

**Examen écrit- session 1- Semestre 1 2023-2024**

Langue : <b>Anglais</b>	Niveau : <b>N4</b>	Date : 13 janvier 2024	Durée : 1h30
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## **The UK's first women-only tower block is a desperate measure for desperate times**

By Marianna Janowicz\*, 15 June 2023, AJ Architects' Journal (abridged and adapted)

5 In west London, just by Acton Town station, Britain's first women's only tower block has been granted planning permission. The 15-storey Brook House building has been designed by Grid Architects and procured by a specialised housing association, Women's Pioneer Housing<sup>1</sup>, and one of UK's major developers and landlords, L&Q. It is set to deliver 102 social rent flats for single women, particularly those who face inequality, abuse and other disadvantages.

10 The housing issues women face are real; from domestic abuse to the gender pay gap, the long drive for equality is far from complete. While housing affordability is a problem for everyone, it has been widely reported that women are less likely than men to be able to afford to buy or rent property. In fact, a 2019 report by Women's Budget Group found there was no region of England where a single woman on median earnings could afford to rent or buy an averagely priced home of her own. In light of this, the efforts of housing associations to provide housing for women are well-founded. However, if there is a problem that can be answered with a new-build tower of one-bedroom flats, this is not the one.

15 Out of its 102 units, only two are set to be two-bedroom properties; the other 100 are poky<sup>2</sup> one-bed apartments. Even though the scheme is not described as temporary housing, a building composed of almost exclusively single-bedroom units is, by definition, transient<sup>3</sup>. There is no flexible margin for changing personal circumstances, no space for a diverse community to develop in the long term, where people can live at different stages in their lives and create long-lasting support networks.

20 These are precisely some of the characteristics of a feminist city, as described by geographer Leslie Kern in her book by the same title. In it, she argues that cities need to better cater for<sup>4</sup> women, who are a diverse group, who cannot be siloed<sup>5</sup> and defined solely by their relationship status. Segregating disadvantaged single women and branding them as vulnerable because they cannot afford a decent home sheds light on much deeper issues of house prices and economic inequality.

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<sup>1</sup> Women's Pioneer Housing (WPH) was founded in 1920 by suffragists to provide women with good quality affordable homes of their own, as part of their wider fight for women's equality.

<sup>2</sup> small and cramped

<sup>3</sup> temporary

<sup>4</sup> provide (women) with what they need

<sup>5</sup> separated from other people

25 Then there is the unimaginative reliance on new constructions – the fact that the block will replace the existing five-storey Brook House flats, managed by the WPH, which, according to the organisation have ‘reached the end of their economic life’.

30 Upon closer scrutiny of the planning drawings, it transpires that the benevolent<sup>6</sup> agenda obscures a bog-standard<sup>7</sup> design which doesn’t propose anything beyond the bare minimum. The press release points out the flats are specially designed for women, with details such as lower kitchen countertops and enhanced ventilation to ensure comfort for menopausal women.

In the grand scheme of things, these design features sound insignificant and reactionary. Cross-ventilation, where windows are placed on opposite walls of a room is the best way to ensure fresh air flow but this isn’t present in the proposal. Lowered countertops, while a reasonable addition, highlight the lack of larger-scale, architectural responses to the project.

35 Bar<sup>8</sup> the rooftop garden, the housing block does not offer any flexible rooms or communal facilities. The scheme is a collection of run-of-the-mill<sup>7</sup>, individual flats, which gives no opportunity to create solidarity among the residents, such as opportunities of sharing domestic work or socialising, or even a little extra circulation space that could facilitate moments of respite and interaction. It’s the same basic housing product, repackaged in pink.

40 Underprivileged women deserve a better solution to the systemic problems affecting them; a solution rooted in urban planning, and more ambitious architecture. The new Brook House is a desperate measure for desperate times, not a long-term solution for a truly feminist city.

*\*Marianna Janowicz is an architect and writer*

### **WRITE ALL YOUR ANSWERS ON THE EXAM PAPER SHEET**

#### **A/ COMPREHENSION - 8 points**

Answer both questions. *Note that you are expected to write organized answers based on the key ideas developed in the text. Use your own words (you can quote key words from the text but not extensive passages) and structure your answers, using appropriate linkers.*

1) Present the housing scheme described in the text and the reasons why it is being developed. (4 pts)

2) What criticisms does the author express about the scheme? (4 pts)

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<sup>6</sup> charitable

<sup>7</sup> completely ordinary

<sup>8</sup> Except for

## B/ GRAMMAR - 4 points

Conjugate the verbs in brackets in the **PRESENT PERFECT** (*I have done*) or the **PRETERIT** (*I did*).

*You do not have to copy the whole sentences. Write down the question numbers and your answers on your exam paper.*

- To their first residents, the tower blocks that British councils (build) \_\_\_\_\_ (1) \_\_\_\_\_ in the 1950s and 1960s (be) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_ symbols of post-war aspiration.
- But in the 1980s, they (become) \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_ associated with crime and anti-social behaviour.
- Over the past few years, many wealthy people (buy) \_\_\_\_\_ (4) \_\_\_\_\_ properties in luxury high-rise schemes in London.
- The digital nomad lifestyle (be) \_\_\_\_\_ (5) \_\_\_\_\_ on the rise since the Covid 19 pandemic.
- After the subprime crisis, many people (lose) \_\_\_\_\_ (6) \_\_\_\_\_ their homes.
- Initially, the main protagonist of *Nomadland* (embrace / not) \_\_\_\_\_ (7) \_\_\_\_\_ the van-life by choice but out of necessity.
- In what ways (the concept of home / change) \_\_\_\_\_ (8) \_\_\_\_\_ recently?

## C/ WRITTEN EXPRESSION - 200 words (± 10%) - (8 points)

Choose ONE of the following topics and propose a carefully written, well-organized essay (or letter for topic 2) with several arguments / ideas and relevant examples. Indicate which topic you have chosen.

*When relevant, references to the documents you studied this semester will be appreciated.*

1) According to the author, a women's only residential tower block constitutes a form of segregation. Discuss this idea.

2) Write a letter to the architects and developers of the Brook House building to propose some alterations or additions to the design that would really meet the needs of the women living there. Propose a few ideas to help create a sense of community there.

3) "Another horrible tall building to blight\* our old Acton Town. The area is turning into a horrible high-rise," an opponent to the new Brook House said about the plan. Do you believe cities and developers should stop building high-rise flats? Explain why (not).  
*\*to spoil, wreck*

4) It seems that a growing number of people are giving up on traditional houses, opting for alternative types of homes. Drawing from the documents and examples you studied this semester, explain what pushes them to do so.