



Housing LIN

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Case Study 183

Award winning Ossulton Court in Uxbridge: Reinterpreting the Almshouse for Later Life.

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Introduction

Ossulton Court is a contemporary almshouse development in Uxbridge, west London. Completed in 2022, it provides 30 new apartments within a highly constrained urban site.

Winner of the Almshouse Association Inspirational Homes Award in 2025, the scheme reinterprets the enduring social principles of the almshouse through contemporary later-life housing: combining independent, adaptable homes with a shared courtyard, landscape and sheltered circulation that create opportunities for everyday encounter and community.

The project grew from a simple but fundamental question: how can housing for later life support independence while also creating opportunities for connection, belonging and everyday community?

The answer drew on two complementary influences: the enduring social principles of the traditional almshouse and the HAPPI1 approach to well-designed housing for older people. Rather than reproducing historic forms, the scheme sought to reinterpret the relationships that made the almshouse model enduring — between individual home and shared space, privacy and encounter, independence and mutual support. Several years after completion, Ossulton Court offers an opportunity to reflect on how these principles were translated into architecture and landscape.

Background: from artillery yard to almshouse

The site has a long history of adaptation. It predates the formation of the Almshouse Association who have recently celebrated their eightieth anniversary. Indeed, Uxbridge United Welfare Trust has provided almshouse accommodation within the town since the eighteenth century, with Woodbridge House constructed on the artillery yard of a former drill hall and barracks in 1906–07.

By the time redevelopment was considered, the existing bedsit accommodation could no longer adequately meet residents' needs. Upper floors were accessible only by steep stairs; circulation was narrow and unwelcoming; accommodation was too small for couples or comfortable visits from family and friends; and the ageing fabric performed poorly environmentally.

The site itself presented another challenge. It sits within a Conservation Area, enclosed by development on all four sides and accessed through a fine-grained urban fabric. Yet its setting is also unusually rich: immediately to the west lies the River Fray, while to the east and north the site encounters the movement and infrastructure of Uxbridge's inner ring road.

This inherited condition suggested that the new development should behave less as an isolated building and more as a **precinct** — a recognisable community with its own social heart.



Ossulton Court between the River Fray and the inner ring road

Reinterpreting the almshouse

An early design sketch described the idea simply as:

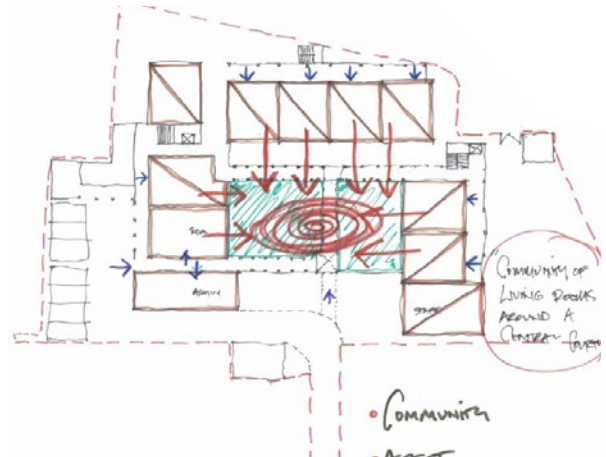
"A community of living spaces around a communal courtyard."

That principle became the organising idea for the scheme. The traditional almshouse courtyard was not treated as a historic style to be replicated, but as a social structure worth recovering. Homes are arranged around a landscaped central space, while covered walkways and cloister-like circulation create a sequence of sheltered thresholds between private dwellings and communal life.

The courtyard therefore performs several roles simultaneously. It provides outlook and landscape, establishes a clear centre to the development and creates places for informal encounter and social interaction. At the same time, residents retain private front doors, balconies and patios and can choose their own level of participation. This balance between community and autonomy became central to the design.



Former Woodbridge House almshouses



Concept sketch: "Community of Living Rooms Around a Central Courtyard"

HAPPI principles, independent living and a renewed sense of community

The HAPPI principles were a significant influence on the development, particularly in considering the quality of the individual home alongside the shared environment.

Apartments were designed with dual aspects to maximise daylight, natural ventilation and views in more than one direction. Private balconies or patios provide personal outdoor space while maintaining a visual relationship with the courtyard and gardens.

All 30 apartments were designed for wheelchair accessibility, with level access throughout the development. The original project brief also incorporated sheltered circulation, communal facilities and adaptable internal arrangements.



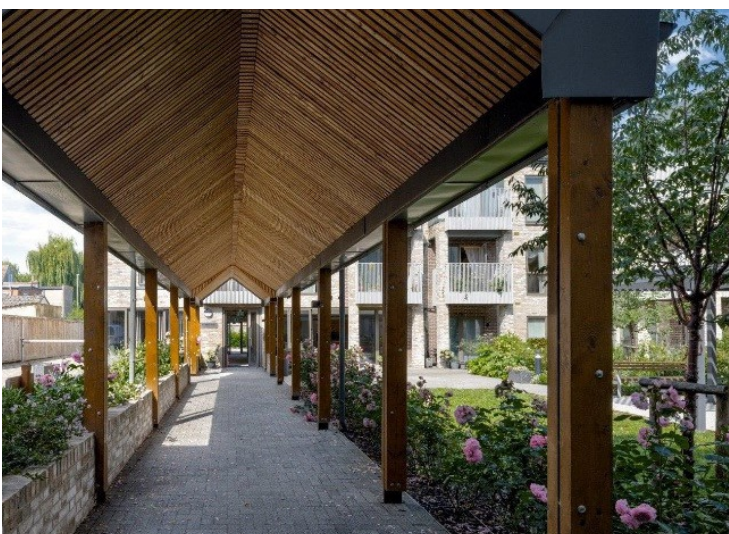
Wide view showing communal garden, seating, homes and cloister

The apartment design was therefore not conceived independently of the wider scheme. A resident moves through a sequence of spatial scales:

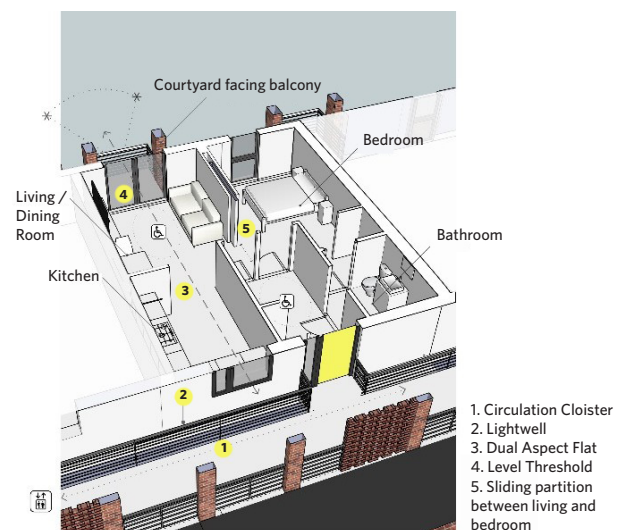
home → threshold → cloister → courtyard → precinct → town

Each offers a different degree of privacy, encounter and participation.

That gradient is important. Later-life housing need not require a choice between isolation and institutionalised communal living. Architecture can instead provide different opportunities for connection while allowing residents to retain control over how and when they engage.



Sheltered walkway connecting homes and courtyard



Apartment axonometric: Dual aspect, level threshold, balcony and adaptable layout

Between river and ring road

Ossulton Court can also be understood as an exercise in mediation. On one side lies the slow, landscape-dominated environment of the River Fray; on the other, an inherited urban precinct - the noise, movement and visual complexity of the inner ring road. The scheme sits between these contrasting conditions and creates a sheltered landscape at its centre.

The architecture establishes definition around the edges of the site while turning homes towards the communal garden. In this sense, the courtyard is more than an amenity: it becomes a place of calm within a difficult urban setting.

The project also incorporates a fabric-first environmental approach, heat recovery and Monodraught natural ventilation systems, alongside daylight and cross-ventilation arising from the dual-aspect apartment planning.

Environmental and social considerations were therefore approached together rather than separately: comfort, landscape, accessibility and opportunities for encounter all contribute to the quality of everyday life.



River Fray: a glimpse of Ossulton Court from across the slow river

Key learning points

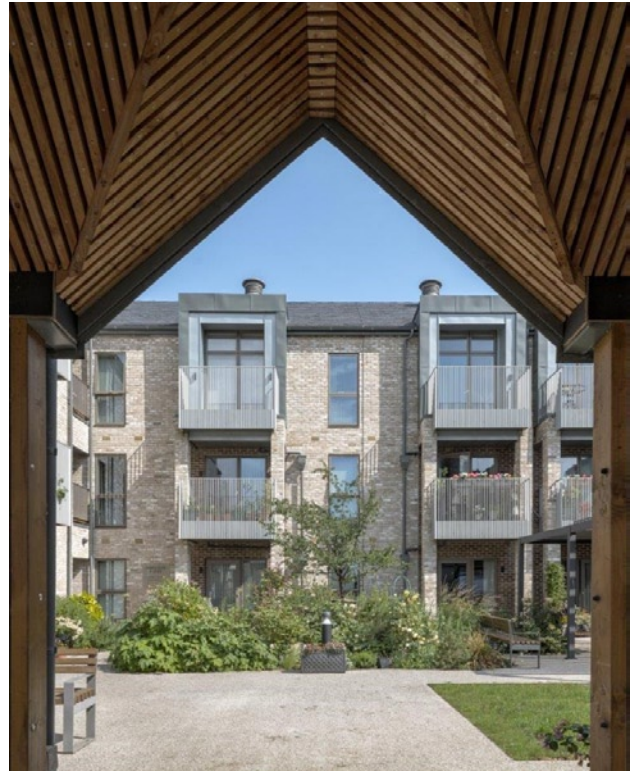
Ossulton Court suggests that the continuing relevance of the almshouse lies not in its architectural appearance but in its underlying principles.

The courtyard gives the community a recognisable centre. Sheltered circulation makes movement through the scheme part of everyday social life. Dual-aspect, accessible homes support independence, while private balconies and thresholds allow residents to participate in communal life on their own terms.

The project also demonstrates the value of working with the particular character of a site. The inherited precinct condition, rather than being treated solely as a constraint, became part of the architectural response.

Perhaps the broader lesson is that good housing for later life is not created by one feature or standard in isolation. It emerges from the relationship between the individual home, shared space, landscape and community.

Several years after completion, the mature planting, personalised balconies and continued occupation of the courtyard provide visible evidence of a place that has moved beyond design intention and begun to acquire its own life.



View of landscape mature courtyard from beneath the entrance cloister



Beekeeping/community activity, Ossulton Court private gardens

Further information

If you found this Case Study of interest, the Housing LIN also curates dedicated webpages on almshouses at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Housing/HousingforOlderPeople/Almshouses/>

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

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About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 15,000 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
- provide access to intelligence on the latest funding, research, policy and practice developments
- raise the profile of specialist and supported housing with developers, commissioners and operators, and
- attract business to help and support clients plan, design and operate aspirational housing and services for people of all ages.

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