

UK Housing Awards 2008

Meeting Housing Needs and Aspirations:
Winner



Staffordshire Housing Association: Rowan Village



Summary

Rowan Village, completed in May 2008, is a Staffordshire Housing Association 'extra care' scheme. The village is the result of a multi-agency approach to older people's housing, health and wellbeing. It was commissioned by Stoke on Trent City Council's Extra Care Programme Board and funded by a variety of partners. The Rowan Village partnership includes Staffordshire Housing Association (SHA), Stoke on Trent City Council, the Department of Health, Stoke-on-Trent Primary Care Trust, the Housing Corporation, and the regeneration agency RENEW North Staffordshire. Funding also came from the Learning Disabilities Development Fund. Rowan Village is the first scheme to be developed within a programme of extra care planned for the city to meet a critical need identified by research into the housing needs of the city's ageing population.

The complex comprises 75 one and two bed apartments, plus communal facilities which include a gym, restaurant, shop, therapy suite, lounge and hobbies room. The apartment blocks are linked by informal, comfortable meeting points to enhance integration as residents go about their day-to-day lives. It also has a Healthy Living Suite for use of village residents and older people in the wider community.

In planning and developing the scheme, the partnership board engaged directly with local and national policy and strategy on housing, health and older people's needs. In doing so, it identified and addressed needs and aspirations previously not catered for, including supported housing for older carers of learning-disabled adults and by the provision of intermediate care for residents recovering from illness or a disabling condition.

The £10 million village provides a quality, sustainable solution to older people's housing and welfare, and engages directly with the wider community in which it is set. It also contributes to the aims of the housing market renewal pathfinder RENEW North Staffordshire, and its community-endorsed masterplan for the local area.

Designed to improve choice and contribute to long-term sustainable communities, Rowan Village offers a mixed tenure housing solution which caters for a variety of needs and household structures. Of the 75 apartments available, 50 are for rent and 25 were offered for sale. To increase the options for purchasers, apartments were offered for outright purchase and for 75% or 50% equity purchase. Eight apartments are for short-stay intermediate care use, and six were designed for rent or sale to older carers of a learning-disabled dependent.

What did you set out to achieve?

The project had a variety of aims:

- To respond to research commissioned by Stoke-on-Trent City Council which highlighted an increasing need for housing with support for older people
- To engage with the Stoke-on-Trent City Council's *Older People's Health and Social Care Ten Year Plan* which aims to provide flexible housing which would help keep older people as independent and healthy as possible
- To offer a range of housing tenure choices which are affordable for local people
- To provide an inclusive housing environment which provided for identified but previously unmet needs, such as those of older people with a learning-disabled dependant, and those of people requiring intermediate care before returning to their own homes
- To provide older people with a 'home for life' within a mixed community, which can adapt to their needs as their needs change
- To engage directly with the local community by offering facilities for use by all older people in the wider neighbourhood
- To respond to the aims of the housing market renewal pathfinder RENEW North Staffordshire and the community-led masterplan for the area by regenerating the area with a new build development and providing a new housing option for local older people whose homes are subject to clearance

- To respond to national strategies and thinking on affordability, choice, diversity and health provision
- To involve the older people of Stoke-on-Trent in influencing the concept and design of future older people's housing
- To provide a building of vibrant, contemporary design which would enhance the appearance of the area in which it is set and meet the style and comfort aspirations of today's older people.

How were these aims and objectives met?

By offering apartments for rent or sale, and by offering the sale apartments for 50%, 75% or 100% purchase, Rowan Village has responded to the need to provide a mix of tenure choices. With apartments starting at £88,500 for outright sale, affordability criteria has been met. Rents are also affordable, with a one bed apartment available for £58.00 per week plus service and amenity charges.

Community consultation and adherence to the community-led masterplan has meant that the village is welcomed by local people and provides a new housing option for local older people whose homes are subject to clearance. To engage older people city-wide in older people's housing provision, a Friends of Rowan Village group was formed. The group met regularly and gave their views and suggestions, which directly influenced the choice of facilities at the village and the name of the village itself. An existing local 'extra care' resident sat on the main Project Board who oversaw the scheme from inception to completion.

By including apartments specially reserved for intermediate care and for older carers and their learning-disabled dependants, the village provides an inclusive environment for people whose needs have not previously been met. With on-site care and support available at all times, the village offers a flexible housing environment which enables residents to have a 'home for life' by responding to their needs as their needs change.

The design of the building is vibrant and striking both inside and out, and take up of apartments at the village has shown this to be meeting the aspirations of today's older people in terms of comfort and style.

What challenges did the project face, and what lessons were learned?

The scheme is located on the edge of a large local authority estate which does not have a positive reputation, presenting a challenge when marketing homes for sale. The challenge was met by forming a Project Board comprising representatives from SHA, housing and social care departments of the local authority, Supporting People, the PCT and an extra care resident. The resident made important suggestions on the layout of apartments, the provision of adequate storage space, and informal meeting areas within the scheme. Sub-groups worked on specialist areas including allocations,

marketing, design, and commissioning the care and support provider.

The challenge of selling 25 apartments was addressed by creating a Friends of Rowan Village group made up of older people from across the city. The group attended information meetings and social events, gave feedback on design and facilities and acted as a sounding board for ideas.

A consultant and solicitor helped develop the flexible home model; this was important to ensure apartments were affordable for residents on the local estate. The result was the offer of outright or shared equity purchase options. We also appointed an internal designer with extensive knowledge of the needs of residents with dementia, who produced a contemporary design for the communal areas and used clear signage and a colour scheme that helps residents know where they are in the building. A show apartment was created and literature produced that explained the purchase options. All apartments have been sold or reserved, apart from two designed for sale to older people with a learning disabled dependent. These apartments will be rented in the short-term.

Although there is one other extra care village in Stoke on Trent, the extra care concept was not familiar to social care professionals. Workshops were held to explain the concept and purpose of the village to ensure that appropriate referrals were made.

How was the success of the project measured?

The criteria for success were:

- *Securing support and funding from a range of partners: local authority, the health authority, Supporting People and the local PCT*
 - The scheme relied on capital funding from six agencies, SHA and receipts from sales. This required careful negotiation to ensure that the expectations of various funding agencies could be realised.
- *Agreeing an allocations policy that would satisfy partners and meet the aims of providing assisted independence*
 - The allocations policy was negotiated and designed to achieve a balanced community with a third of residents having housing related support needs, a third having medium level support needs, and a third having intensive support needs.
- *Providing a building designed to meet a range of special needs and provide an attractive residential environment*
 - An important criteria was ensuring the apartments and the building were designed to provide facilities for intermediate care and adults with a learning-disabled dependant in a domestic, realistic setting. This was achieved through the scheme layout which provided a range of informal meeting areas near to the apartments, and ensured the semi-public space was well designed and fitted out with

contemporary furniture and furnishings.

- *Attaining a range of purchasers for the apartments offered for sale*
 - The main short-term measure of the success of the project is the response it has received from residents and prospective residents. From the time the project started on site, the village generated a substantial amount of enquiries from people wanting to rent and buy. One month after opening, all apartments for rent are allocated, and all but two of the 25 sales apartments have been purchased. Feedback from residents is extremely positive.

What were the key positive outcomes?

The project has resulted in several key positive outcomes:

- A new type of mixed tenure housing offer for older people in Stoke-on-Trent
- A project which addresses the housing and support needs identified in research commissioned by the local authority with a viable long-term response
- A project which helps meet the challenge of freeing hospital beds by providing apartments for intermediate care
- A project which meets the needs of older carers of a learning-disabled dependant who have not previously been catered for
- A building which enhances the housing market regeneration area in which it is set and engages with the community-led masterplan for the neighbourhood
- A scheme which actively involves the local community through its healthy living centre.

How did the project demonstrate positive practice in equality and diversity?

The project set out to address not only the needs and aspirations of older people as a whole, but also to promote inclusion by offering a solution for people needing intermediate care, and addressing the previously unmet needs of people who are older carers of a learning-disabled dependant.

Provision for intermediate care in the city did not meet demand, and intermediate care opportunities were not necessarily as conducive to recovery and rehabilitation as was desired. By placing intermediate care apartments within the extra care village, with the social and support opportunities the village provides, the project aims to enhance recovery and wellbeing. The apartments are fully furnished and interior-designed to offer vibrant, contemporary and homely temporary accommodation with round-the-clock support.

The project also meets a previously unmet need highlighted by the local

authority for new housing options and choice for older carers and their learning disabled dependant. Choice is offered for carers and their dependants by making carers' apartments available for rent or for sale on an outright or shared ownership basis. Shared ownership is offered at 50% or 75% equity.

By not placing a lower age restriction on the learning-disabled adult dependant, the village again promotes diversity and also offers a housing solution to the learning-disabled residents who will be able to remain in their secure and supported homes when their older carers pass away.

What elements of the project could be replicated by others?

The model of providing intermediate care within an extra care setting could be replicated by others, as could the solution of offering arrange of purchase options for older people to maximise the opportunities for prospective residents to buy into the scheme.

How does the project contribute to wider organisational objectives?

A unique part of the project is that eight of the apartments are reserved for intermediate care, supporting the national and local priorities of freeing hospital beds for people with more acute needs. Meanwhile, the older person is able to make their recovery in surroundings conducive to their welfare and with flexible support and care available at all times.

The West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy identifies the need for a range of affordable housing options for rent and sale, and also the need for new housing to support renewal strategies. Rowan Village supports these priorities by offering mixed tenure affordable homes for rent and with a variety of purchase options. It also assists the renewal strategies of RENEW North Staffordshire by providing an affordable housing option for older people whose homes are subject to clearance.

How does the project involve the wider community?

Stoke-on-Trent is within the top 5% of the most deprived areas in England, and North Staffordshire was designated a housing market renewal pathfinder area in 2003. Coupled with this, research by the local authority showed that the social housing needs of older people, many of whom lived on low incomes, were not being met.

Rowan Village provides a choice of affordable housing options for the city's older people by offering apartments for rent, shared ownership and outright sale. With the purchase price of outright sale apartments starting at £88,500, it enables low income owner-occupiers to purchase with money raised from selling their own homes even when they are of relatively low market value. Older people in the local area whose current homes are subject to clearance

are also prevented with an affordable relocation offer.

The project also provides a new option for people needing intermediate care, enabling them to live temporarily within a comfortable home environment and ready-made community that is conducive to their recovery.

A new option and greater choice for older carers and their learning-disabled dependants is provided by a mixed tenure offer. Carers' apartments are available for rent, outright sale and a choice of shared ownership options. Learning-disabled residents are also provided with a new housing solution as they will be able to remain in their secure and supported homes when their older carers pass away.