



Housing LIN

*Connecting people, ideas and resources*

## Case Study 166

# Red Oak Court, Dorset – Relocatable Housing scheme for people with Learning Disabilities and Mental Health problems

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# Brief Description of the Scheme

Red Oak Court is a development of 18 properties in Wareham, Dorset. 13 of the homes are used to create a Supported Living service, primarily for people with Learning Disabilities or Mental Health problems. 1 property has been used to create a staff office and overnight accommodation to enable an onsite support service to the people living at the scheme. A further 4 properties are used to provide Temporary Accommodation to homeless people.

All the units are self-contained. 12 properties form a two-storey block of terraced apartments with a large veranda area, and 6 properties are bungalows with private rear gardens, for people who need more accessible accommodation.

Our site in Wareham is a brownfield site owned by Dorset Council, previously occupied by a Middle School. This site was a good opportunity because while we have long-term development plans, a modular housing product could give us 'meanwhile' use - tying into existing services and infrastructure on the site and giving people a short-term home while the longer-term plans are developed. It is surrounded by playing fields, natural green space, and leisure facilities, and is a 10-minute walk from the high street.

What makes Red Oak Court unique, as far as we know, is that the scheme is entirely constructed from factory-built modular units that can be relocated multiple times over their life.

The main aims of the scheme were to:

- 1) Provide a solution for immediate housing with support need in the area, particularly for working age adults with disabilities.
- 2) Provide "meanwhile use" for a vacant development site while long-term plans are developed.

When the units are relocated we can think again about the most appropriate use and location, and we can configure them in a different way depending on the location, site constraints, and proposed use. This could involve splitting up into several smaller schemes in different parts of the county.

## How it was delivered

In early 2018, Dorset Council completed an Accommodation Needs assessment, considering the new Care Homes and Homes with Support schemes that might be needed to meet current and future demand. Through this exercise we worked with our Social Work teams to collate a register of people with a need for accommodation with support, asking them to also identify the timescale in which accommodation was needed.

Through this exercise we identified 160 people who needed accommodation within a year, some of whom had an immediate need. Our limited supply of general needs housing accessed through the housing register would not suit everyone on this list, and we had a chronic shortage of 1-bedroom self-contained supported living as much of the existing services were provided in HMOs. We started to consider how we could quickly provide an option for some of these people.

Alongside this, Dorset County Council (which would become Dorset Council through Local Government Reorganisation in 2019) was progressing plans for larger scale development across several council-owned sites, to include Extra Care Housing and Supported Living services alongside affordable housing for workers in the Health, Care, and Support sector. It was clear that these larger projects would take many years of planning before development would begin, and this led to an opportunity to think about a housing product that could help to meet immediate need and put the land to “meanwhile use” and generate income from otherwise unoccupied sites.

A case was made for exploring modular-build accommodation as a short-term solution to this urgent need using the land that we had at our disposal. The Business Case assumed that we would use an accommodation product based upon recycled Shipping Containers, with an estimated price of £65,000 per unit including planning costs, groundwork and infrastructure costs, and units themselves.

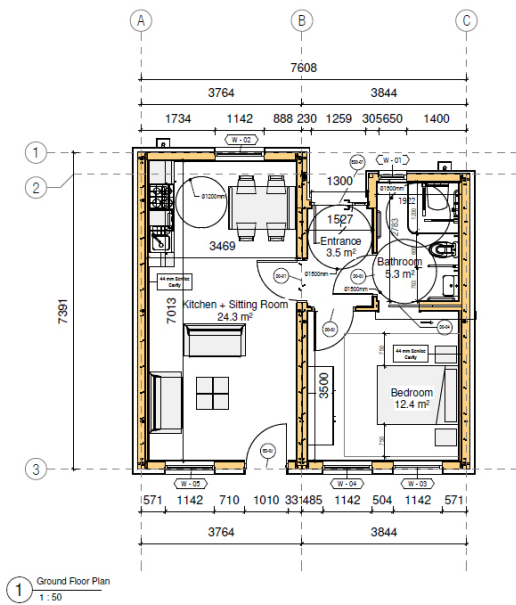


*Early Concept Design*

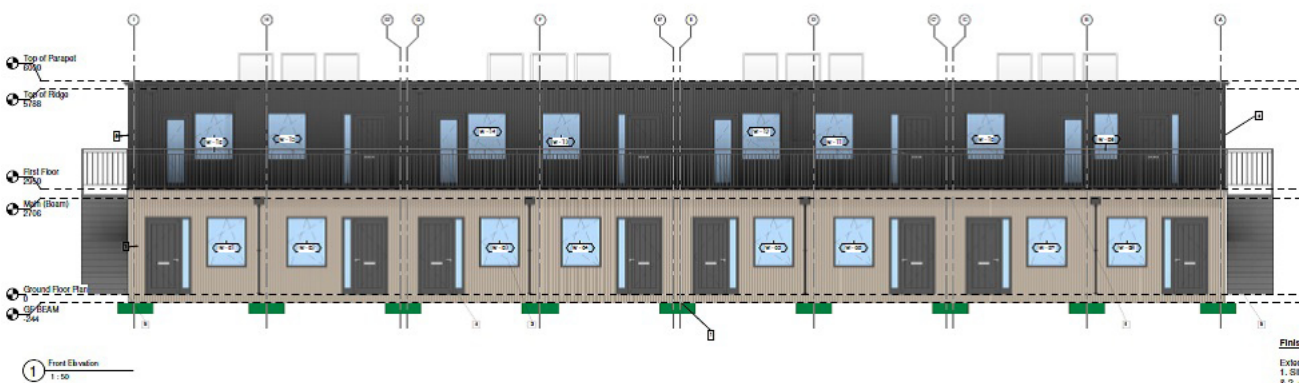
Dorset County Council cabinet approved the investment of £1.9m capital funding to deliver 30 units of accommodation. Dorset also successfully made a bid to the One Public Estate (OPE) programme under Phase 7 grant funding for Red Oak Court. This was a companion bid to a second bid for funding to bring forward development of the site for permanent use. OPE were interested in the innovative approach of using a relocatable housing product to meet need and extract value from a site while longer-term planning took place, and approved funding for both bids.

Although we anticipated that modular units could be cheaper to produce than a traditionally constructed home, the main advantage was the speed of delivery and the ability to relocate the homes to other locations in future. Having explored the procurement options with colleagues in our Property Services team, it was decided that the Southern Modular Building Framework, set up by Hampshire County Council, was a quick and simple route to market for a range of Modular Building contractors, and initial market engagement indicated several interested providers.

Although the initial assumptions in the Business Case were made based on units of accommodation recycled from Shipping Containers, as more became known about the needs of individuals and the limitations of the recycled product, it became apparent that a bespoke product would be more appropriate. In addition to having a greater degree of input into the design of the accommodation itself, a purpose-built product has a longer expected lifespan of 60 years, giving us greater scope to make use of the accommodation over a longer period. We ran a mini competition under the framework, receiving three bids. It became clear through the procurement process that the initial assumptions around price per unit had been underestimated, and the scope of the project reduced from 30 units to 18 to remain within the budget envelope. The outcome of this exercise was to appoint Extraspace Solutions Ltd as the successful provider, under a Design & Build contract.



① Ground Floor Plan  
1:50



① Front Elevation  
1:50

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The design process involved Social Workers and Occupational Therapists from our local Operations team, coordinated by our in-house Property Services acting as the contract managers. The units were all constructed in a factory while groundworks were undertaken. On the day of delivery, all 18 units arrived and were sited in a single day, arriving on a fleet of articulated lorries so service connections could be made, and external treatments added.



# More details about the scheme

The properties are not large - 25m<sup>2</sup> for the terraced units, 50m<sup>2</sup> for the bungalows - but they offer more living space and privacy than a room in a shared house and are a greater starter home for people to learn independent living skills.

Each of the terraced apartments offers a single bedroom, wet room bathroom, and lounge and kitchen space, and an alcove - some people are using this for a bistro table and chairs, others as a place for shelving and storage.

The bungalows have a larger single bedroom, accessible wet room bathroom, and open plan living space incorporating a kitchen area with space for a dining table, and a lounge area with a patio door leading into the private garden.



The scheme is arranged around a central green space with parking, and borders playing fields leading on to the Wareham Common, giving most of the flats great views across green space and onto forest and fields. The flats are fitted with solar panels across all roofs.





An onsite commissioned Support Provider offers a 24-hour background support to the 13 Supported Living units, plus additional 1:1 support where required. The service currently supports a mix of people, some who only need minimal support and some with quite complex support requirements. Most of the people living there have learning difficulties or mental health issues, but the scheme hasn't been designed to be exclusive to one group of people.

Through the long-term plans for the site, we intend to provide permanent, larger accommodation to replace Red Oak Court, which will be located to a new site (or sites) in Dorset.

Red Oak Court is also cited as an example in the Housing LIN's recent Housing and Care good practice guide for South West ADASS. This can be accessed at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/Housing-and-Care-Good-Practice-guide/>

## Outcomes

In Summer 2021, Red Oak Court turned 1 year old, and this seemed a good point to take stock, conduct lessons learned on both the construction and support commissioning, and to celebrate with the people living there how life has changed.



We created a video, interviewing people living at the scheme and social workers from the local team about what it was like to live there: [Welcome to Red Oak Court \(opens in Youtube\)](#)

A lovely community feel has formed at Red Oak Court and people are thriving here, forming friendships, caring for pets, looking after their own gardens, securing jobs, and getting involved in local community schemes.

For this group of people, the scheme has enabled them to move on from living with mum and dad or a room in a shared house, on to their own place with its own front door. Because the apartments are clustered, they provide independence within a community while also giving Dorset Council financial benefit through the shared support service.



## Lessons Learned

Red Oak Court has been open and occupied for over 2 years now, and while life for the people living there is good, Dorset learned some important lessons through the creation of this scheme.

There was no blueprint for us to refer to with the creation of this scheme – as far as we know this is the first modular relocatable housing scheme that has been used for Supported Living. The key learning points that we have taken away from this project are:

- Project oversight is needed across design, construction, allocation, and service commissioning to ensure all these aspects are aligned as closely as possible.
- Specialist design input at an early stage will help us to make the most of schemes like this in future, widening the cohort of people who could be successfully supported and making sure environments are suitable for a wider range of people.
- Modular construction is faster, but it is not always cheaper. Eventually, the scheme cost Dorset Council £2.2m to deliver, just over £120,000 per unit.
- While our scheme is not going to be on the site forever, the requirements of the planning application are no different to those for a permanent scheme, and we had to do a lot more work on landscaping and external treatments than we anticipated (adding unexpected cost).
- The scheme has had a higher than usual amount of snagging and defect issues, something we have worked through with our contractors. We have tried to minimise the impact on residents as much as possible, but this is nonetheless far from ideal in supported living service.
- The unique nature of the properties has highlighted the need to have a very well managed and clear nomination and allocation process for supported living, to make sure the environment is appropriate for the people being referred.

# 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

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 25,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist/supported housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people to live independently in a home of their choice
- provide insight and intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice to support sector learning and improvement
- showcase what's best in specialist/supported housing and feature innovative projects and services that demonstrate how lives of people have been transformed, and
- support commissioners and providers to review their existing provision and develop, test out and deliver solutions so that they are best placed to respond to their customers' changing needs and aspirations

To access a selection of related resources on housing for people with a learning disability of autism, visit our dedicated pages at:

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

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