

## Extra Care Housing and Regeneration in Wolverhampton

This case study describes the housing led regeneration of a specific disadvantaged area of Low Hill in Wolverhampton, which includes 208 new homes including a 64 bed Extra Care apartment scheme and day centre for older people built in the heart of the development.

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### Background

Built in the 1920s, the estate had been in serious decline since the early 1990s. Local manufacturing jobs had disappeared, people left the area and there were few owner occupier properties. The condition of many of the homes had deteriorated and the estate found itself in the worst 1% of areas according to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation.



In 2007 the number of elderly people living in Wolverhampton was estimated as over 46,100 with the average life expectancy increasing and looking to continue increasing. The drivers for development of Extra Care Housing and a new day centre within the regeneration included:

- The identified need to provide intensive 24 hour care services for frail older people in the north of the city, as a direct alternative to residential care
- The presence of an existing day service for older people, the Chris Laws Day Centre, in a Council owned building on the eastern edge of the Showell Park development
- The closure of the Dale House Residential Home in Showell Circus and the desire of the local community to see the site reused for older people's housing

Following extensive lobbying by local members of the community Wolverhampton City Council established the New Low Hill Partnership Group (NLHPG) to focus resources on trying to lift Low Hill. It was agreed that a large scale housing project would start the regeneration process of their community.



Wolverhampton City Council appointed a Regeneration Manager to act on their behalf within the area, as well as the NLHPG which consisted of local residents and businesses, ward members, volunteers and public bodies in order to give a representative view of issues and ways of addressing them.

Through the joint efforts of the community and specifically the NLHPG a strong design brief was produced which was then used to market the site in order to secure a development partner.

An area of land around Humphries Road was identified as a suitable location for new development. Existing residents were moved to other homes in the area before demolition and site preparation work could take place at the 15-acre site.

Wolverhampton City Council therefore started a procurement process to secure a suitable development partner with the experience of delivering housing led regeneration schemes.

The brief was to seek a solution which would create a better mix of affordable and 'for sale' properties.

The procurement process was a multi-phased approach which include a design and finance competition followed by an intensive interview process which included officers, members and community representatives.



Keepmoat, a leading housing and regeneration company, were awarded the contract on the basis of its track record of delivering high quality designs, community engagement and transparency of operation. This project was operated on an open book approach to the development costing in order to demonstrate Best Value and to help all of the stakeholders understand how officer's conflicting aspiration can impact heavily on the projects viability. This approach helps to ensure that whilst the overall scheme is of the highest quality, it still realised a significant capital receipt for the local authority to reinvest into the other redevelopment projects within the area (including the extra care and refurbishment projects).

At the same time, Wolverhampton MBC tendered for the Extra Care Housing scheme and day centre which were to be built on the same site. Accord Housing Association were awarded the tender for the Low Hill scheme. Accord has considerable experience of delivering integrated model of housing for the elderly with services delivered to tenants and residents in the wider community.

## Local Population

With regard to existing residents, the Low Hill area has a disproportionate percentage of teenagers and single parents. Keepmoat worked extensively with the Low Hill Project Group to forge links with local youth groups in order to generate interest in the scheme, educate them on the scheme's objectives and reduce the possibility of vandalism and trespassing. The Partnership wanted to modernise the area and help to build a diversified community to benefit everyone.

Over the last 4 years, Keepmoat have maintained close contact and engagement with the Low Hill Project Group and continue to work closely with local suppliers and sub-contractors to ensure that the construction spend benefits those at the local level. The project has delivered a 1 acre public park, new Multi Use Games Area, and investment towards a new community facility. Both Keepmoat Homes and Accord have undertaken numerous community events and supported local groups with donations and grants. For example, Keepmoat Homes worked with the local school, Our Lady of St Chad's, as part of its Outwards Bounds Project which culminated in one student being offered full time employment on site as a plumbing apprentice.

## Scheme

The proposal for this new development was multi-functional for the community. The objective was to provide 208 new homes built to a contemporary design and a high standard introducing owner occupation, and also built with exemplary commitment to energy efficiency and sustainability. For example, all homes benefit from the 'Sunwarm' system and this is the largest single development in the UK.

30% of this new development was dedicated as social housing delivered in partnership with Bromford Housing Group with the remainder as owner occupier. Included within the 30% affordable was the provision of the 64 Extra Care Housing apartments for the elderly (constructed by Wates with Pozzoni LLP as architects) and managed by Accord Housing. As well as the Extra Care Housing apartments, there is also a day centre for older people, also run by Accord housing. The final phase of the Extra Care Housing scheme will also include allotments for use by the tenants.



As part of the scheme, Accord worked with the Primary Care Trust's (PCT) Local Improvement Finance Trust (LIFT) scheme so that it has been incorporated in their wider social renovation. LIFT has proved itself an effective tool and extremely important for investment in primary care. This is not only a key concern of the residents but it is also a Government priority particularly around inner city areas.

## Community

As this is a community based project it is important that it be inclusive and caters to all the residents. There is a new one acre community garden which was designed to reflect the high quality of the new build environment but also act as the catalyst for integrating existing with new residents. This area includes the Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP), bio-diverse planting



as part of the Eco Homes Very Good Standard and community art. In addition to the community park Keepmoat also constructed a new Multi-Use Games Area adjacent to the site to cater for the needs of older children and teenagers.

The Extra Care Housing scheme has also benefitted the local community by creating up to 40 new jobs within its care and support provision. The involvement of families and carers within the scheme as well as involvement of the local

community will ensure that the building is utilised as a community resource, particularly for other older people in the locality.

The Scheme was designed to be contemporary in nature with a nostalgic element to reflect the progress Low Hill had made over the last 5 years, whilst showing the regions strong industrial heritage through aesthetics such as the mono pitch roofs.

The entire community would benefit from these facilities creating a desirable living environment for all. From a financial point of view, the development will lift the areas perception and in turn the marketability of both new and existing homes.

## Lessons Learned

The scheme design was advanced, post selection, in collaboration with officers and community representatives, however, on a scheme such as this everyone wants it to be an exemplar. Unfortunately, this often results in a conflict between varying local authority or statutory departments. Upon this project these conflicting aspirations resulted in a reduction in new plots which obviously led to a reduction in land value for the public authority. However through the open book approach Keepmoat were able to demonstrate that if the land receipt was paid over a 12 month period, in 4 instalments then this would increase the Return On Capital Expenditure (ROCE) to an acceptable level, therefore allowing us to pay more for the land pro-rata. This in turn allowed the capital receipt to be received within the financial year, as budgeted by the City Council.

Another factor to the success (so far) of this project has been the drive of the community and desire to see Low Hill rise from the low point that it had hit. Without the willingness to allocate considerable resources, along with a true interest in building relationships, communicating and developing ownership locally the scheme will be viewed as any other housing development, not a regeneration project.

This was also replicated by Accord, with a senior manager involved in liaison with local community groups and Wates Contractors who were the developers for the site also allocated specific staff to ensure continuing liaison with the local community. During the construction of Showell Court, Wates visited local schools and organised drawing competition's to highlight the dangers of construction sites. The school was then invited to bury a time capsule to mark the opening of the scheme.



## Summary

Could this be replicated? The answer is a resounding yes. It demonstrates that through open and honest dialogue a project of the highest quality, incorporating extensive environmental aspects can be delivered in an area of low value. The overall regeneration should represent a community benefit and uplift that includes housing for the wider community, from children through to older people.

This project has required all parties to work in a transparent manner but this can only be achieved once relationships have been established, and this is the first hurdle to clear. For this project, Keepmoat's willingness to lay open their development spreadsheets and cashflow's to demonstrate the viability and pitfalls of the development were met with some initial scepticism at Wolverhampton City Council (as this is still an area that most developers are uncomfortable entering). However, relationships were established which has meant that the scheme is designed to be of the highest possible quality, meeting all aspirations and still generating a positive land value for the vendor, along with an overage which should lead to further capital income.



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The Housing LIN welcomes contributions on a range of issues pertinent to Extra Care housing. If there is a subject that you feel should be addressed, please contact us.

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