



Tibby's Triangle in Southwold

This Case Study provides an overview of the development of Tibby's Triangle in Southwold, Suffolk. Although not built specifically as a HAPPI scheme or aimed exclusively at older people, the scheme is an excellent example of a liveable, inter-generational neighbourhood.



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Introduction

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History

Adnams brewery together with the lighthouse, and the flint tower of St Edmunds Church, dominate the skyline of this small town. Part of Southwold's town centre's unique character is that of ginnels and alleyways, a patchwork of irregular 'greens and well tended gardens' and a very mixed architecture.



Drayman Square at Tibby's Triangle

A key opportunity was provided by Adnams Brewery's decision to move its main distribution depot out of town. This created a development site in the centre of the town, and also meant that up to 80 HGVs and vans and up to 60 employee cars a day would no longer drive into the heart of the small town.

Strategic need

A recent housing report by Southwold and Reydon Society in 2012 identified that 49% of current properties are second homes or holiday lets. From 2001 to 2011, the resident adult population of Southwold has reduced from 1,328 to 974, a 27% decline, of which the population under 18 declined by 28%. This suggests that the overall decline has been principally among families with children.

In 2006, Southwold Council carried out a 'Southwold Local Housing Needs Survey', which identified the need for additional affordable housing particularly for families. It was also identified that the Council needs to ensure the provision of effective and accessible services, health and social care, to meet the changing needs of the ageing resident population.

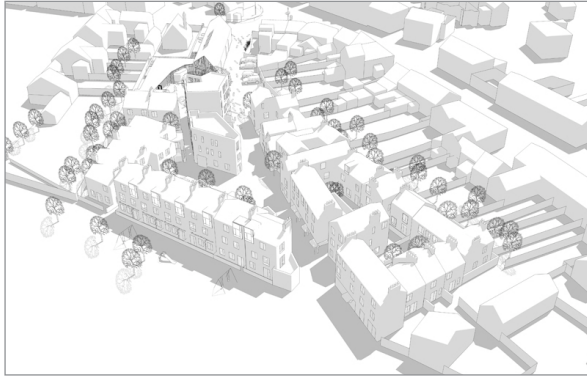
The average property price in the town is £324,560 and average price for a flat is £235,320. The properties in Tibby's are currently £299,995 for a one-bedroom apartment and a four-bedroom house with carport is £649,995.

The town and context

Southwold is a small town on the North Sea coast in Suffolk with a population of around 1,500 but increases with summer visitors. Although once home to a number of different industries, Southwold's economy nowadays is mainly based on services, particularly hotels, holiday accommodation, catering, and tourism. With the surrounding areas largely given over to agriculture, the town is an important commercial centre for the area, with independent shops and a market. Adnams Brewery is the town's largest single employer.

The site

The site is located in the town centre of Southwold, adjacent to the Grade 1 listed St Edmund's Church and just 250 metres from the beach. The development provides a new public square, road and footpaths that link through to the rest of the town, reinstating the porous nature of the town centre and reconnecting with the wider area.



Aerial view of the site

The development also includes a new public square for weekly farmers' markets, an Adnams wine and kitchen shop, another new shop and café. The landscaping in the square comprises drought-resistance planting, a small garden space and green roof for the café. The paving incorporates Suffolk pebbles, a 'sea of washed pebbles' and timber sections reclaimed from the groynes from Southwold beach as they were upgraded.

The accommodation

The development comprises a mix of thirty-eight homes, 22 houses and 16 apartments ranging from 1 to 4 bedrooms.

The development includes ten pepper-potted affordable homes including shared ownership, and with 16 apartments and 12 houses for sale.

Whilst not built to HAPPI principles, the scale of the units varies from the smallest apartment at 58 sq.m to the largest house at 210 sq.m.

The Flagship Housing Group, also known as the Suffolk Heritage Housing Association, manages the ten affordable housing units in the development. These shared ownership properties are offered under 'Staircase Agreements', which mean purchasers buy a percentage of the property (usually 50%) and rent the remaining portion and subsequently can increase their purchased percentage. There are two versions of this type of agreement; 'closed' whereby they can never obtain 100% ownership of the property or 'open' where they can if they wish ultimately purchase the full 100%, whereupon the property leaves the affordable housing scheme and becomes private freehold and can be subsequently sold on the open market. The units in Tibby's are 'Open Staircase Agreements'.

The concept and key design principles

The overall concept is of a desirable, mixed-use development that creates its own identity, centred on a new public space accessed from the High Street via an existing entrance in Victoria Street.

"One of the things that I wanted to do very much was to make this site porous again to the rest of the town, so that there would be ways through, just natural ways where people congregate or move through the site, which was formerly closed to them."

Simon Loftus, Former Chairman Adnams Brewery, client.

A residential street and a network of lanes run through the site giving public access on foot directly between Victoria Street, Field Stile Road and Tibby's Green. The Green is the

heart of the town and has been enhanced by the new development. It encourages a lively atmosphere in the public area, opens up views of St. Edmunds Church and allows a good level of permeability, where possible opportunities for interaction between residents and passersby is facilitated, adding to the sense of community.

The scale and architectural style of the development picks up on the Southwold vernacular, all the houses are different heights, widths, layouts and use a variety of materials. Where possible there are landscaped or naturalistic thresholds, with front gardens for social activity and more secluded courtyards and roof terraces.

The architects worked hard to ensure that although the development was quite dense, any overlooking was minimised. This resulted in a 'jigsaw' of a layout, but also a rich collection of interesting external spaces, public and private, and translated internally into some lovely spaces, maximising sunlight and daylight into the properties and views out. This lends itself to the HAPPI criteria.

However, there was a concern that the percentage of second homes or holiday lets might lead to 'dark areas'. But this was mitigated by pepper-potting the affordable homes across the site, by locating them at the three corners, ensuring that the development would not have areas which might be less active.

Layout

The site is compact and bounded by existing yards and gardens to the rear of the High Street and Bartholomew Green and Tibby's Green. The architects have developed the informal grain of the existing housing and retail with two irregular triangular clusters of homes enclosing a pedestrian route from Tibby's Green to the new Gardner Square and creation of Tibby's Way to create a shared space for residents' cars to access parking and pedestrians from Field Stile Road to the Square and Adnams Café, Wine Cellar & Kitchen Store and Victoria Street beyond.

Quite urban in layout, the houses range from two to three storeys. In the centre of the site, fronting the new square, are two taller blocks containing apartments and a small shop.

At the relatively high density of 86 dwellings per hectare there are twenty-six houses and eight apartments with private gardens and roof terraces. The interlocked terraces of tall town houses enable this density to be achieved, while responding positively to the character of the surroundings; 'a reinterpretation of Southwold's urban form of large blocks grouped around publicly accessible yards'.

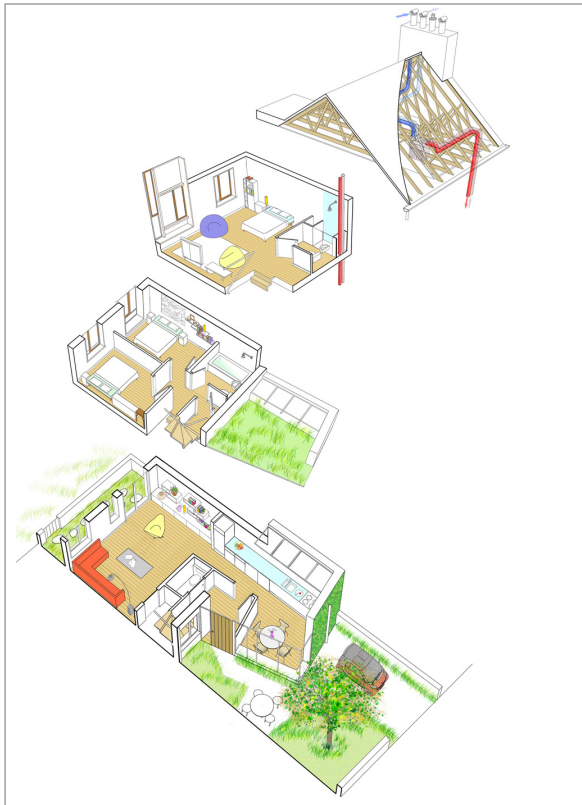


Site plan

The houses facing on to Tibby's Green have small rear garden / patios overlooking the Green, ideal for socialisation and access to the playground, but also providing natural views over the Green and pedestrian footpath to St. Edmund's Church.

Cars are accommodated by parking spaces adjacent to the homes but not at the expense of pedestrian circulation.

Architecture



Cutaway view of a flat

The traditional grain of the development is continued in the choice of materials - brick, buff or white painted (or, in some cases, tarred as protection against the sea winds) and pantiled pitched roofs. Flat roofs are either treated as roof terraces for the flats, or covered in robust sedum planting to cope with the salt sea air. Brick or flint walls to the gardens complete the traditional patchwork which contributes to Southwold's distinctiveness. The development is influenced by its context but is not pastiche. The design and construction of the homes is contemporary and meet all current sustainability criteria with whole house mechanical ventilation and heat recovery.

The architects designed the kitchens but not other interiors, which were fitted out by Hopkins Homes (the Contractor).

"To do something of a contemporary nature was fantastic to us."

James Hopkins, Hopkins Homes

Procurement

The architects were chosen through an invited competition and worked with Adnams and Hopkins Homes as developer to design the scheme to planning, with Hopkins Homes as the preferred developer. When planning permission was granted it was conditional on the developer to act on the agreed design. A management contract was used.

Project team

Architect: Ash Sakula

Developer: Adnams Brewery / Hopkins Homes

Contractor: Hopkins Homes

Planning Authority: Waveney District Council

Client feedback

“I wanted to have something that we were going to be architecturally and socially proud of.”

Simon Loftus, former Chairman Adnams Brewery

“Because of the high quality materials that we used, the landscaping and quality of design, it should stand the test of time and we will be proud of it for many years to come I think”.

James Hopkins, Hopkins Homes

Resident feedback

“We call it our modern cottage, it’s bright, sunny, what else is there to say? It’s great. It’s what we were looking for... for about 10 years!”

Val Collins, retired resident

“The square is a very special place to be....”

Resident

“... One of the best places I have been in the world.”

Jed Tejada-Jimenez, resident with young family

“Such a community spirit, it’s such a really nice place to be.”

Paul Edwards, local trader

Conclusions

The development has been very successful in bringing more life to this area of the town. There is a constant flow of people of all ages walking through the scheme to the sea, café, and shops or just as a shortcut. The aim of creating a permeable site has been achieved.

The scale of the development, use of space and access to amenities could lend the Tibby’s Triangle to be easily transformed into a ‘care ready’ community. This might require some minor design changes for some of the apartments to improve access and a formalisation of the mutual support and reciprocity, but could build upon and be a natural expansion of the existing community spirit.

The square has attracted events, markets, and performances and is a well-used place for the residents to meet. Tibby’s Triangle has won the following design awards:

Winner of the 2012 Housing Design Awards for Completed Scheme

Winner of the 2008 Housing Design Awards for Best Project

Winner of the 2011 What House? Gold Award for Best Brownfield Development

Key learning points

There was some negative reaction once the development was completed from some of the adjacent residents, but mainly due to the fact that the much larger bulk of the industrial buildings had few external windows so there had been no overlooking, whereas the smaller new development did. So more a case of the ‘shock of the new’ and adjusting to change.

A large proportion of the cost was the area of external wall required mitigating any overlooking; this could have been reduced but would not have addressed those concerns. The layout was very much dictated by planning constraints and density, but the outcomes have been successful due to the very innovative design solutions. The only areas which have been less successful were where several of the houses were changed to flats post planning, resulting

in slightly compromised gardens and layouts, but these were responses to the collapse of the housing market and the need for additional units to be incorporated.

Cost reductions also led to modifications in the planting, with less indigenous plants, fewer trees and omission of green walls. Several of the houses were post planning converted to apartments, which has led to some compromised internal layouts and gardens.

By increasing connectivity to the town and within the development it has created an easy place to live – easing the burden of daily life – making it easier to shop, go out, and interact with neighbours but also be integrated with the rest of the town. The scale also allows residents to choose the level of interaction and feel part of a community without it being too small to not provide privacy and choice to engage, or too big to feel lost. These are some of the ingredients required to enable a sense of community to work, for all residents irrespective of demographic.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Ash Sakula for their assistance and generosity in providing images for this case study and spending time discussing the scheme.

Cover photo courtesy of John Lord, yellow book. All other images © Ash Sakula.

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

About the Housing LIN

Previously responsible for managing the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund, the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) is the leading 'learning lab' for a growing network of housing, health and social care professionals in England involved in planning, commissioning, designing, funding, building and managing housing, care and support services for older people and vulnerable adults with long term conditions, including dementia.

The Housing LIN is a member of the Dementia Action Alliance. For further information on this and about the Housing LIN's comprehensive list of online resources at 'In Focus: Innovations in Housing and Dementia', and opportunities for shared learning and service improvement, including site visits and network meetings in your region, visit:

www.housinglin.org.uk/HousingandDementia

The Housing LIN welcomes contributions on a range of issues pertinent to housing with care for older and vulnerable adults. If there is a subject that you feel should be addressed, please do contact us.

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