



Ensuring Extra Care is Part of the Community, not a Community Apart

This case study for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network showcases how a 120 unit extra care housing scheme in Swansea, developed and owned by Family Housing Association Wales Ltd, has become an integral resource for the wider community.

The study found that forging relationships with stakeholder groups across the local community is vital to the ownership of the scheme by both tenants and the wider community. In addition, the benefits from employing an experienced Community Activity Co-ordinator have proved invaluable.



Written for the Housing Learning & Improvement Network by **Barry Miles**, Older Person Services' Manager, and **Pamela Williams**, Community Activity Coordinator, at Family Housing Association (Wales Ltd)

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About the Scheme

Hazel Court is a purpose-built extra care housing scheme in the Sketty area of Swansea that provides affordable apartments for people aged 55 and over (people who are in receipt of a care package are eligible at 50). It first opened in November 2008 and is owned and managed by Family Housing Association (Wales Ltd), a registered social landlord, and takes its name from two demolished tower blocks formally owned by the City & County of Swansea which were on this site.

Hazel Court has over 160 tenants living in 120 apartments set over three blocks, with the highest block covering four floors. This includes one apartment utilised by Social Services for respite, with another offering specialist care and support to three ladies with mental health support needs. A further 43 apartments will be built on the north of the site with the addition of a second guest suite. These will be available for rent in early 2016, with tenants having the opportunity to access the range of facilities at the scheme, already provided.

The scheme has a wide range of communal facilities, all available for hire, which are widely used by both tenants and the wider community. These include:

- Gym Therapy Room
- Exercise Room
- Community Hall
- Training / Meeting Room
- Craft and Hobbies Room
- Library / IT Suite
- Restaurant
- Shop
- Hairdressing Salon
- Laundry
- Fully-fitted Assisted Bathroom



“The Community Hall where we hold our youth group meetings is brilliant”

Parklands Church

“Swansea U3A groups make vital use of the excellent accommodation at Hazel Court”

University of the Third Age

“Thank you for providing such a great hospitality”

Independent trainer using the Community Hall

On-site staff employed by Family Housing provide a range of services, including:

- Domiciliary care
- Tenancy support
- Estates / grounds maintenance services
- Communal cleaning service
- Handy person service
- Personal cleaning service
- Reception and administration service
- Scheme management

Background

The City and County of Swansea was committed to replacing the original Hazel Court tower blocks with extra care housing and invited expressions of interest from providers with relevant experience. Family Housing recognised this as an opportunity to establish an innovative housing scheme and community resource so expressed an interest in taking the development forward. They were awarded the contract in 2004. A great deal of time was then spent determining the design and management model for Hazel Court.

Extensive consultation was carried out with a range of stakeholders and partner organisations, and from the outset they all agreed that the scheme should be “a part of the community and not a community apart”. This informed the decision that all the communal aspects would be open to the wider community.

Space, community and security were also considered essential ingredients of the project design and a great deal of consideration was given to the following:

- Low rise blocks with wide, open landscaped spaces.
- Wide internal ‘streets’ with open aspects.
- Apartments with different window arrangements, many having balconies or patio doors.
- Apartments with individuality.
- Circulation areas and courts to create the opportunity for contact and conversation that add vibrancy to the scheme.
- Tenant apartments separated from the community facilities by a secure entry system, allowing tenants to enjoy privacy and security with easy access to the busier, public areas.

During the development period the stakeholders continued to be included in the planning of how the scheme would operate, ensuring that what they provided within the scheme met the needs of local strategies.

Communal Facilities

A number of key decisions were made with the aim of establishing Hazel Court as a community resource. These included:

- Tenants and the wider community would be consulted regularly to ensure that services and facilities matched their needs and expectations.
- High quality food and a place to socialise would be available to both tenants and the wider community by including a restaurant area.

Key objectives for Hazel Court were to:

- Become an asset to the community.
- Provide a valuable community resource.
- Enable tenants and the wider community to establish hobbies and interests.
- Provide an opportunity for social interaction.
- Enhance the local environment and community amenities.

Key partnerships within Hazel Court:

- A contractual partnership with the Local Authority in delivering gym membership induction to all new members of the Hazel Court gym. In addition, the Local Authority “Positive Steps Programme” utilise the gym to improve the health & wellbeing of people with a range of chronic conditions.
- The hairdressing salon provided under lease a business opportunity for a local hairdresser, which is now firmly established within the scheme.
- The fully fitted Assisted Bathroom facility is an open resource to the wider community, with on-site staff trained to undertake risk assessments.



“Since moving into Hazel Court our lives have opened up completely. We join in all the activities that we can, eat in the Restaurant and socialise with other people. We meet lots of different people and everyone is so friendly and helpful.”

Mr & Mrs H. Hazel Court tenants

Community Activity Co-ordinator Role

At an early development stage it became clear that if Hazel Court was to successfully become a community resource a post was required. Three year funding was secured through the Big Lottery - People & Places - and the role of the Community Activity Co-ordinator was born.

Key elements of the role were to:

- Establish and maintain links with tenants, community groups and organisations across the city.
- Encourage tenants and the wider community to use the communal facilities.
- Overcome any potential barriers between tenants and the community, including intergenerational work.
- Further development of the facilities.
- Devising new activities to keep Hazel Court fresh as a communal resource.

Crucially, the post holder had the skills, experience and initiative to develop a range of links across the sectors. This continues and has resulted in more than 50 regular activities and sessions on a weekly basis taking place across the scheme. These cater for a range of diverse interests and include yoga, tai chi, singing for fun, chair exercise groups and creative writing groups.

The importance of the work done by the Community Activity Co-ordinator is recognised by the Association, and when funding from the Big Lottery ended the Board agreed to continue funding the post on a part-time basis.

“Wonderful, wonderful. So much activity going on here.”

Mr L. Hazel Court tenant

“It’s like always being on holiday.”

Mrs P. Hazel Court tenant

Hazel Court as a Community Hub

Hazel Court has firmly established itself as a key ‘community hub’ with over 100 organisations and community groups using the facility over the past year. In addition, during the course of 2013-14 over 80,000 people from across the community have used the range of facilities including its on-site restaurant.

“Parkland Primary Orchestra and Choir have accepted an invitation at Christmas to share their music with the community of Hazel Court. The children have enjoyed taking their learning into the community and adding to the community celebrations of Christmas. We look forward to continuing our association with Hazel Court.”

Local Primary School Teacher

Communication is vital in ensuring we meet the needs of our tenants and engage with the wider community. Since opening, a number of events and collaborations have proved hugely successful which have included:

- Intergenerational video storytelling project involving a youth group from a local church.
- Health & Wellbeing Day attended by 300 people and over 20 organisations and community groups.

- Establishing a Hazel Court choir which meets every week and is open to all ages and abilities. The choir has around 40 members and now gives public performances. The choir is a constituted group which used funding from Communities Trust Fund to buy an electric piano to replace an old electric organ.
- Working with tenant groups to successfully apply for funding to develop their activities.

Tenant Involvement

Tenant involvement has been a key factor in the successful development of Hazel Court. The Tenants' Association has worked closely with Family Housing to make the tenant section of the scheme their own. Initiatives include:

- Successfully applying for funding to have a boules court built.
- Encouraging tenants to use tenant lounges by arranging regular board games and cards sessions, putting table skittles and a dartboard in one lounge and a full size snooker table in another. These are available for tenants and their visitors to use at any time.



Other examples of tenants working together to improve their environment and take ownership of Hazel Court includes:

- The Hazel Knuts Garden Club which, with support from Family Housing, has transformed an overgrown and neglected area into a pleasant garden where tenants can relax and enjoy the fresh air. This constituted group was awarded funding by Big Lottery - Awards for All to set up a 'Diggers Den' in the garden where they store their equipment, work when the weather is not good and hold coffee mornings and social events.
- Artful Dodgers Art Group which welcomes people from the community as well as tenants. As a constituted Group they were able to successfully apply to Communities Trust Fund for funding to pay for art materials and arrange social afternoons with guest speakers.

Conclusion and Key Learning Points

It has become increasingly clear that the objective to establish Hazel Court as a 'community hub' has been fully realised, with the wide range of people, organisations and community groups that continue to use our facility. The Community Activity Co-ordinator continues to work closely with stakeholders in ensuring Hazel Court meets the needs of its tenants and the wider community.

The focus for the forthcoming year will be placed on reducing loneliness and isolation, improving support to people with dementia and developing a greater understanding between generations.

A further 43 apartments have been confirmed for the north of the scheme, with the addition of a guest suite.

Key Learning Points

- The benefits from having a Community Activities Co-ordinator have proved invaluable.
- Appreciating all stakeholder groups as partners is vital to ownership of the development by both tenants and the local community.
- Interior design - ensuring the scheme lent itself to engaging with the local community but also felt safe and secure for tenants.
- Regular partnership meetings ensured Hazel Court fulfilled its promise to become a key communal facility in the area.
- Develop a partnership approach with tenants at an early stage.

Note

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

About Family Housing Association Wales Ltd



We are a traditional registered social landlord (RSL) based in Swansea. We develop and manage homes in South West Wales. The majority of our homes are in Swansea and Carmarthenshire but we also have homes in Neath Port Talbot, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire.

We currently build, improve and manage homes for a wide range of people including families, single people, older people, people with disabilities, and people requiring additional support.

Following the success of Hazel Court we have built similar projects in Cardigan and Pembrokeshire and are currently working on two new projects in Carmarthenshire.

We also continue to build new homes and supported housing to meet the needs of our local authority partners. For further information on us please visit: www.fha-wales.com

About the Housing LIN

Previously responsible for managing the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund, the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) is the leading 'learning lab' for a growing network of housing, health and social care professionals in England and Wales. Commissioned by the Welsh Government, we are involved in knowledge transfer and innovation exchange on planning, commissioning, designing, funding, building and managing housing, care and support services for older people and vulnerable adults with long term conditions.

For further information about the Housing LIN's comprehensive list of online resources and to participate in our shared learning and service improvement networking opportunities, including 'look and learn' site visits and network meetings in Wales, visit: www.housinglin.org.uk/Wales

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Housing Learning & Improvement Network
c/o EAC, 3rd Floor,
89 Albert Embankment
London SE1 7TP

Tel: 020 7820 8077
Email: info@housinglin.org.uk
Web: www.housinglin.org.uk
Twitter: @HousingLIN