

East can be your true north

Glasgow's East End is on the verge of a renaissance, reveals *Caroline Ednie*

THE East End is the new West End. This is the mantra which has been on the lips of many hopeful Glaswegian East Enders recently. And let's face it, some of the traditional villas and tenements of leafy Dennistoun, for instance, could easily be transposed to the West End without anyone noticing much of a difference.

Reality kicks in, however, when getting down to the nitty gritty, such as comparing the residential property values in both areas, where a matter of simple economics will reveal that a pad in the West End is worth twice the price, and then some, of a similar East End gaff.

Still, many East Enders remain undeterred from their mantra. In fact, some have even been openly declaring that an East End renaissance is on the cards. Although this might be a bit premature, it is an indication that the East is undoubtedly beginning to stir again.

Recent residential developments, such as Homes for the Future and St Andrews in the Square, are gradually creeping east of the city centre from Glasgow Green and the Gallowgate, proving that handsome redevelopments and new properties don't have to be situated west of the High Street to be successful. And it's not just the eastern fringes which are rousing. There are a few reasons to be cheerful in the East End proper too, due in no small part to developments such as the new housing at Graham Square, situated off the Gallowgate.

Graham Square is the latest venture initiated by the Molendinar Park Housing Association, who on this occasion have combined forces with Page and Park, Richard Murphy and McKeown Alexander Architects to create some of the most contemporary and desirable homes in the city, in what was previously a pretty undesirable gap site.

Rob Joiner, director of Molendinar Park Housing Association, explains the astonishing interest generated by the development even before they were completed. "We didn't even have to advertise the Graham Square flats. People were going on site and finding out what our phone number was, and at one point we had six flats for sale and 60 applications," he says.

The judicious vision of Molendinar Park Housing Association has just earned them the RIBA Client of the Year Award at this year's Stirling Prize for Graham Square, as well as a plethora of other housing gongs.

Leading edge housing solutions such as Graham Square are, however, still relative specks in the great swathes of dereliction which occupy huge tracts of the East End,

with perhaps the most notable of these sites being between the High Street and Bellgrove to the east and Duke Street and Gallowgate to the south.

It is this inner-city site which effectively cuts off the East End from the city centre, and keeps those house prices down. This may all be about to change though, for since "the Merchant City is going like the clappers", according to Rob Joiner, it looks as though this prime location is currently being perceived as the golden development opportunity in Glasgow.

This is the belief of Thomas Laurie of the Laurie Consultancy Group, an instrumental player in the early development of the Merchant City in the late 1970s and early 80s, and something of an East End crusader.

As Laurie explains: "Those of us who are devotees of urban regeneration can see the economic power spreading eastwards. What we need to do, however, is to create a linkage between what is happening west of the High Street with parts of the city to the east such as Dennistoun and Calton.

"We've got an opportunity to take a huge chunk of the city and re-build a new zone to complement the Merchant City and see its economic influence spreading east, although I prefer to see the East End as having its own identity.

"There are plans afoot and hopefully it will come off, that the owners of the land, including principally Glasgow City Council and Scottish Enterprise Glasgow, along with the rail network bodies, private sector ownership and the housing association movement, will work together to produce a masterplan which is seamless, and addresses housing, business, leisure, education and cultural activity."

The favoured model for this type of development, it appears, is based on studies carried out by Dr Hildebrand Frey, director of the Urban Design Studies Unit at the University of Strathclyde, along with his students.

Dr Frey says: "There was a view, until recently, that a business park would be the right kind of solution, however local people and developers thought that this area is one of the great opportunities of Glasgow and that it shouldn't be wasted for a low density development.

"So we worked on a number of options, one of them being a model for a mixed-use development encompassing the idea of layers in high density, like a little La Défense, and this solution was the one which immediately jumped out.

This seemed to get people thinking that there was much better value socially and