

SIMON FELTON

Park Central is the name given to the area formerly known as Lee Bank. Lee Bank was named from Lee Crescent in the 1960s slum clearance and redevelopment with the name itself taken from an 18th Century landowner Thomas Lee.

The 1960s estate was the result of clearance being created out of one of the city's redevelopment areas. The estate fell into disrepair by the 1980s and was nicknamed very publicly, by the hijacking of advertising boards, as the largest slum in Europe (<https://www.business-live.co.uk/commercial-property/birmingham-slum-lee-bank-transformed-6174528>).

Plans for regeneration was kick-started by the transfer of 2,800 homes from Birmingham City Council to Optima Community Housing Association in 1999 which was followed by the award of a grant from the Estates Renewal Challenge Fund and a partnership with Crest Nicholson. Plans were drawn up to clear the tower blocks and develop a new layout around two parks. The first demolition of blocks took place in 2000.

All but four of the tower blocks created in the 1960s estate were cleared and so there is little to recognise from the original layout which included four twenty storey towers in a parkland setting of 9.95 hectares of open space with names such as Longleat and Chatsworth. The four remaining blocks adjacent to the midway were refurbished with three 1950s Y shaped blocks by Great Colmore Street being refurbished, blocks that were the precursor to the Lee Bank regeneration of the 1960s.

The original 1,490 homes was replaced by 2,004 increasing density from 71 dwellings per hectare to 96 and creating two new parks at the heart of the estate. New blocks up to 8 stories enclose the new parks and there is a common feel in materials and property types with only the corner of the site adjacent to Bristol Street in a different brick style being the final phase of the regeneration which took over twenty years to complete. The green parks, known as sunlight and moonlit, provide a linear connection through the estate and a part of the remaining 4.74 hectares of improved open space.
