



Housing LIN

*Connecting people, ideas and resources*

## Case Study 151

# Building the right homes for adults with learning disabilities and autism in Oxfordshire.

**FEBRUARY 2019**

Written by **Sue Ryde** and **Julia Godwin** (both formerly of Oxfordshire County Council) and **Kim Swallowe** (Cherwell District Council)



# Summary

Following a presentation given at the South East Housing LIN regional meeting last year, this case study describes an innovative supported housing scheme that was recently delivered by Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council.

## Brief description of the scheme

St Edburg's Path in Bicester and Nickling Place in Banbury offer 12 purposefully designed apartments for adults with learning disabilities and autism.

All units are self-contained with private rear gardens and look out onto secure communal courtyards that have been designed to offer sensory areas for both play and relaxation. The schemes also provide communal kitchen and lounge areas alongside designated staff offices and overnight accommodation.

The core aspiration of the scheme had two main requirements:

- 1) To provide well designed housing to meet the needs of clients who were either inappropriately housed in residential accommodation (sometimes out of area) or those who were living in family or other inappropriate accommodation but ready to move to a more independent lifestyle.
- 2) To produce revenue savings from the Oxfordshire County Council's Adult Services revenue budget.



*Communal gardens at St Edburg's Path, Bicester*

## How it was delivered

Recognising the need for better quality and more cost effective housing and the need to offer an alternative to residential care, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) and Cherwell District Council (CDC) agreed to work in partnership through a joint commissioning approach. The work was

formalised through a transfer arrangement whereby a number of OCC sites (which were surplus to requirements) were sold to CDC at a price which reflected the agreement to develop the supported housing.

It was recognised early on that the schemes would be more costly to build than typical residential units due to their higher specification requirements. As such, Homes England provided £440,000 of grant funding for these particular units under their Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund. Without this contribution the project may not have otherwise been deemed viable.

Sites were identified based on their suitability in terms of access to nearby amenities, a sense of community (it was important that there was the potential to integrate), surrounding noise levels and ability to offer the required level of privacy.

This structure and responsibility for project deliverables is illustrated in table 1 below.

Project Phase	Joint Commissioning Board (Decision Making Body)	
	Cherwell District Council	Oxfordshire County Council
Design & Construction	Produce design proposals and manage construction of project	Advise on design features and specification
Post Practical Completion	Building and landscaping maintenance, management of leasehold contracts with tenants	Provision of care service and tenant needs management

A specification was then jointly produced with input from occupational therapists, industry experts, care providers, end users and their families.

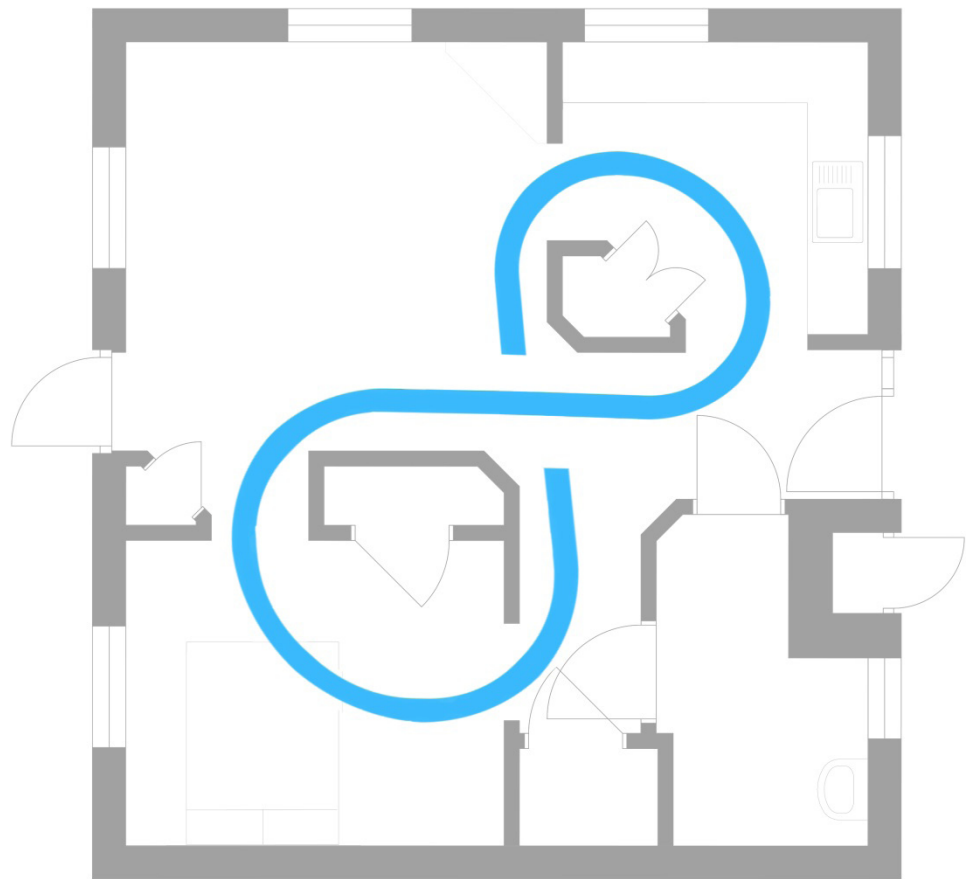
Since completion, CDC have provided ongoing building management as landlord and OCC have commissioned the care and support service for tenants via a third party.

## Housing Design

The homes had been entirely planned to meet the specific needs of adults with autism and included features such as an innovative internal layout that allowed tenants to run in a continuous figure of 8 around the property (see fig. 1 below).

In order to ensure the usability of this feature, the choice of flooring was carefully chosen to minimise the difference in texture and colour between rooms. A mono-colour, matt vinyl in a soft grey tone was chosen throughout with no visible join lines across doorways. In wet-rooms, a vinyl of a similar tone but with the increased level of grip resistance as required was employed.

*Fig. 1  
Internal layout of the homes,  
allowing continuous movement  
around the property*



Other design features incorporated to meet the needs of residents include the following:

- The adoption of private front gardens (as well as rear gardens) to create safe, semi-public areas between front doors and the communal garden.
- External lockable service cupboards so that plumbing and electric meters can be maintained without having to enter properties.
- Integrated play equipment in gardens such as sunken trampolines.
- Integrated cabling infrastructure to allow for future addition of assistive technologies.
- Robust reinforced solid wall construction and robust door hinges.
- Wet-rooms that have been designed to allow either baths or showers, with plumbing infrastructure installed to readily allow future adaptation as per residence needs.

- Anti-ligature fixtures and fittings throughout including ironmongery, lighting & window dressings.
- Underfloor heating throughout to remove risk of radiators being damaged.
- Purpose-built media units to contain TVs and gaming consoles behind toughened glass panels.
- Purpose-built, robust furniture with no 'hiding places' underneath.
- A soft, muted, matt colour scheme of neutrals and greys that allows residents to add colour for sensory stimulation as and when they feel comfortable.
- Sloped internal window cills to deter residents from picking around frames.
- Streamlined kitchen designs that include flush fitted induction hobs, solid surface worktops, and handleless doors and cupboards.



*Interior design of the homes, with muted colour scheme and purpose-built furniture*

## Outcomes

- The developments have been hugely successful with nearly all units now occupied and care managers and the provider seeing noticeable improvements in tenant wellbeing.
- The short term level of revenue savings has not been realised on the care contract at the outset as many of the tenants have needed one to one support at night on an individual basis but it is hoped that as the tenants become used to living more independently these savings will be realised in the longer term. However the supported housing model commissioned does compare favourably against the equivalent costs in a registered setting.
- These new developments allowed tenants to move back into Oxfordshire and to prevent people moving out of county so they could be closer to family as there was previously not a similar scheme on offer in Oxfordshire which catered for the level of complexity of need.

# Lesson Learned

There were, however, a number of challenges faced during the delivery of the schemes which needed to be overcome and that will be used to shape any future projects. These are as follows:

- The need to appoint external design consultants with a suitable level of experience in supported housing. The lack of consultant knowledge put a huge strain on in-house specialists to assist with production of specifications and design proposals.
- The need to ensure Site Managers have experience in schemes of this nature. This will reduce the onus on a clerk of works/client to check the quality of the work and finish required for schemes of this nature.
- Short soft-landing periods require all work to be completed & snagged without overruns. Unlike other types of projects, flexibility cannot be built in to complete minor detailing post-completion.
- Need to co-ordinate and identify resources for hospital discharge and specialist health input.
- Need to review Nominations agreements for specialist schemes- naivety on everyone behalf as the scheme took longer to fill up due to the complexity of the transition to independence of some of the clients.
- A need to work with the wider community in the longer term over acceptance of those with more complex needs living in the community and to work with individual clients on becoming 'good neighbours'.

## Note

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

A copy of the powerpoint slides from the presentation given at the South East Housing LIN regional meeting on 19 July 2018 can be accessed at:

[https://www.housinglin.org.uk/\\_assets/Events/2018-07/GodwinRyde\\_190718.pdf](https://www.housinglin.org.uk/_assets/Events/2018-07/GodwinRyde_190718.pdf)

# About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 40,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England and Wales to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population.

Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'knowledge hub' on specialist housing, our online and regional networked activities:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing choices that enable older and disabled people to live independently
- provide intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice developments, and
- raise the profile of specialist housing with developers, commissioners and providers to plan, design and deliver aspirational housing for an ageing population.

To view other resources on housing for people with a learning disability or autism featured by the Housing LIN, visit our dedicated webpage at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingLearningDisabilities/>

## Published by

Housing Learning and Improvement Network  
c/o PRP, The Ideas Store  
10 Lindsey Street, Clerkenwell  
London EC1A 9HP

Email: [info@housinglin.org.uk](mailto:info@housinglin.org.uk)

Web: [www.housinglin.org.uk](http://www.housinglin.org.uk)

Twitter: [@HousingLIN](https://twitter.com/HousingLIN) & [@HousingLINews](https://twitter.com/HousingLINews)