easily accessible parking for those bicycles, away from communal passageways. Similarly, the Council wants residents with mobility problems to be able to live as independently as possible. This policy too requires dedicated storage and recharging for their mobility scooters. And new bike and scooter stores, in turn, require networks of clean, level pathways and hard standings that are all in good repair.

So the three main Council policies that are advanced through the very numerous EIS projects that install bike and scooter stores are:

- fire safety through ‘Zero Tolerance’ of items stored in communal areas
- promoting cycling
- promoting independent living for older and disabled people

Bikes and scooters example: Lichfield & Neville

Problem: A Fire Risk Assessment had flagged Lichfield block 105-115 as needing a solution: it had several bikes and scooters habitually blocking the communal area, and recharging wires for scooters were trailing out of windows and across pathways.

EIS Proposal: Install 3 mobility-scooter shelters and a shelter for 6 bikes.



Lichfield and Neville mobility and bike storage



*A new bike store
At Augustus Way*

Advantages: The work removed fire risks and trip hazards, as well as making the area more attractive and easier to maintain.

EIS criteria met:

- ✓ Build out future cost, as a 'spend to save' initiative with a better design
- ✓ Design out crime and anti-social behaviour
- ✓ Make a visible and positive difference to the aesthetics of an estate
- ✓ Contribute to strengthening the community on the estate
- ✓ Improve the health and safety or well-being of those living on the estate

Consultation: From 1 to 22 July 2022 (it was a 'Notice of Intent' rather than a consultation, as the work was a fire safety requirement)

Cost: Less than £40,000 in all (for 6 stores at approx. £5,000 each + 5 concrete bases with slab paths + relocation of clothes dryers, costing £6,270 + vat)

2. Bins

The original design of the Council's estates usually planned for a smaller volume of bins than is needed today, now that households generate a larger volume of rubbish to dispose of. Traditionally, bins were also more mobile, less robust, less capacious, and without hard standing beneath them. Today, this causes overflowing and fly-tipping, which attracts vermin. The grass under and around these bins erodes to mud, soiling nearby pathways. And this further discourages proper dumping and recycling, as well as lowering the image and 'self esteem' of the estate.

The Council's 'Zero Tolerance' policy insisting that residents never leave items in communal areas requires the provision of adequate, clean and easily accessible bins for dumping and recycling. So the main Council policies advanced through EIS projects for new bin stores and clean hard standings under them are:

- fire safety through 'Zero Tolerance' of items stored in communal areas
- promoting recycling
- ending fly-tipping

Bins example: Ashbury & Golding

Problem: This need too was flagged-up as part of a Fire Risk Assessment. Individual recycling bins were being left in communal areas (as well as bicycles being chained to handrails).

EIS Proposal: Install new concrete pads for recycling bins outside of the block, so bins would no longer be stored under stairs as a fire hazard. Install 6 lockable recycling bin stores. Also lay 10 concrete bases for flats' blue wheelie bins (instead of them too being stored in the stairwells). Put up instructional A3 waste signs beside each concrete pad. At some properties, install a safety fence by the bin's hard-standing.

Advantage: Waste bins will now be locked, reducing the risk of arson and the causes of fire. Secured bin cupboards will reduce fly-tipping. The estate and its path will be cleaner and tidier, with locked bins meaning waste can no longer blow around.

EIS criteria met:

- ✓ Build out future cost, as a 'spend to save' initiative with a better design
- ✓ Design out crime and anti-social behaviour
- ✓ Make a visible and positive difference to the aesthetics of an estate
- ✓ Contribute to strengthening the community on the estate
- ✓ Improve the health and safety or well-being of those living on the estate

Consultation: Residents were notified in writing between 31 June and 17 July 2022. They did not have the option to veto, as the works were required as part of the Fire Risk Assessment.

Cost: £2,500 for each concrete base and galvanised metal bin store fitted.



New hard standing under wheelie bins, with new signage to guide usage, at Ashbury & Golding



Ashbury's secure bin store being fabricated

The hard standing under the Ashbury wheelie bins above shows how even a small fitting can make a big difference: the bins became clean, usable, easy to access both for residents and waste staff, and they now enhance rather than damage the area that they are in.



Similar provision of a secured, hardstanding store for recycling bins at Tweedale

3. Gates, locks and security

Originally the Council's estates were often designed with relatively open layouts and thoroughfares that left them quite porous to the wider community (in the interests of integration, equality and aesthetics, at the time). But with today's lifestyles, this yields many zones on estates where residents now experience various types of need for more enclosure and security.

At the 'softest' level, EIS found residents on some estates requesting more sense of privacy, so they can 'shut the door behind them' on the increasingly hectic world outside. This sometimes applied to the collective entrance to their flat-block, or sometimes to their own private balcony or patio, which they now wanted more shielded than before.

At the next level of inconvenience, some fully open estates are mis-used by non-residents who use them as a 'rat run' to drive bikes or motorbikes through, either for a speedy gain of time or as noisy, dangerous recreation. So EIS also gets asked to add enclosures simply to increase physical safety, including to prevent children running out into roadways or parking areas that are now busier than in the past.

Finally, some estates, like Bermuda, have been in serious need of gated security to prevent a range of anti-social behaviour by rough sleepers, loiterers, drug-dealers or gangs exploiting the communal areas of these estates or flat-blocks.

So the main Council policies advanced through EIS projects providing new gates, locks and security are:

- health and safety
- preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour
- building a perception of safety
- building a sense of community

Tailor-made gates and partitioning have become a particular forte of EIS. The scheme has been able to provide completely individual solutions for different estates. For gates, the style, colour and aesthetics of each 'gated solution' have been tailored for the specific estate they were going into. Tailor-made gating has been see-through or opaque, perforated where airing was needed, plain or decorative, able to wrap around awkward angles, and so on.



New gating at Upperhall



New security gating at Staffordshire

Security example 1: at Wulfstan Way flats, garages and shops

Problem: Residents had been complaining that the driveway down the side of their flats and the garage forecourt was being used for anti-social behaviour and drug-dealing, particularly in the evenings. The tenants and their Housing Officer requested a locked gate across the access route.

EIS Proposal: Install a locked gate on the access route. (A similar gate was installed with success at Ditchburn Place sheltered scheme.)

Advantage: Communal areas are now much safer as the gate closes the area off, to be accessed only by its tenants, shop keepers and garage-users. The area is now more secure, and maintenance due to fly-tipping has been reduced.

EIS criteria met:

- ✓ Build out cost eg. better designed
- ✓ Design out crime and anti-social behaviour
- ✓ Make a visible and positive difference to the aesthetics of an estate
- ✓ Contribute to strengthening the community on the estate
- ✓ Improving the health and well-being of those living on the estate

Cost: £3,500



One of a pair of similar new security gates at Ditchburn Place sheltered scheme, Which cost £595 each

Security example 2: CCTV at Bermuda

Problem: EIS improvements had already been made at Bermuda in the previous year, to prevent rough sleepers accessing the area and causing anti-social behaviour. But another EIS project in the past year was needed to finish dealing with what had been a serious anti-social behaviour problem.

Solution: Install CCTV cameras with transmission to Huntingdon. And to prevent rough sleeping, manufacture and install security gates at either end of the corridor at Gibbons House.

Advantage: These works will further improve security and fire-safety, reduce anti-social behaviour, and improve the aesthetics of the area. They will reduce damage to the estate, and the costs of removing graffiti. They will also reduce complaints from residents, and provide evidence if anti-social behaviour recurs there.

EIS criteria met:

- ✓ Design out crime and anti-social behaviour
- ✓ Make a visible and positive difference to the aesthetics of an estate
- ✓ Contribute to strengthening the community on the estate
- ✓ Improve the health and safety or well-being of those living on the estate

Consultation: From 26 May to 15 June 2022

New CCTV installation at Bermuda



4. Cleaning and access

Traditionally, spaces under stairwells in flat blocks were built to be open, for reasons of aesthetics, budget and to let air circulate. But over time, as households accumulated more possessions, understairs spaces have attracted stored left items in there, causing fire and trip hazards that contravene the Council's 'Zero Tolerance' policy today. Open understairs spaces also attract dead leaves and litter that blow in and pile up there, making cleaning and

maintenance more difficult. EIS has provided a single solution for very many such sites on the estates, with the perforated, tailor-made panel pictured below, which allows ventilation while preventing all the problems above.



Perforated steel mesh under stairs for fire safety and cleaning at Rush Grove, Tenby, Cherry Hinton and many other blocks

Another example of the site-specific, local flexibility of enclosures provided by EIS projects is this simple, inexpensive but effective mesh enclosure (pictured, right) at Hanover Court. It prevents what had been a severe fouling mess left by birds, but without obscuring the view or blocking light or ventilation.



5. Paths and thoroughfares

We saw above that some council estates get used as ‘rat-runs’ by riders of bikes and motorbikes, either for their convenience or for off-road recreation.

As well as installing tailor-made gating and partitions, some EIS projects have redefined or re-enclosed pathways with new fencing and / or bollards.

At some sites, without actually installing locked gates, EIS has installed new signage that now officially bars entry to motorbikes, as in this example (pictured, right) at Gunhild Close play area.



6. Fencing

We have seen above that EIS has met new needs for various types of gating and enclosures, for various purposes. However, residents’ calls for repairs to the *fencing* on their estates has been a perennial topic for many years. It was for many years ranked as a relatively low priority by the Council, and residents were used to being told that their rotten or falling fence must wait, perhaps years, for the planned maintenance programme to reach it. Though budgets and maintenance do have to be planned in long-term programmes in this way, fencing issues may have generated a disproportionate amount of lingering dissatisfaction among residents.

On the estates, EIS is seen to have excelled at tackling these fencing dissatisfactions, for three reasons. Firstly, unlike many less obvious investments, fencing has a highly visual 'kerb appeal', as the first thing one sees on approaching an estate, or part of an estate. Even experienced staff have been surprised at how much of a facelift some new fencing can provide for a whole estate, and how effective it can be for protecting a specific area, demarcating usage, and inspiring pride.

Secondly, these new fences have benefitted greatly from the local promptness enabled by EIS, compared to planned maintenance programmes. Out of 85 fencing jobs done in the past year, staff describe over 50 as having been "prompt, responsive repair jobs" (like the first example pictured below) that were able to be done very quickly by local contractors.

The third reason for EIS successes with fencing is, again, the scheme's flexibility. As with EIS gating, its fencing too has been tailor-made for each estate's needs. Even the six examples pictured below show the wide range of designs, materials, heights, colours and usages involved, depending on the needs of that estate, or that part of that estate.



Example of a quick, small fencing repair, rapidly commissioned and completed



New balcony fencing and enclosure at Upperhall



New wooden estate fencing at Whitehill



Elegant black metal fencing separating Greystoke from the road, complemented with new Spring planting



New green metal fencing at Heatherfield, with complementary planting done through a separate EIS proposal



Very different galvanised fencing style at St Thomas Square, to prevent parking on the grass verge, with new bulb planting beneath it

New fencing installations like those above have also served another council agenda, by improving biodiversity on the estates. EIS was also able to install wildflower meadow areas and even a 'bee bank' inside new railings that protected the new planting from trampling and parking.

Fencing example: Ventress Court

Problem: Even newly built developments can turn out to have minor design flaws. The entrance to the new development at Ventress Court had developed a muddy area in front of it, which people walked through rather than sticking to the pathways around it.

EIS Proposal: To install entrance railings around the mud patch, marking a corrected pathway to the new bin store. Attractive railing was installed in the same colour as the estate's bin store doors, with new planting protected inside the new railing. This created a more welcoming entrance that protects the scheme, with the ironwork incorporating the scheme's place-name and property numbers, to help orient visitors.

Advantages: Without the former muddy area, the path through to the new bin store will now remain cleaner, with less maintenance. The corrected walking route will prevent planting being trampled, and prevent the risk of falls on mud. The aesthetics of the area are much improved, leading to a better sense of pride and community.

Cost: £1,500

*The new decorative entrance railing
at Ventress Court*



7. Street lighting

In the past year, EIS enabled the upgrading of about 300 street lights on estates - both their columns and lanterns, as needed. Estates' street lights were first surveyed. Then old-style lanterns were upgraded to LED, and columns were replaced if their structural integrity was poor. Lighting bollards were also upgraded where necessary. The citywide project to upgrade estates' street lighting has been the single biggest financial investment of EIS to date, costing about £700k.

EIS criteria met by upgrading street lighting on the Council's estates:

- ✓ Build out future cost, as a 'spend to save' initiative with a better design
- ✓ Design out crime and anti-social behaviour
- ✓ Make a visible and positive difference to the aesthetics of an estate
- ✓ Contribute to strengthening the community on the estate
- ✓ Improve the health and safety or well-being of those living on the estate

A balance has to be reached here, between on the one hand, large-scale 'city-wide' EIS investments such as this lighting upgrade - and on the other, the very diverse, local projects that EIS funds in response to grassroots requests. The citywide improvements are impactful and needed, but in the scheme's final year ahead, they could risk using up the entire EIS funding that remains, and hence functioning more like a planned maintenance programme.

Improved street lighting: evidence of outcomes elsewhere in the UK

A police study in the wider UK has described improved street lighting as “a form of situational crime prevention”, as well as accident prevention. It found that “across 13 studies reviewed, both violent and property crime was reduced by an average of 21% in areas with improved street lighting, compared to areas without it”. Significantly, crime was reduced not only during the night but also in daylight hours.

The report concluded that by “demonstrating investment in the neighbourhood, (improved lighting) may lead to residents caring more about their neighbourhood, and consequently being more likely to take actions that might reduce crime in it.” (*Effects of Improved Street Lighting on Crime - Systematic Review*, College of Policing & Economic and Social Research Council, 2015)



8. Health and safety through defibrillators

It is not only policy, but also legal requirements and good practice standards, that change over time, including those governing health and safety. At the time of the EIS application below, a recent parliament bill was likely to start requiring public buildings, and buildings providing care to vulnerable people, to have a defibrillator. This EIS project from the past year met a need that could be life-saving.

Health and safety example: defibrillators at sheltered schemes

Problem: There was already one defibrillator at Ditchburn Place extra care and sheltered housing scheme. But there were none at the Council’s eight other ‘indoor’ sheltered schemes, nor at the Community Centre that serves several of the Council’s ‘outdoor’ sheltered schemes. (The terms describe whether a sheltered resident’s front door opens directly onto the public thoroughfare, or onto a corridor inside their scheme’s collective front door.) In reality, all the Council’s sheltered residents needed access to a defibrillator like the one at Ditchburn Place.

EIS Proposal: Install 9 new defibrillators, one at each of the required locations above.

Advantages: In the event of a cardiac arrest, use of a nearby defibrillator within 3-5 minutes raises survival rates from 6% to 74%. The equipment would be wall-mounted outside the scheme, with a pin code and connected to the emergency services, so that the local community could also have access to it in an emergency.

EIS criteria met:

- ✓ Build out future cost, as a ‘spend to save’ initiative with a better design
- ✓ Contribute to strengthening the community on the estate
- ✓ Improve the health and safety or well-being of those living on the estate

Consultation: May 2022, followed by a Notice of Intent to all tenants of these schemes

Cost: total for all defibrillators and lockable cabinets, under £15,750 + vat



Typical defibrillator as described above

Possible questions to consider in approaching the final year of EIS

The answers to the questions below seem broadly to be 'yes', but they are worth considering, as the different perspectives of residents, councillors, staff and other stakeholders might answer them differently.

The degree of success: Has EIS met its stated aims and intentions, or has it exceeded expectations? Was the allotted £5 million a reasonable amount of investment, able to make a definite impact?

Have EIS improvements measurably influenced behaviour on estates in the desired ways? Have left items and fly-tipping reduced? Has anti-social behaviour reduced, where it was tackled by an EIS project? Are residents using the new bike, scooter and bin stores frequently, and responsibly?

How to go forward after EIS? Clearly, EIS has occupied an important place alongside the other programmes that work to enhance the Council's estates, such as regeneration, redevelopment and ongoing planned works. Is there any aspect of EIS that should be extended beyond the planned end of the scheme in March 2024? (It is worth recalling that EIS evolved out of a long-running, prior scheme - a smaller, resident-led fund for estate improvements called the *Tenant Initiative Scheme*.)

How to fund new estate facilities after EIS? In the course of EIS, the Zero Tolerance post for keeping communal areas clear and safe was first created for a fixed term, and then made permanent based on its success. Will there be sufficient funding available to install the ongoing storage and binning facilities required for implementing Zero Tolerance, as has been done so often to date by EIS?

Residents' reactions, and awareness: Have EIS improvements been sufficiently promoted beyond the individual estates where they are visible day to day? Do residents acknowledge this extra investment and effort from the Council, beyond its normal maintenance programme? Or do residents consider it just 'the tip of the iceberg' compared to what they feel is needed?

The achievements and positive impacts of EIS certainly merit communicating to the entire community on the Council's estates. This year a new webpage has begun to do so, but it will be complemented by a page-long feature on EIS projects in each edition of *Open Door* magazine for tenants and leaseholders across the year ahead.