

Foundations for Living Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire

An innovative scheme which contains affordable, wheelchair-accessible homes for disabled people and private flats, as well as providing a range of services.

Services include housing, support, employment, education and community integration. The scheme provides 24 affordable rented wheelchair-accessible flats, 22 private flats and the Saxongate Community Learning Centre.

The developer and landlord is the Papworth Trust, a disability charity and a registered social landlord (public sector). The landlord provides support to the residents and personal care is provided by another organisation under contract to the county council.

The scheme was funded by the Papworth Trust, from land sales and through a dedicated fundraising campaign. The private housing was funded by a private developer.

The project was completed in 2007 and won a Housing Corporation Gold Award in 2008.

Key features

- The accessible design is crucial to supporting independence and equality for disabled people. The town centre location brings advantages in terms of integration with the local community. The project has achieved high levels of user involvement, consultation, advocacy and support.
- A move from residential care to independent accommodation can shift responsibility for support costs from the commissioning or home County Council to the authority in which tenants are resident or on to the individual.

Background

A social model of disability is becoming increasingly accepted²⁰ alongside a greater awareness of the role that inclusive housing has in enabling disabled people to live independently in the community.

The Foundation for Living project started in 2001 when the Papworth Trust decided its rural residential care scheme in the village of Papworth Everard, Cambridgeshire, was no longer fit for purpose and did not meet the requirements of the Care Standards Act 1990. Many disabled residents felt isolated by the village location and poor public transport and wanted to live in a town with better access to jobs, shops and other services.

The Trust wanted to create a scheme that integrated affordable homes with private flats, as well as a range of services for disabled people and older people.

The Trust formed a partnership with Hill Residential and, despite fears on the part of other developers that it would be difficult to make a profit, the scheme was a commercial success and the private flats sold quickly and at a good price.

Design and planning

The housing is spread across two residential blocks and the top floor of the community centre. Flats are all designed to exceed both Lifetime Homes and Housing Corporation standards. Design features include wide corridors and doors, level access showers, height-adjustable kitchen hobs and sinks, easy-to-access sockets, alarm/intercom systems, remote-control curtains and assistive technology. One of the two housing blocks is mixed tenure, combining social housing for disabled people on the ground floor and privately owned apartments above.



Management

Tenants' support needs range from a few hours a week to 24 hours a day and these have reduced since the tenants moved in. This is partly due to increased independence and the new skills people have picked up, including money management, shopping and cooking. Average support has reduced from 23 hours per person per week in 2005 to 1.7 hours per person per week in 2008. Many people are financially independent and some are considering paid work for the first time.

Feedback

The Saxongate Community Learning Centre, which shares the site, provides meeting and training rooms for disabled and non-disabled people, as well as hosting businesses, community groups and Huntingdon Regional College. Facilities include two IT suites, an art room, an accessible kitchen, two rooms with height-adjustable interactive whiteboards, a café and a hot-desking area. The centre is well-used by the trust's tenants and the local community.

A range of facts demonstrate its success:

- 9,579 visitors overall and 2,529 disabled people attended meetings or training in the first year
- Of the 45 students enrolled on college courses in September 2007, eight had a disability

- Papworth Trust employment programmes at Saxongate helped 430 people
- Local businesses used the meeting room. There has been good uptake of courses by disabled and non-disabled people, but some office space is empty and the trust continues to look at new ways of working.

The project is also a good example of user involvement and support including:

- A long-term consultation process with residents living in residential care
- An urban location gives better access to shops, community facilities, volunteering and employment opportunities
- Use of an independent advocacy service to ensure people's views were accurately reflected and incorporated
- A project management team of disabled and non-disabled members.

A transitions team supported people through the move. Research shows that tenants are positive about the project and feel that their independence has increased, along with their overall quality of life. Tenants have also been able to maintain existing friendships and develop new ones.

Learning points

This is an innovative and imaginative scheme, which has increased tenants' independence and quality of life while creating community facilities.

High levels of user involvement, consultation, advocacy and support are important features of the project's success. Not everyone wanted to move from the village – of the 32 disabled people living in Papworth Everard, eight moved into the new scheme while the others moved to new supported housing in the village or moved to be nearer family/friends.

Good design is crucial to supporting independence and equality for disabled people. This includes internal design, external design and the use of assistive/adaptive technology.

A town centre location brings major benefits in terms of integration with the local community and can also help challenge perceptions about disabled people. Some local shops have become more accessible and sought advice on employing disabled people. The transitions team played a key role in helping residents adapt to their new situation and developed personalised plans.

The trust consulted with a range of partners from the start, including voluntary organisations, the local college, schools and MPs.

The community learning centre provided a focal point for tenants and attracted local organisations. The local college draws people into the centre, from where they can then access training, employment support and other services.

Building private flats alongside affordable housing was a success and flats sold quickly because of their town centre location.

Design and architectural features

- Inclusive design, which is crucial to supporting independence and equality for disabled people, characterises the development.

Points for residents

- The town centre location brings advantages in terms of integration with the local community
- High levels of user involvement, consultation, advocacy and support.

Management issues

- A move from residential to independent accommodation shifts responsibility for support costs from the commissioning or home county council to the authority in which tenants are resident.

20 See Independent Living Strategy, Office for Disability Issues (HMSO 2008), *Independence, Well-Being and Choice* (DH, 2005), the 1990 *Community Care Act* and *Valuing People* (2001).



Foundations for Living, Huntingdon © Photography F64