

Appleby Blue: one year on

Insights into our journey so far



To our team, trustees, partners, supporters, and, above all, our residents, thank you for believing in this vision. Appleby Blue proves that superb design and support services that strengthens independent living can transform lives.

This is a place where choice and respect for each individual are paramount, and we hope that, like our historic almshouses, Appleby Blue will remain a cherished part of Southwark’s landscape for centuries to come. A home not just for one generation, but for many to follow.



Photo: Benoit Grogan-Avignon

What is an almshouse?

Almshouses are charitable housing typically for older and low-income individuals. They offer independent living with communal spaces, fostering connection and wellbeing.

Cover photo: Philip Vile

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Reimagining the almshouse

Welcome to Appleby Blue



Martyn Craddock
Chief Executive
United St Saviour's Charity

For over 500 years, United St Saviour's Charity has supported the Southwark community, providing housing, grant funding and community programmes that build resilience and foster connection. Appleby Blue, our latest development, reimagines what social housing for older people can be in the heart of the city.

At United St Saviour's Charity, our story began in 1541 with legacies like Dorothy Appleby's, supporting Southwark for over five centuries. Appleby Blue represents the next chapter, inspired by its namesake – The Blue – Bermondsey's central marketplace, known for bringing people together.

Appleby Blue reimagines the almshouse for the 21st century, a model of social housing where independent living and community life thrive. This innovative project was made possible by a bold collaboration between public, private, and voluntary sectors, proving what can be achieved when diverse partners unite behind a shared vision.

More than just housing, Appleby Blue offers older adults choice, dignity and connection, with vibrant shared spaces like a community centre and kitchen fostering intergenerational engagement. By investing in thoughtful design and people, we've created homes that uplift residents, free up family housing, and inspire a new standard for independent living.

This report celebrates Appleby Blue's first year and shares insights to inspire local authorities, developers, and communities nationwide. While we're proud this project serves as an exemplar, our true ambition is for it to become not the exception but the standard for older people's social housing, both here in London and in cities across the UK.

Photo: Philip Vile

The state of housing



“I sometimes wonder what a later living development would look like if funds were available to make it near-perfect. Now I know. Appleby Blue’s brilliant design, its feel-good atmosphere, its fit within its wider community...it all adds up to the model we have been waiting for. Now let’s see how we can learn from this experience and repeat it everywhere.”

Lord Richard Best, OBE DL
Co-Chair of the APPG
for Housing and Care
for Older People

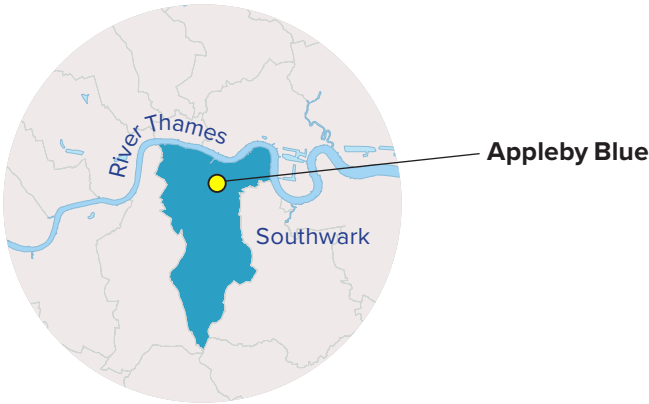
The housing landscape and need for change

England’s ageing population is driving an urgent need for accessible, purpose-built housing. By 2035, nearly 29% of the population will be over 60, requiring 38,000 new rental homes annually, including 21,000 as social housing for low-income renters. Without such developments, the number of private renters aged 65+ could double by 2046, intensifying pressure on housing markets and public services.

The Labour government has committed to a ‘social housing revolution’, promising affordable, age-friendly homes for all. Providing suitable housing for older adults creates a ripple effect across the housing chain, freeing up larger homes for families while easing market pressures. It also reduces public costs by preventing avoidable hospital admissions and supporting independent living.

Appleby Blue exemplifies these benefits. Its 57 homes house 65 residents, many transitioning from underutilised council or private rental properties. This move has freed up 118 bedrooms, showing how offering the choice of high-quality social housing for older people directly benefits the broader housing system.

Appleby Blue is more than just a housing project, it’s a blueprint for integrating thoughtful design, independence, and community. By learning from this model, we can transform housing for older adults nationwide and meet the evolving needs of an ageing society.



“A triumphant example of what can be achieved when the public, private and voluntary sectors work together.”

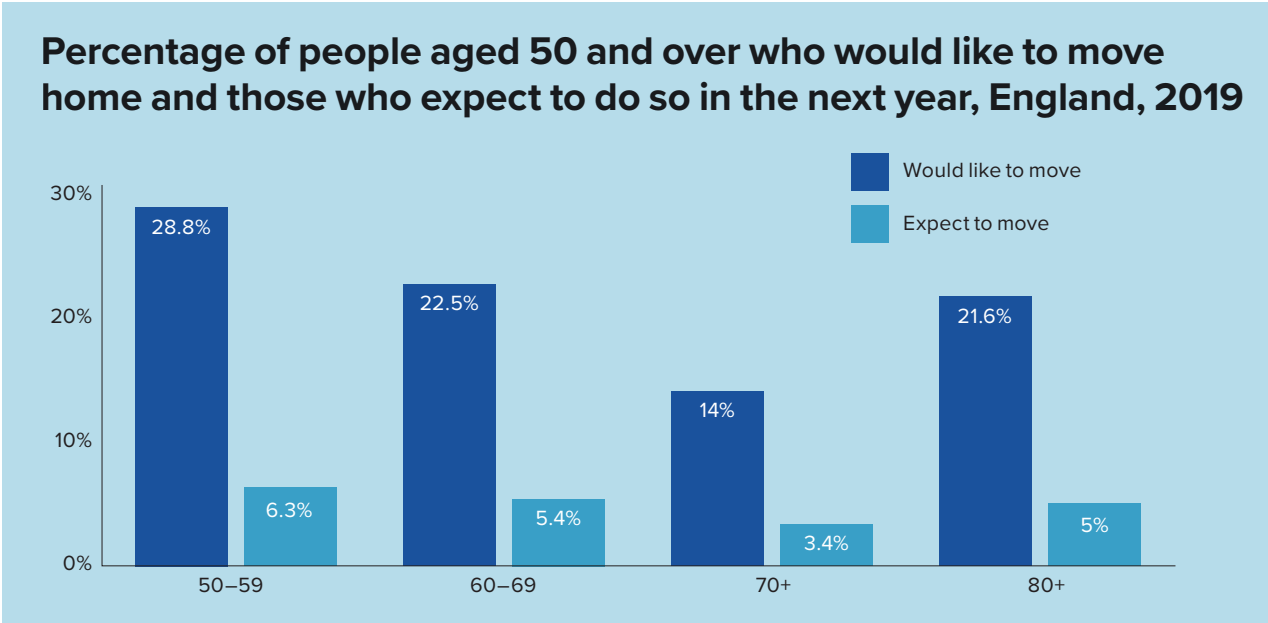
Steve Platts
Director of Planning and
Growth, Southwark Council

The need for change in housing for older adults

Southwark is on a journey to build on its status as an age-friendly borough – part of the WHO Global Network – with a focus on creating inclusive spaces, intergenerational activities and accessible housing for older people, no matter their background or needs.

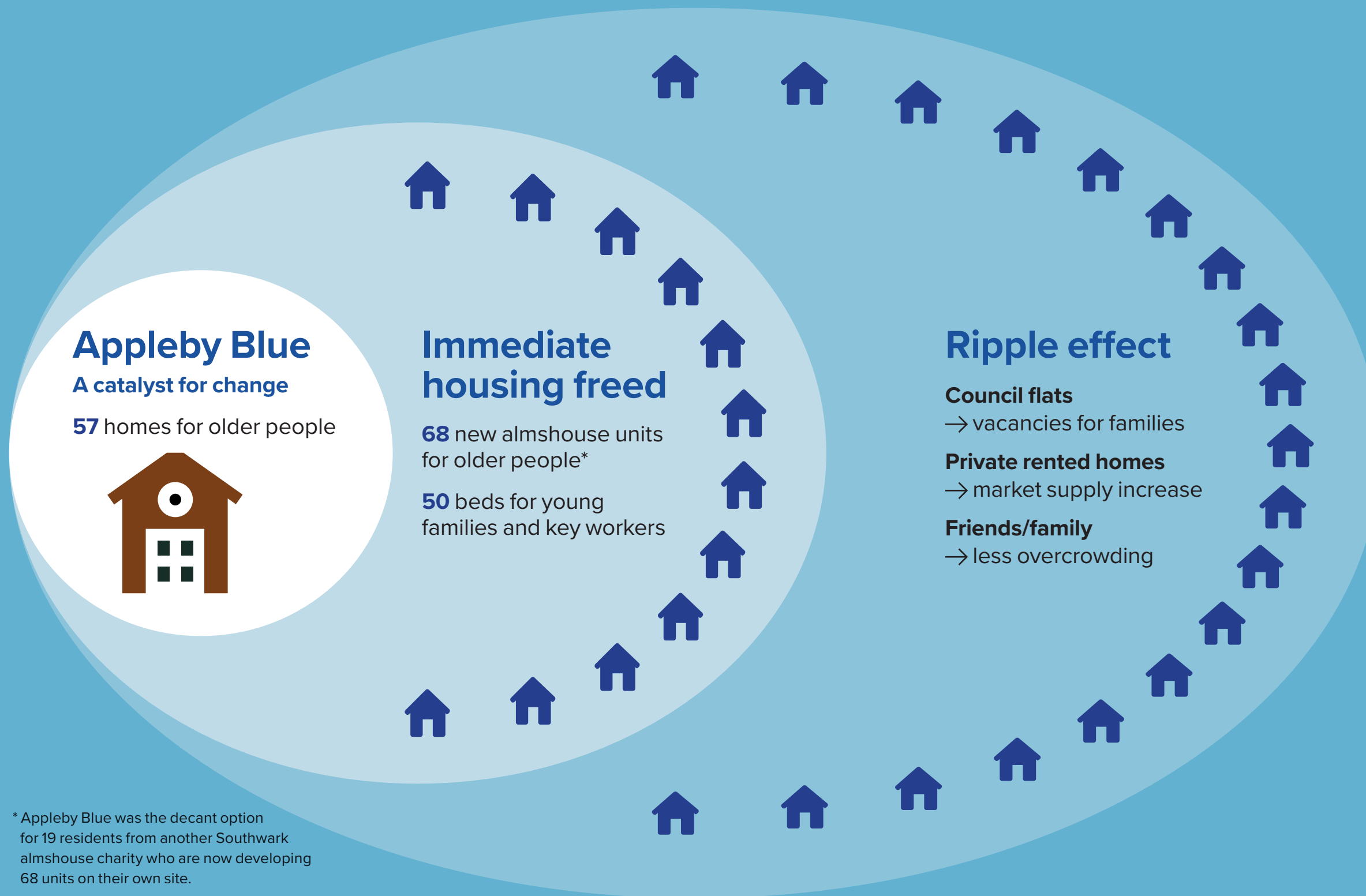
Although 39% of Southwark’s 143,000 homes are social housing, many older adults still struggle to find options that work for them.

Appleby Blue is fully aligned with Southwark’s vision, offering housing that creates connections and supports people as they grow older and their lives begin to change.



Centre for Ageing Better (2023) Homes. In: State of Ageing 2023-24 [online]
Available at: www.ageing-better.org.uk/homes-state-ageing-2023-4

Hundreds of new homes made available system-wide



“By senior citizens moving into more appropriate housing, family homes could be released with a positive ripple effect on the housing market generally. Also, helping senior citizens to live in more age-friendly and inclusive housing could save money for the public purse by avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions.”

Prof. Julianne Meyer
Chair of the Older People's Housing Taskforce

* Appleby Blue was the decant option for 19 residents from another Southwark almshouse charity who are now developing 68 units on their own site.

Design for all ages



Photo: Philip Ebbeling

“Appleby Blue is thoughtfully designed to connect residents and the community, promoting health, activity, and wellbeing.”

Stephen Witherford
Lead Architect at
Witherford Watson Mann

Reimagining the almshouse

Appleby Blue brings the traditional almshouse into the 21st century, offering supportive, affordable housing for older people right in the heart of Bermondsey. Designed by Stirling Prize winners Witherford Watson Mann, Appleby Blue is a new model for social housing; an urban community that balances independence with connection, and city living with a sense of calm.

Designed with residents in mind

Every aspect of the design prioritises resident needs, based on consultations with almshouse communities. Communal walkways encourage social interaction while respecting privacy and lounge windows offer peaceful spaces for quiet reflection or connection to the city.

A partnership that builds community

Appleby Blue was built on the site of a former council care home through a partnership between United St Saviour’s Charity, Southwark Council, and JTRE London. Funded by a Section 106 agreement with a luxury private development, this collaboration reinvested resources into creating a community asset that benefits the entire neighbourhood.

A sanctuary in the city

The Garden Room and central garden courtyard provide calm, green spaces for residents to relax, blending seasonal plantings, water features and urban vibrancy.

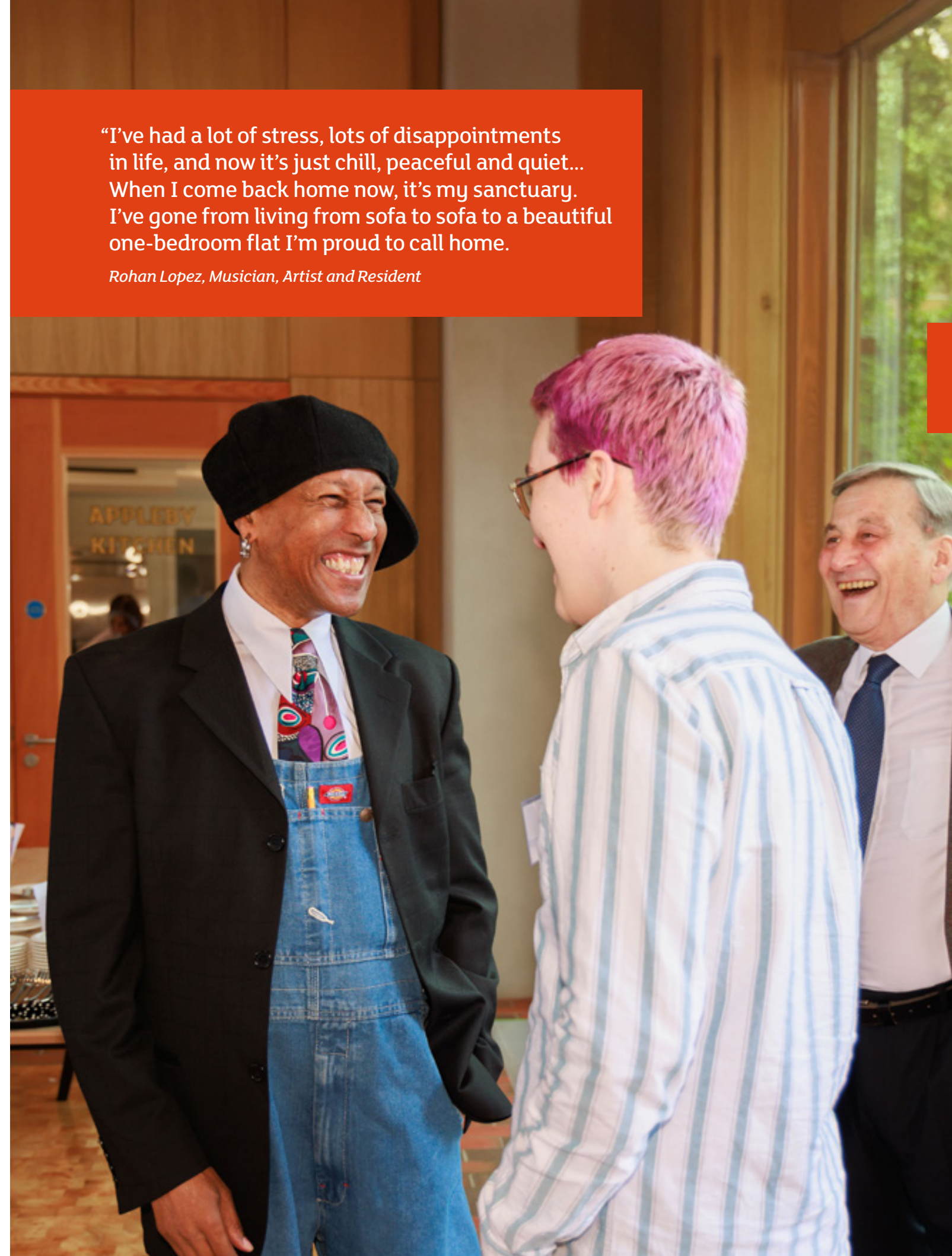
A vision of possibility

Appleby Blue proves that high-quality, well-designed social housing can enrich residents’ lives and strengthen communities.

Photo: Benoit Grogan-Avignon

“I’ve had a lot of stress, lots of disappointments in life, and now it’s just chill, peaceful and quiet... When I come back home now, it’s my sanctuary. I’ve gone from living from sofa to sofa to a beautiful one-bedroom flat I’m proud to call home.

Rohan Lopez, Musician, Artist and Resident





Residents Rita and Gwen at our weekly Songs and Smiles baby group in partnership with The Together Project.

Our resident support



“The highlight of our day is knowing we are easing anxieties for our residents and their families, and of course the many laughs and hugs we share along the way.”

Amy Brown
Resident Support Manager
United St Saviour's Charity

Our resident support model offers a tailored, person-centred approach to enhance independence and quality of life.

Outcomes Star methodology

At its heart is the Older Persons Outcomes Star methodology, used by our support team to create personal plans based on each resident's needs and goals and to measure impact. The resident support team act as advocates, helping residents navigate the health and social care system and access additional benefits and services.

Proactive and impactful

Our proactive approach not only boosts residents' wellbeing but also reduces GP visits and eases pressure on local services. We aim to ensure residents feel confident and able to stay in their homes and feel supported in their daily lives.

By fostering a supportive, inclusive community, we aim to ensure all residents feel valued and able to contribute to life at Appleby Blue.

Our first cohort of residents has been carefully selected to reflect, as much as possible, the diversity of Southwark. With 50% of nominations coming from the council, we've also worked to ensure a range of ages, creating a community where people at different stages of life feel welcome. From the outset, applicants were informed that Appleby Blue would be an active space with a community centre and opportunities to participate in activities. This first group plays a crucial role in shaping the culture and tone of Appleby Blue for future generations.

Right: residents Pat and Dave in their home at Appleby Blue



“I've never lived in a community before. My children are grown up and I knew a family could really use that space, but as a single person at my age there weren't many options. Living here has given me a new *raison d'être* – it's enabled me to carry on working.”

Fran, Appleby Blue resident



Photos: Jamie Lorrimer (above), Eve Milner (below)

Community connections



“We’re deeply committed to Southwark as a leading grant maker supporting grassroots organisations. Our strong community ties mean that Appleby Blue can offer local charities a space to deliver their essential services, co-designing programmes with both community partners and residents.”

Morgan Tume
Centre Manager
United St Saviour’s Charity

Appleby Blue is more than housing. We are a neighbourhood hub for Southwark and create meaningful connections between residents and our wider community. Our inclusive spaces and programmes bring together people of all ages, helping to create new social connections and learning across the generations.

A space for all ages

Our Garden Room hosts regular activities like Songs & Smiles, which brings three generations together to tackle social isolation through music and play. While Man with a Pan provides cooking classes for older men that foster new skills and friendships over shared meals.

Collaborative partnerships

We host art workshops and digital skills bootcamps in other shared spaces that encourage learning, creativity and wellbeing.

We work with a variety of local organisations to deliver local projects from cultural cooking classes to art initiatives for all ages.

We also provide an affordable venue to accommodate a range of community-driven initiatives to ensure facilities are accessible to all, while keeping residents at the heart of our mission.

Photos: Benoit Grogan-Avignon (top and bottom), Polly Braden (centre)

Right: Resident Dawn, Louise Durand – Community Programme Co-ordinator and Chef Hulya Erdal cooking in Appleby Blue Community Kitchen



Left: Local primary school children participating in a food project in our rooftop garden, in partnership with School Food Matters



Right: Resident Alimatu with local residents at The Songs & Smiles group in partnership with The Together Project







Photo: Benoit Grogan-Avignon

Connecting through food



“Living at Appleby Blue allowed me to build genuine, trusting relationships with participants and the local community. This organic approach to co-production was pivotal in creating meaningful experiences and ensuring the project’s success.”

Dr Sophia Amenyah
Vice Chancellor’s Fellow,
Assistant Professor in
Nutrition and a Dunhill
Medical Trust Research
Fellow at Northumbria
University, UK, leading on
the LEMONADE project

The Appleby Blue Community Kitchen is a warm, inclusive space that unites people of all ages through growing, preparing, and sharing food. Its rooftop garden supplies fresh herbs and produce, supporting a harvest-to-table approach that nourishes both body and soul. Generations work side by side at raised planters, fostering connections while cultivating new skills.

Dishes regularly celebrate Southwark’s cultural diversity, offering participants the chance to explore new flavours and share personal and family stories tied to food. This kitchen serves as the heart of Appleby Blue, where food and friendships flourish, creating stronger community bonds with every shared meal.

The LEMONADE Project

Led by Bournemouth University, hosted at Appleby Blue and funded by the Dunhill Medical Trust, the LEMONADE project, brought together over 121 older adults in Bermondsey to co-create community-based food activities. From gardening to cooking and meal-sharing, the initiative reduces social isolation, promotes health, and inspires local policymakers.

Appleby Blue’s kitchen builds on these lessons, placing older adults at the centre of its programmes. By using food as a tool for connection and wellbeing, it exemplifies how community initiatives can transform lives and create lasting change.

Learning together



“Our goal is not just to improve the life of our residents and neighbours but to share our learnings widely, inspiring inclusive environments across the UK and beyond.”

Alison Benzimra, Head of Research and Influence
United St Saviour's Charity

As a charity supporting the people of Southwark, learning and knowledge sharing is central to our mission at Appleby Blue. We collaborate with research and learning partners to explore the factors shaping our almshouse residents' lives and wider community dynamics. Our evidence-based, co-produced approach ensures that findings are shaped by lived experiences and real needs, fostering meaningful impact.

The researcher-in-residence studios at Appleby Blue enable ethnographic research by encouraging researchers and residents to connect as neighbours. This approach deepens understanding and informs our services while influencing wider policy and practices.

Key studies include the Bayes Business School Almshouse Longevity Study, which found that almshouse residents live longer and enjoy higher quality of life than peers in standard housing. Meanwhile, the UCL Almshouse Resilient Communities (ARC) project created the ARC Knowledge Hub, a resource for anyone interested in building resilient communities.

Our research explores the impact of intentional design, holistic support, and community engagement on older adults' wellbeing. We work across housing, health, and social care sectors, aligning efforts to support healthy ageing. Set in an urban environment, Appleby Blue also examines how cities can foster inclusive spaces where older people thrive. By sharing our insights, we aim to advance supportive environments for older adults across the UK.

Photo: Jon Nichols



Shaping futures through research and partnerships

Recommendations

Our journey reveals practical steps for creating better homes for later life. Building on the Older People’s Housing Taskforce recommendations, insights from our Appleby Blue autumn lecture series and our first-year experiences, we’ve identified eight recommendations:



1. Invest in quality design

Quality design should be accessible to everyone. Thoughtful design has a powerful impact on mental wellbeing and broader social outcomes, creating societal benefits that far outweigh the additional 25% investment needed to achieve quality and excellence.



2. Create collaboration across sectors

Collaboration between the public, private, and voluntary sectors is essential. The voluntary and community sectors bring unique expertise and connections often overlooked. By working together, these sectors can achieve outcomes that benefit communities and enhance project success.



3. Bridge housing, health and social care

Housing, health and social care should work as an integrated system, not separate silos. Addressing them together creates a robust foundation for wellbeing. This cohesive approach supports older adults’ needs more effectively, benefiting society as a whole and creating economic savings too.



4. Engage communities in the built environment

Architects and developers should view the community as a central client. Development should be co-created with communities, not simply for them. This community-centred approach strengthens ties and ensures that spaces meet the real needs of those who live there.



5. Embed housing for older people in within communities

Older people’s housing should be viewed as an integral community asset, embedding older adults in the heart of community life. By doing so, we celebrate the contributions of older residents and foster stronger, more inclusive neighbourhoods for all generations.



6. Create aspirational social housing

Social housing for older adults should offer dignity and choice, becoming a desired option rather than a last resort. Increasing quality housing options in cities for older people not only enhances their lives but also frees up larger homes for younger families, easing pressures across the housing chain.



7. Food is a social connector

Food serves as a powerful tool for bringing people together across generations, celebrating cultural diversity, and fostering connection. Integrating food-related activities into housing projects builds community bonds and enriches daily life.



8. Leverage community organisations in research and policy development

The expertise of community organisations should play a vital role in shaping housing policy. Their on-the-ground insights and experience of co-producing research bring innovative, practical ideas that can advance housing models for older people.



“Moving to Appleby Blue was like jumping out of a plane with no parachute, and landing on a bouncy castle.”

John Haywood, Appleby Blue resident

Photo: Jude Leighton



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