



Housing LIN

Connecting people, ideas and resources

Case Study 174

More's Meadow Almshouses: A community-led development in Cambridgeshire

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Written for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by **Rowan Haysom**,
Director at Haysom Ward Miller Architects.



Introduction

The [Great Shelford Village Charity](#) has existed since 1890 to help people in need within the village and surrounding area. It is a not-for-profit charitable company with the directors all giving their time and expertise as unpaid volunteers. With the completion of the 21 new almshouses the Charity now owns 53 almshouses with residents paying half the local market rental rate. The Charity also provides individual grants and support, including emergency food support and grants to organisations supporting the village through the year.

Beyond the original houses, the Charity owned some allotments and a six acre field of arable land, all located in the Cambridge greenbelt, which encircles the village of Great Shelford. Aware of the housing need, they set about seeking consent to develop part of this site. At this point they appointed [Haysom Ward Miller Architects](#) for their experience in community-led development.



To secure planning permission to build on the greenbelt, the Charity had to fulfil the policy requirements for a rural exception site: they had to show that no other site in the village was better suited, evidence the housing need, produce a design sympathetic to the landscape setting, and importantly, establish the support from the local community.

"This project has delivered 21 much needed affordable rent homes to the people of Great Shelford. The sensitivity to the greenbelt and the focus on gardens, allotments and parkland is something that will be enjoyed by all for many years to come."

Cllr Bridget Smith, Chair of the South Cambridge Housing Committee

Community support

Working with the Parish Council, the Charity's directors and design team led community engagement events, focus groups and public consultations, and kept the local community up to date with monthly updates in the village newspaper.

A housing need survey established that there was a need for a further 97 new affordable homes in the village. 95% of residents agreed on the need for more affordable housing, while 75% agreed that this would best be achieved by building on the greenbelt.



This lengthy process, lasting over eighteen months, culminated in a public meeting held in the village hall just before the planning application was submitted, where the directors and architects had to present and justify their proposals before a crowded audience. It enabled the community to understand how this proposal was truly community – not developer – led; that the intention was to help the village become more socially and economically sustainable, and that although built on the greenbelt the proposal would in fact provide greater access to the countryside, with a new village green, meadow, woodland, active allotments and community garden.

When the application went to Planning Committee, the Chair of the Parish Council and the local Councillor volunteered to speak in support of the scheme, which was awarded unanimous consent.

The development is a mix of one, two and three bedroom homes arranged in three curved terraces around a central green; this accompanies landscaping to the remaining six acres of charity-owned land, including allotments, a community garden, a meadow, and a woodland area with 250 new native trees. Public access to these spaces serves to enrich the connection of the village to its surrounding landscape.

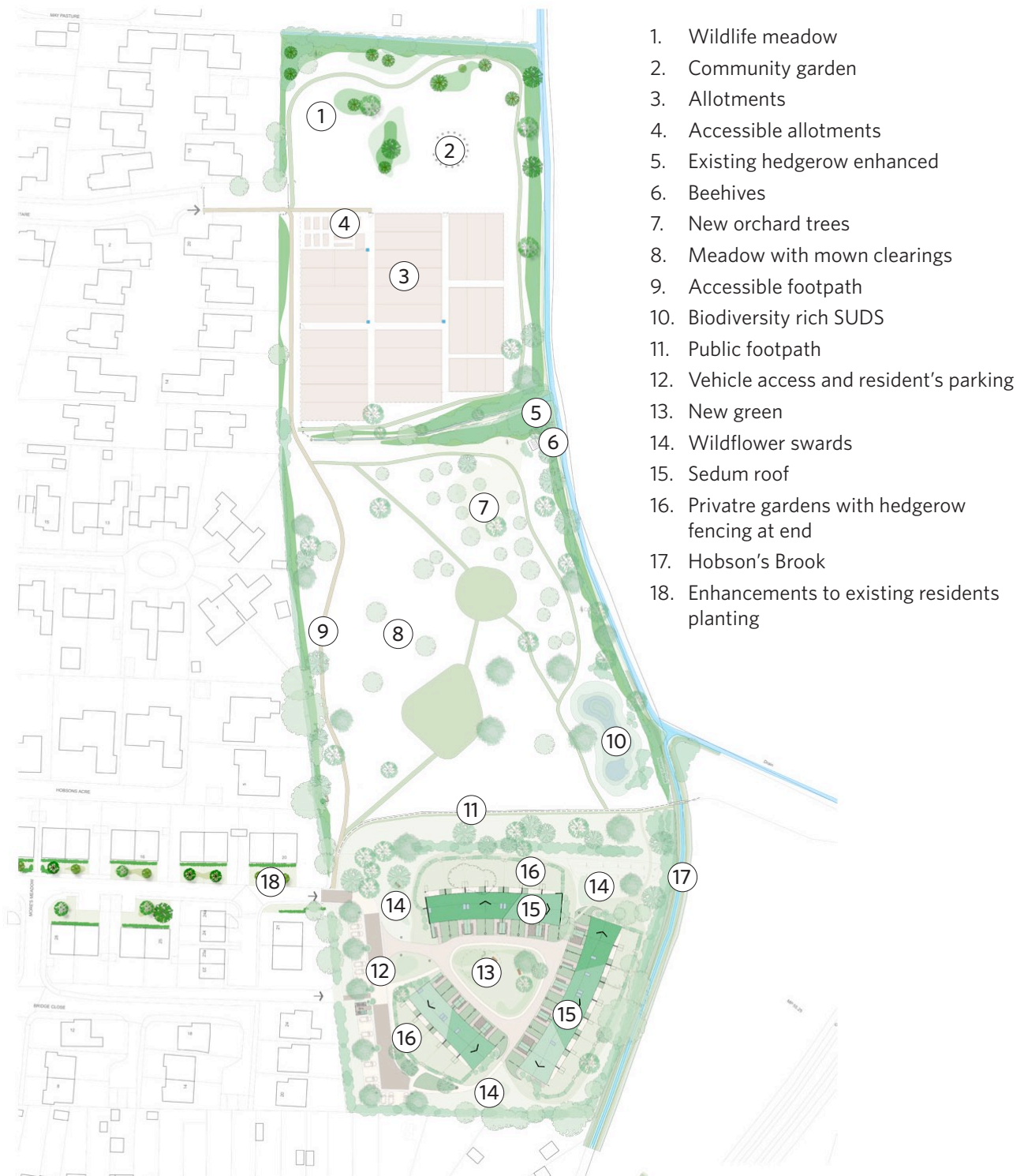
There has been a strong emphasis on biodiversity, permeability and access for both people and nature. Surrounding hedgerow planting encloses the rear garden boundary of each house, which provides a soft edge where the gardens meet the landscape. From the greenbelt the view of the buildings is one of sloping green roofs and curved black boarded facades, which subtly nestle the almshouses into the surrounding setting of the chalk downs. The development creates a soft edge to the greenbelt, whilst providing a species rich haven for biodiversity.



Then, as one moves from the outside edge into the central green, encircled by the buildings, the homes seem more familiar: a group of solid brick terraced houses, each with its own front door, front garden, enclosing and overlooking a small village green.

“Through the landscape we have sought to improve on the connection of the village to its surrounding countryside. The development creates an accessible soft edge to the greenbelt, providing a species rich haven for biodiversity.”

Emily Haysom, landscape architect



Creating communities

The three rows of terraces curve in plan around the green. The decision to keep the central green car-free (except for emergency vehicles and disabled access) has defined the character of the place. The subtle placement of natural play features has given licence to the younger residents, signalling the primary purpose of the space. The central green feels like a live-in play park, alive with activity. Children leave their bicycles and toys out and treat the space as their own. Chairs and tables have been moved into the front gardens, whilst the bench seating in the green is often occupied by the older residents chatting, watching the constant flow of the younger ones in, out, and through each other's homes.

The two storey homes best serve families, but the terraces sweep down to end with single storey houses which better serve some of the more elderly residents, with views out on three sides. All the front gardens can be adapted for a disabled car parking space if necessary and the bicycle sheds have been fitted with power points for electric bicycles and sized to fit mobility scooters.

Each house is separated from the green with a front garden, framed by the brick bicycle sheds. Like traditional terraced houses, this is an in-between space which the residents can control to negotiate the transition between the public green and their front door. The kitchen window looks out over this space to the green, providing a sense of beneficial overlooking. Any visitor into the green has a sense of being seen. The public space feels somehow semi-private.



This shared public space is the principal feature of this development. Although distinctive in appearance, the buildings themselves are the picture frame to the artwork, the foil which forms the backdrop to the public realm and the community it contains and defines. This is housing as impetus for community building.

"We are thrilled that both the Almshouse Association and Eastern Echo have awarded prizes to our More's Meadow development. Residents moved in earlier this year and have already established a real community spirit thanks to the innovative build and layout of the almshouses around the central green space."

Dr Sarah Rann, Great Shelford Village Charities Chair

Sustainability

The homes include mechanical ventilation with heat recovery (MVHR), air source heat pumps (ASHPs) with underfloor heating throughout, triple glazing and high levels of insulation. The measured energy use after one year of occupation is equivalent to Passiv House standard.

Concluding thoughts

The Harvard Study of Adult Development¹ has found that strong relationships with others are the most important factor for long-term happiness and wellbeing. Similarly, other studies^{2, 3} have shown that interaction with nature and access to green spaces contributes to our physical and mental wellbeing. Every building we construct is an imposition upon the ground of this earth and an intervention into the social fabric of our community and so has the potential to degrade or enhance the quality of these relationships. We should build sensitively, carefully, knowing that in doing so we are creating new communities, of people whose happiness and wellbeing will be informed by the quality of these relationships our buildings create.

The almshouses in Great Shelford show that through genuine engagement with the local community, and with a sensitive approach to the surrounding context, this can be achieved.

Project data

Address	More's Meadows, Great Shelford, Cambridgeshire
Project schedule	Planning Approval 2021 Construction started 2021 Completed 2023
Contract cost	£4.4m
Site area	3.5ha
GIA	1680m ²
Client	Great Shelford Village Charity
Architect	Haysom Ward Miller Architects
Landscape Architecture	Emily Haysom, Landscape Architect
Project Manager / QS	Henry Riley LLP
Planning Consultant	Carter Jonas
Structural Engineer	The Andrew Firebrace Partnership
Photography	Richard Fraser

- ¹ The Harvard Study of Adult Development is one of the longest-running studies on adult life, tracking the lives of men over 80 years. The study has consistently found that strong relationships are the most important factor for long-term happiness and wellbeing. Robert Waldinger's TED Talk "What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness" summarises these findings.
- ² Rachel and Stephen Kaplan's "Attention Restoration Theory" highlights how interaction with nature can reduce mental fatigue and improve cognitive function, which is strongly linked to enhanced wellbeing. Reference: Kaplan, R., & Kaplan, S. (1989). *The Experience of Nature: A Psychological Perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- ³ White, M.P., Alcock, I., Wheeler, B.W., & Depledge, M.H. (2013). "Would You Be Happier Living in a Greener Urban Area? A Fixed-Effects Analysis of Panel Data." *Psychological Science*, 24(6), 920-928. This study published in *Psychological Science* found that individuals living near green spaces reported better mental health over time, supporting the idea that connection to nature enhances wellbeing.

Note

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

About Haysom Ward Miller

Haysom Ward Miller Architects is a Cambridge based RIBA Award winning practice. Their work includes a wide range of projects, from private one-off houses, to housing developments, educational, ecclesiastic and other building types.

HWM seek to develop an architectural language which is strongly rooted in the surrounding context. They aim to design buildings and spaces which are responsive, dynamic and integrated. Their concern is not principally with the designed object as much as how that object informs and influences the surrounding environment. The design process is one of translation and interpretation, which begins with a mapping and reading of the surrounding context, drawing on local knowledge and experience, and ends with a built form which they hope will enhance and reinforce pre-existing positive aspects of its surroundings whilst healing the negatives.

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 20,000 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 in a home of their choice
- provide insight and intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice to support sector learning and improvement
- showcase what's best in specialist/supported housing and feature innovative projects and services that demonstrate how lives of people have been transformed, and
- support commissioners and providers to review their existing provision and develop, test out and deliver solutions so that they are best placed to respond to their customers' changing needs and aspirations.

Access a selection of related resources on the Housing LIN's dedicated almshouse page at:

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

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