



Trees Extra Care Housing - Highgate

This case study provides an overview of the development of the 'Trees' Extra Care Housing scheme in Highgate, London, the relationships of the partners involved, the planning challenges in producing modern sustainable design in a conservation area and how the local community were engaged, resulting in a unique 100% affordable rent housing project for older people.



Produced for the Housing Learning & Improvement Network by **Anne-Marie Nicholson** and **Mark Walker**, PRP Architects

August 2011

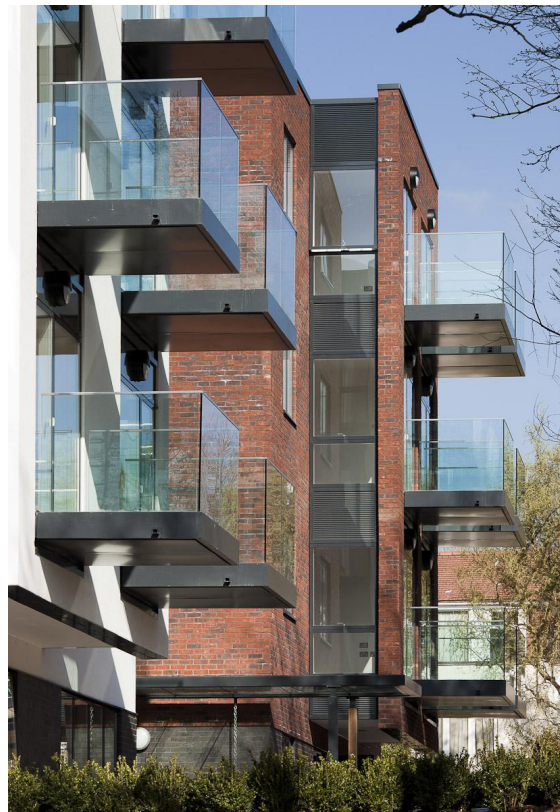
Introduction

The 'Trees' Extra Care Housing scheme in Highgate provides 40 apartments for older people on what is a beautiful site located in Highgate's Conservation Area and was opened in March 2011. The scheme is unique in that it is the first 100% affordable housing project in this part of Haringey.

'Trees' was conceived prior to the HAPPI Report 2009 (Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation) commissioned by the HCA to promote high quality design and innovation in the older persons housing sector. 'Trees' embodies many of the recommendations set out within the report and has been heralded as one of the best HAPPI schemes in Europe.

The building was recently awarded a prestigious Housing Design Award in July 2011, winning the best 'Completed HAPPI Scheme'. The judges described Trees as 'setting the benchmark for all housing for older people in the UK'. It was shortlisted for the British Homes Awards 2011 - Lifetime Home of the Year and the House Builder Awards 2011 - Best Design.

The main partners in the development were Hill Homes (who owned the land and provided care from buildings that the Trees replaced), development specialists One Housing Group, Durkan (building contractors) and PRP Architects who also provided project management, quality monitoring, landscape and interior design and town planning expertise.



Projecting Bays & Private Balconies

History

The site is owned by Hill Homes, an organisation that arose from the legacy of care begun by Margaret Hill in 1944 to provide Care Homes for elderly victims of the Blitz in the Highgate area. The location within Highgate Conservation Area meant that the Local Authority planning and conservation departments were engaged from the outset of the scheme's design.

Two existing buildings on the site had historically been used as 'care' accommodation and following a rigorous testing process it was accepted that these were no longer fit for purpose and they were demolished. These old buildings were however considered to be of architectural merit contributing to the character of the area. The replacement scheme therefore needed to be one that not only represented 21st century approaches to care provision but also one of 'Architectural distinction' in order to justify the loss of the existing buildings. This ambition was shared by the local authority, client, design team and local community who continued to evaluate the developing scheme against this aspiration.

Strategic Need

There was an identified shortage of Extra Care housing in Haringey and the scheme at 'Trees' was seen as an important part of the strategic delivery of housing for older people in the West of the Borough. The Local Authority Housing & Adult Social Care Departments played a role in the development of the brief and provided valuable support



Broadlands Road Elevation

both to the scheme throughout the planning process and also in achieving grant funding from the HCA.

Early consultation revealed high demand for affordable extra care in this part of the borough where historically it had been challenging to provide affordable housing. The opportunity and desire to provide a continuation of care and support that had long been provided by Hill Homes within Highgate made it possible to overcome the challenge.

“This scheme is the first and only affordable housing project in living memory, in this part of Haringey”

(Haringey Planning Dept)

Public Consultation

An initial public consultation event was held early in the design process allowing local residents to see the emerging proposals. This took place within the existing buildings, which made discussing issues in relation to the immediate context very productive. A second consultation event displayed more developed proposals giving residents the opportunity to see that the team had responded to the earlier comments. The project team consulted closely with the Highgate Society whose members also attended the open public consultation events and shared the vision to create an exemplar service within a building of architectural distinction that would benefit the community and enhance the lives of the residents.

The proposals were also presented at a 'Design Forum' organised by Haringey council; a more formal stage where residents could provide comments on the scheme design that informed part of the committee report. The client and design team fully engaged with the local community throughout the entire design process. The scheme received approval at the planning committee in July 2008.

Achieving the Vision

The overall financial viability of the scheme was assisted by the fact that Hill Homes owned the site. A fundamental part of the success of the project was the involvement of key people from Hill Homes (the client) from inception to completion - a level of continuity that is uncommon in modern procurement.

The client team included two eminent Architects from Hill Homes Board of Trustees who understood and influenced the design development and procurement at all stages. There was a wide reaching commitment to quality and desire to ensure that the integrity of the early design principles were maintained.

“As individuals we have lived and loved this project; the development process used for this scheme has allowed the architects to follow a project through, from concept to completion. We are proud that the building has already transformed the lives of those that live there.”

Anne-Marie Nicholson - Partner, PRP Architects

“This beautiful scheme is a collection of quite simple ideas, that when put together each make a huge contribution to the resulting building and enhance the lives of its residents”

Mark Walker - Associate, PRP Architects

The Site

‘Trees’ is located in North London in a residential area of mainly large period properties ranging from grand Victorian, Edwardian & Gothic Villas to 1930 modernist architecture including a grade 1 listed apartment block considered to be one of considerable architectural distinction. Other buildings are housing developments constructed during the 1950’ & 1960’s in a mix of brick, render and timber boarding. One of the most striking characteristics of the site is the mature landscape with many beautiful trees. The site generally has a quiet residential quality, whilst North Hill to the east has a more active and busy character.

The Accommodation

There are 40 self-contained apartments over three floors, 21 one bedroom and 19 two bedroom units with good space standards at 55 sq.mts and 68 sq.mts respectively. The 2 bedroom flats include a second toilet for guests and visitors. Each flat has a balcony with glazed balustrade, honed limestone flooring and stainless steel handrails. From the upper levels it has been mentioned that you ‘really do feel like you are in the trees’.

Bathrooms have been designed with flush floor showers, integral storage and concealed pipework. Kitchens are all fully fitted with appliances to suit the user group and good levels of storage. The entrance doors to all of the apartments are recessed, have a full height sidelight, functional shelf and are lined in oak giving a high quality finish and defensible space to every home.

There are a range of communal and support spaces including:

- Staff Administration Office
- Manager’s Office
- Staff Rest and Changing
- Communal Lounge
- Kitchenette
- Hair Salon
- Laundry
- Therapy Room
- Guest Room
- Buggy Store
- Disabled WC’s
- Assisted Bathroom

The main ancillary spaces (e.g. buggy store, refuse store, laundry and plant) are discreetly located at ground floor to the right of the entrance and do not impact on the communal or residential parts of the scheme. A small activity room / boardroom is located on the top floor to the southwest corner of the building. This room is recessed from the main façade and has access to a terrace area with spectacular views over Highgate. There is also an assisted bathroom and accessible WC located at this level.

The interior design is informed by the architectural approach and the result is calm and contemporary. Materials selected should age gracefully over time. Room layouts are oriented to maximise the views of the landscaped gardens and furniture is simple in design but of a high standard. Each level has subtle variations in colour to passively assist orientation. The client employed PRP Interiors to achieve the aspiration for a quality product throughout the building. The appointment of the interior designer was as crucial as all the other consultants in achieving the final result and cannot be emphasised enough when procuring such buildings.



Main Communal Gardens

Tenure and eligibility

All the flats are for affordable rent on an assured tenancy basis. To be offered a flat people must meet the following criteria:

- Be 55 years or over (for couples partner can be as young as 50)
- Either meet council criteria for being on housing register or nominated by Hill Homes due to a local connection or a social need to live in the area.
- Be registered on housing list and been assessed by adult social care as have needs that could be met by extra care
- OR be disabled and/or frail person requiring care of the kind provided.

Care/support

There are care and support staff available 24 hours a day seven days a week who provide:

- Personal care
- Shopping & domestic tasks
- Personal affairs handling
- Enabling & befriending
- Handyman
- Volunteers to accompany people on trips, help with daily activities etc.

Personal care is provided by London Care plc who provide a core daytime and waking night service that tenants can top up by purchasing additional hours. Support is provided by Hill Homes.

Charges

The charges are broken down into:

- Rent
- Service charge for communal services.
- Service charge personal (includes water & heating to flat)
- Electricity usage in flat
- Hill Homes support charge
- London Care charge

	One bed	Two bed
Rent	119.10	126.10
Service charge (communal)	50.73	67.18
Service charge (personal)	6.18	8.35
Electricity	5.00	5.00
Hill homes support charge	76.00	76.00
London Care charge	84.90	84.90
TOTAL WEEKLY CHARGE	341.91	367.53

The Concept & Key Design Principles

The scale of the building is similar to those it replaced and to adjacent flats resulting in appropriate proportions. A number of key design principles were established at an early stage in the development, each of which are quite simple but which make a huge contribution to the resulting building:

Natural Light & A 'Permeable' Plan - It was important to maximise the levels of natural light within the building and particularly within the circulation areas. Access to daylight is a simple yet fundamental aspect of good design and can assist with orientation and an awareness of the surroundings, the weather and the time of day. There are a number of Dual Aspect apartments in the scheme which maximise access to natural light and ventilation.

The design is 'permeable' containing smaller clusters of homes arranged around an internal atrium, which creates a strong connection between the ground floor communal spaces and the residential areas on the upper floors. Having apartments in smaller clusters with shared circulation areas rather than on long corridors helps to promote neighbourliness, maximizes natural daylight and assists orientation.



Central Atrium - Upper Floors

Responding to urban context - This was important in achieving the support of the Planning & Conservation Departments. The design aspiration was to combine an appropriate response to the context in urban design terms with a pleasing environment for the residents of Trees.

The view from Broadlands Road is of three distinct building elements connected with glazed links that respond sensitively to the local context and reflect the rhythm of the existing villas. This approach was not simply viewed as an urban design response but exploited to create meaningful spaces within the scheme i.e. within the glazed links. The new building broadly follows the general footprint of the previous buildings that occupied the site and is respectful to the existing mature landscape.



View from Broadlands Road

The single storey wings along the eastern boundary maintain the visual gap in development and extend the existing residential façade in Grange Road. A green roof to both wings allows these to integrate with the landscape when viewed from above and in this respect improves the visual amenity to the nearby properties.

Following discussions with the Local Planning Officer it was felt that a reduction in scale to the South West corner would be beneficial to reflect the general change in scale & character in Grange Road. A recessed top floor to the South West corner achieves a stepping to the roofline and a general reduction in scale when viewed from the South & West.

Accessibility - As an Extra Care scheme the building is designed to be fully accessible and have an inherent flexibility. The scheme is designed to be fully wheelchair accessible and meets lifetime homes standards. The entrance forecourt to the main Broadlands Road frontage provides 8 parking spaces over a permeable pavement with new planting to enhance the existing trees and vegetation. The building is served by two lifts and two stair cores at either end of the plan and there is fob access to control movement between the communal and residential parts of the scheme.

The Housing LIN has published a Factsheet on design, available at: www.housinglin.org.uk/pageFinder.cfm?cid=1629



Landscape Plan - Rear Gardens

Landscaped Heart to Scheme - The beautiful mature landscape is one of the site's most significant characteristics and created the opportunity to create a 'green heart to the scheme'.

The scheme is designed around attractive gardens with two single storey wings sensitively placed between the existing trees and the use of green roofs enable these elements to integrate with the landscape when viewed from upper floors and adjacent dwellings. The entrance forecourt includes new planting that complements the existing landscape. There is a strong visual connection from the front door through to the gardens that is reinforced by a linear water feature and sculpture on its axis.

The external spaces integrate with the existing mature landscape setting and establish an attractive

communal courtyard garden at the heart of the scheme. In keeping with the formality of the building the garden is laid out along strong visual axes. Central to the layout is the vista and main access that extends through the glass foyer, linking the entrance court on Broadlands Road to an impressive polished granite mirror pool and sculpture at the far end of the rear garden.

The enclosure of the garden provides a delightful shared amenity space that can be accessed from the main communal areas and provides a pleasant outlook to the enclosing apartments. A series of pathways lead to sheltered seating, timber pergolas and patio areas. Two large terraces encourage social gatherings and combine with secluded spots that offer opportunities for privacy and contemplation. The external layout ensures that there is an appropriate level of defensible space to the ground-floor apartments utilising generous patios combined with low planting.

Vibrant Hub & Progressive Privacy - The entrance to the scheme is a welcoming reception foyer that offers views through bright and open communal spaces to outdoor terraces and the gardens beyond. The layout provides progressive privacy from the communal hub at the centre of the plan on the ground floor, to the more private residential areas within the single storey side wings and the residential floors above. The apartments all have private balconies with enough space for table, chairs and plants.

The Layout of the Building

The main entrance is via Broadlands Road into one of the glazed 'links' that leads into the main foyer space. This area is bright and welcoming and has views through the communal lounge and circulation areas to the beautiful gardens beyond. A path extends from the main entrance into the gardens.

In the open plan foyer lounge residents can wait for family and visitors and casually observe activity in the main entrance area. Around the entrance is also a hair salon and reception, staff and managers office. The adjacent communal lounge, kitchenette and dining spaces contribute greatly to this vibrant hub and are arranged around a dramatic four storey atrium with full height artwork. There is a delightful therapy room located at the end of the eastern residential wing providing an appropriate level of privacy with views across the shared gardens.

Architecture

The architectural approach combines traditional materials with contemporary detailing. The primary material within the overall composition is 'red multi' facing brick reflecting buildings in the surrounding area. Red brick is used within the East & West villas and provides an appropriate visual connection between the new building and the existing context. The central villa is finished in self-coloured white render reinforcing the '3-Villa' concept. A blue/grey engineering brick plinth is used at ground floor level to anchor each of the blocks and provide visual distinction between the residential and communal areas of the building.

A similar approach has been adopted on the single storey wings with brick bays on a rendered elevation. It is felt that these materials create a strong, considered composition that sits appropriately within the site, and appears particularly elegant when viewed against the trees and existing landscape.

Bay windows with projecting balconies are included on all flats providing private external amenity space. The bays to the main south facing elevation are cantilevered from first floor level achieving particularly strong structure free architectural feature.



Layered Façade

The detailing to this element has been rigorously considered to achieve a well crafted, elegant detail of the highest design quality.

The brickwork provides a strong framing element to the bay. Painted steel balconies with glazed balustrades cantilever from the main façade.

On the south facing elevation the 'glazed links' are formed by frameless planar glazing. These accommodate seating bays internally and create a sense of permeability to the elevations. The delicate connection achieved using this system also reinforces the '3-villa' concept.

Sustainable Design

The scheme far exceeds minimum standards in terms of sustainability and incorporates renewable energy sources. A biomass boiler achieves a 32% reduction in CO₂ emissions. The scheme includes

high performing building fabric and incorporates under floor heating throughout.

The Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH) assessment method was used as requested by the client. This means that the individual flats were assessed for their environmental performance but not the communal areas. CSH level 4 has been achieved. A separate BREEAM assessment could have been undertaken for the whole building, however this would have incurred additional costs for the client and some duplication of work. The advantage of using the CSH for flats is that their performance can be compared with that of conventional new build housing, although there are likely to be some credits which may not be as relevant for older peoples' housing such as cycle storage.

Energy efficiency measures include; very good building fabric performance gained through enhanced building fabric U-values, mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR) installed to all apartments together with dedicated low energy light fittings throughout. Natural daylight has been maximised in the design thereby reducing the need for artificial lighting. Energy is supplied using gas / biomass boilers linked to a mini CHP system. The gardens are irrigated sustainably utilising underground rainwater storage reservoirs.

The Housing LIN has published a technical brief on sustainability, available at: www.housinglin.org.uk/pageFinder.cfm?cid=7380

Procurement

The meticulous approach to procurement was key to achieving high quality within a 'Design and Build' contract, which was the chosen method of procurement. 'Design and Build' means that a single contractor takes overall responsibility for the end product and Durkan was the appointed Contractor.

Set out below are details of how the key stages of procurement were undertaken:

- **Design development** - The architect was the initial team member appointed by the client with further key team members (inc. QS / Project Manager / M&E / Structural Engineer / Landscape / Town Planner) appointed early to ensure a fully coordinated approach to the scheme from the outset

- **Planning Application**
- **Stage E / employers requirements** - an enhanced set of employers requirements were prepared, which specified in detail what Hill Homes desired in terms of key features of the scheme and 'design intent'. This provided a robust basis for tendering contractors to price, maintaining the integrity of the original design and ensuring the resulting scheme reflected the aspirations of the client. A full design team was assembled at planning and pre-tender stage. Detailed Room Data Sheets were prepared by the Employers Agent.
- **Tender process** based on Design and Build contract
- **Novation** - PRP Architects were novated to contractor to prepare the working drawings, (meaning that their contract was transferred from Hill Homes to Durkan) and this ensured design continuity throughout the build.
- **Working Drawings**
- **On site roles** involved the Employers Agent / Client / Quality monitoring role of the architect. Uniquely PRP also had a separate appointment with the client to assist with the monitoring of quality on site and ensuring that the scheme did not deviate from the very detailed Employers Requirements. This arrangement allowed for continuity of role with the key designer involved throughout the entire process, which has undoubtedly been of benefit to the resulting scheme.

The Project Team

Architect:	PRP
Project Manager:	PRP
Quantity Surveyor:	DWB Appleyards
Town Planner:	PRP
Landscape Architect:	PRP
Interior Designer:	PRP
Mechanical & Electrical:	KUT Partnership
Structural Engineer:	Campbell Reith Hill
Contractor:	Durkan

Client Feedback

"PRP have designed a building for us that is both beautiful and practical. We particularly appreciated working with architects who encouraged us to play an active part in the design process and responded to our ideas."

David Bernstein – Trustee Hill Homes

"Everyone involved in this scheme wanted it to be of the highest standard because the decision to move to supported accommodation is likely to be one of the most difficult decisions individuals and their families make. It is incumbent upon us to make the offer the best it can be and I think this scheme represents that aspiration."

Fiona Lovering - One Housing Group

Conclusions

'Trees' is a building of high quality incorporating key design features to meet the needs of older people both now and in the future. The important attributes of the scheme can be summarised as follows:

- Provides a valuable housing and care facility for older people and the local community, meeting a need in the local area that has not been met before.
- High-quality and attractive accommodation for older people that combines a secure environment with convenient but controlled access.
- Provides a building form that responds to the constraints of the site, respects adjoining properties and is sensitive to the surrounding context in terms of its scale, massing and materials.
- Provides amenity space within the scheme suitable for the recreational needs of the residents both present and future and an integrated landscaping scheme that reinforces the form and quality of the proposals and enhances the visual amenity value of the locality.
- Provides modern, purpose-built accommodation on a vacant/underused site, which will enhance the quality of life of service users and staff.
- A high quality building in terms of its architectural design

Key learning points

- High quality design was achieved through key involvement of the client and continuity of architect's role from start to finish using a design and build contract to give cost certainty.
- Extensive public & local authority consultation has resulted in community support for a scheme that is a sensitive response to the existing context.
- The overall financial viability of the scheme was assisted by the fact that Hill Homes owned the site.
- Maximising natural light with simple adjustments to the plan and considered detailing can create an uplifting, comfortable and sustainable internal environment.
- The appointment of the interior designer was as crucial as all the other consultants in achieving the final result and cannot be emphasised enough when procuring such buildings.
- Use of high quality materials ensures a robust long lasting design.
- Suitable design can empower residents and complement on-site and community support in improving their quality of life.



Ground Floor & Site Plan

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Margaret Edwards and Jeremy Porteus at the Housing LIN for their helpful comments and editorial contributions.

About the Housing LIN

For further information about the Housing LIN and to access its comprehensive list of on-line resources, visit www.housinglin.org.uk

The Housing LIN welcomes contributions on a range of issues relating to Extra Care Housing and housing for older people more generally. If there is a subject that you feel should be covered, please email us at info@housinglin.org.uk

Published by

Housing Learning & Improvement Network
 c/o EAC,
 3rd Floor, 89 Albert Embankment
 London SE1 7TP
 Tel: 020 7820 8077

Email: info@housinglin.org.uk

Web: www.housinglin.org.uk