

One day? Let's try a decade or more; Rick de Blaby is at the heart of one of London's newest neighbourhoods. We find out what makes him tick.

MILLIONS have been captivated by the recent Netflix adaptation of David Nicholls' best-selling novel *One Day* - a story that catches up on the lives and loves of its two protagonists on the same day each year: St Swithin's Day, 15 July.

If I could take you back to one day though, it would be Friday, 27 July 2012 - the opening ceremony of the London Olympic Games. If you are looking for a concentrated feeling of feel-good, this is it.

Fast forward a dozen years and it is fair to say that mojo has been somewhat misplaced and finding it could well be the exam question for the General Election.

And so, the first place you should always look is the last place you saw it.

Good job that I work with a business leader dubbed by one newspaper as 'Mr Mojo', who happens to be right at the heart of that place - the Olympic Park.

Rick de Blaby is chief executive of the build-to-rent pioneer Get Living. His business took on the former

Athletes' Village, which today stands as East Village; a 25-acre estate that is home to some 8,000 people. Less a village and as Rick describes, "a town in its own right."

It is a new neighbourhood for London, part of a wider destination with room to grow and expand.

If there is one thing we have got right since 2012, it is seen in the legacy of the Games on this corner of the capital. From the innovation district Here East to the cultural hub that is East Bank - now home to the BBC, V&A, Sadler's Wells and the London College of Fashion - Get Living's East Village is part of the staggering and continued development of Stratford.

Rick started this journey unknowingly as an audience member for that opening ceremony. Little did he suspect that a night watching the national narrative of Danny Boyle would soon become the driver of his life's work, to initiate and evolve the professionalisation of the rental sector through neighbourhoods across the UK's major cities.

East Village was just the first in that story. It has since been joined by neighbourhoods in Elephant and Castle (pictured) and Manchester, with two more set to launch soon in Maidenhead and Lewisham.

In Rick's view, build-to-rent neighbourhoods like these are a proxy for the economic dynamism of regeneration, bringing new jobs and skilled residents in their wake. These are long-term investments, with the various cycles and changes that these neighbourhoods go through allowing Get Living to make decisions that are a force for good.

In short, to think about places as more than just bricks and mortar. "The proposition that people value on the way in is different to the one they value when they are in it," Rick says.

That proposition defined in one word? Belonging.

For Get Living, the key is to set the stage for its people to engineer their own community. If Rick is the East Village's Boyle, then its residents are Kenneth Branagh's Brunel.

He is also driven by a sense of social responsibility to the local community, akin to the great estates of the past - Cadbury, Whitely and others. And it's the long-term view that earns Get Living a right "to be part of the civic family in which you now reside."

Rick also sees build-to-rent as a signature solution to the housing crisis. A way to address the shortage and rising costs of rental properties at scale and at pace. Recent data from Zoopla found that in some areas of the country, rents have risen by more than a third since 2020, driven by a "staggering" level of competition in major cities and commuter towns.

But it is not a politically convenient one, he explains, crushed by the system and the short-term news cycle.

Rather than step away though, Rick wants to step in. If he wasn't so engaged in the day-to-day of his current job "I would love to write the [government's housing] strategy, to take the time to solve the problems." He adds that to compete for global investment, build-to-rent is a compelling proposition for the UK to take the lead on, if it is to restore its "mojo".

Particular praise for One Day has been its slow burn over 14 episodes, taking its time to tell its story and to tell it well. For Rick, the same can be said for how you address a

housing shortage or build an Olympic legacy - something that France's leaders are no doubt considering as we rapidly approach the 2024 Summer Games.

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