



Housing LIN

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## Case Study 176

# Abbeyfield's HAPPI Regency Mews: Regenerating extra care housing in York

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# Introduction

Providers of housing for older people face two pressing and often competing priorities: on one hand, they must invest in ageing stock to make it sustainable and appealing for future generations; on the other, they must respond to a growing housing crisis and prepare for an ageing and increasingly diverse population.

These challenges helped shape the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Care for Older People's 2023 Inquiry report, *Regeneration of Outdated Sheltered Housing*.<sup>1</sup> In York, The Abbeyfield York Society responded to these issues with Regency Mews – with a £6.44 million extension to its existing home, designed by Brewster Bye Architects. The scheme is a practical example of how the sector can modernise older housing models while also meeting evolving future needs.

Originally designed to include a secure dementia unit, Abbeyfield York Society chose instead to integrate support across the building, creating a true community atmosphere. The entire scheme is dementia-friendly, enabling all residents to live together, socialise, and take part in meaningful daily life, and reflects its commitment to enablement over restriction. As a result, Regency Mews sees a further 19 one-bedroomed extra care housing apartments for rent, six 2 bed apartments for market sale (this includes eight dementia friendly apartments) next to the grounds of Abbeyfield York Society's existing extra care and sheltered housing scheme – Abbeyfield House in Dringhouses, York.

The new Extra Care Service development now boasts 25 apartments and provides a safe, inclusive environment where older adults - including those living with dementia - can live independently in a non-clinical environment with dignity and the right support around them.

Officially opened in April 2025 by his Majesty's Lord Lieutenant of North Yorkshire, Mrs. Johanna Ropner, the contemporary, new annex facility offers new communal spaces, including lounges, dining rooms, and multi-function hobby and meeting rooms, designed for maximizing social connection. This has already resulted in forging stronger community connections. For example:

- weekly visits from Dringhouses Primary School;
- partnerships with the Marriott Hotel and local sports & Cricket Club; and
- now launched a bespoke Day Service offering tailored support, socialisation, and engaging activities for the wider community.
- supporting other charity-funded community projects, including Brunswick Organic Nursery based in Bishopsthorpe in York. They provide a safe and stimulating environment for people with learning disabilities who provide a contract gardening service.

*"I would like to thank everyone who was involved in making this special day so enjoyable. Everything about the day worked so well and the surprise visit from the children's choir was so good to listen to and enjoyed by all who we were lucky enough to be present."*

**(Regency Mews residents)**

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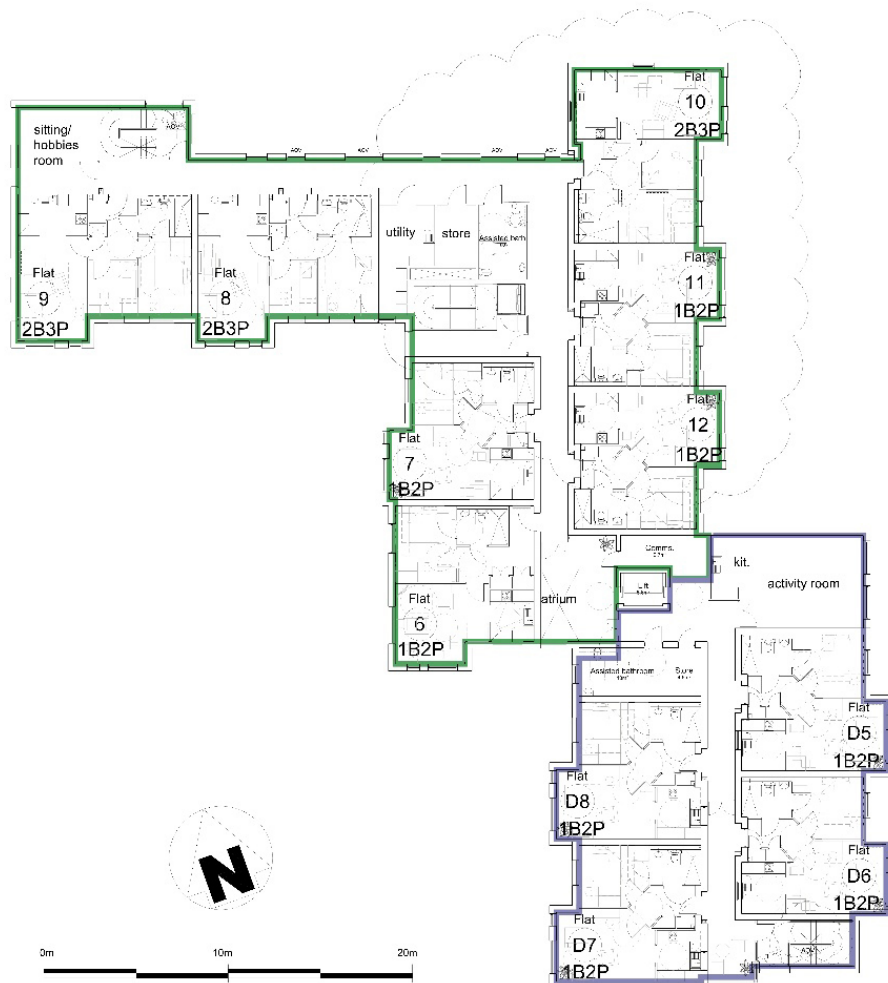
(1) [https://www.housinglin.org.uk/\\_assets/Resources/Housing/Support\\_materials/Reports/HLIN\\_APPG-HCOP\\_Re-HAPPI.pdf](https://www.housinglin.org.uk/_assets/Resources/Housing/Support_materials/Reports/HLIN_APPG-HCOP_Re-HAPPI.pdf)





## Key features

Regency Mews features high quality design approach and incorporating facilities for dementia care needs in a number of the flats. The scheme shares a site with an existing sheltered scheme owned by Abbeyfield York Society which enables sharing of resources and improved economies of scale and better services for the residents.





Each apartment has been built to wheelchair accessible standards and the design incorporated many of the Stirling University's dementia design audit tool<sup>2</sup> and HAPPI<sup>3</sup> design principles (further detail below). This is enhanced with communal spaces, assisted bathrooms, and dementia-friendly landscaped gardens for residents to enjoy throughout the seasons.

The scheme was also designed as 100% all electric, providing low voltage lighting, advanced panel heating with zoned control to apartments, PIR LED lighting to all communal areas, passenger lifts and associated further domestic power which is fed from 32KW of solar paneling fitted to the building roof area to aid in reducing annual running costs. There are also 3 external electric vehicle charging points and an internal buggy store for charging of resident mobility scooters.

## HAPPI-inspired design

Although the Regency Mews project is relatively modest in scale, the design team has successfully delivered on all key points outlined in the HAPPI (Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation) principles, as demonstrated below:

- **Space and Flexibility**

The scheme integrates support across both the new and existing buildings, offering dementia-friendly layouts and a mix of tenures tailored to local needs.

- **Daylight in the Home and in Shared Spaces**

Maximising natural light was central to the design strategy. Expansive window openings ensure generous daylight in all apartments and communal areas.

- **Balconies and Outdoor Space**

Despite a constrained site and surrounding development, the design prioritises access to outdoor areas. The scheme provides both private and shared high-quality external spaces that benefit from sun and shade throughout the day, following the sun's path.

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(2) Dementia Services Development Centre, [Environments for Ageing and Dementia Design Assessment Tool \(EADDAT\)](#), University of Stirling

(3) [Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation](#), Housing LIN

- **Adaptability and 'Care Ready' Design**

The homes have been future proofed to accommodate changing care needs.

- **Positive Use of Circulation Space**

Circulation areas are designed with clear wayfinding and natural light. Corridors open out to create visual connections with gardens and communal spaces, avoiding the feel of enclosed institutional corridors.

- **Shared Facilities and Hubs**

The scheme includes communal facilities that support social interaction and wellbeing.

- **Plants, Trees, and the Natural Environment**

Landscaping enhances residents' connection to nature, with greenery carefully integrated throughout.

- **Energy Efficiency and Sustainable Design**

The scheme embraces sustainable design principles, including energy-efficient construction and materials.

- **Storage for Belongings and Bicycles**

Ample storage is provided within apartments and in communal areas, including secure space for buggies and bicycles.

- **External Shared Surfaces and 'Home Zones'**

The external environment has been designed to integrate sympathetically with the existing building and landscape. Parking and refuse collection are accommodated without dominating the site, using carefully selected materials and colours to ensure the development feels rooted in its surroundings.

## Challenges

Due to the unique site location, a full archaeological dig and map survey had to be carried out across the full building footprint prior to any construction work being carried out. The intrusive survey took place over several weeks with numerous slip trench excavations carried out to ensure there were no significant archaeological deposits in the area. Works on site found a small old Roman well, with a single coin at the bottom and only some small pieces of pottery. All areas were mapped and recorded within a detailed report which remains with the York Archaeological Society.

The building also occupies a challenging suburban infill site and has been designed to navigate a number of critical constraints including existing statutory services, amenity distances to all dwellings surrounding the site, height limitations and several existing protected trees to design around. However, the building design is successful in this regard, creating a discreet and highly contextual intervention that mitigates its impact on its surroundings through a symbiotic relationship with existing facilities on site.





Having clear communication with Homes England officers was important in ensuring there was a clear picture around the issues affecting the complexity of funding, scheme viability and practical completion. For a small provider this can be quite a challenge but being part of a consortium with Abbeyfield Living Society was a real benefit to Abbeyfield York Society's experience.

## Funding package

In addition to £1.3m capital funding by Homes England and the use of £1,189,690 Recycled Capital Grant Fund from 4 other Abbeyfield Member Societies and Abbeyfield Living Society (this is recognised on site with a specially commissioned stonework which is incorporated at the entrance of the building), Abbeyfield Societies contributed considerable funds to make this development possible. For example, some through recycled capital grants including Abbeyfield Widnes Society, Abbeyfield Sheffield /Christchurch, Abbeyfield Grimsby and Cleethorpes Society and Abbeyfield Loughborough Society. The scheme also required long-term borrowing after development finance and sales income to the tune of £2m which was secured with Charity Bank. This was also a great partnership where we worked constructively to offset significant financial hurdles and constraints.





# Outcomes delivered

Incorporating 'HAPPI' design principles, the building design optimises communal and shared facilities, internal environment with a strong connection to the outdoors. All flats are designed to meet current accessibility standards, ensuring they are fit for purpose as the residents' care needs change over time.

Residents at Regency Mews have commented:

*"I feel really comfortable living here at Abbeyfield and know I made the right choice to come here. It suits me to be able to have the choice of help, meals, activities etc. whenever I like. I would be more than happy to show anyone around my flat and chat about the lifestyle I have."*

*"Abbeyfield is a very nice place to live, and I feel very fortunate to be here. I love my room and get so much pleasure from watching the wildlife through my window. Although I live independently every contact I have with management and all staff members has been met with kindness and respect. The staff look out for me, and this makes me feel safe and happy. I really cannot imagine how anybody would not be happy here."*

And, mindful of the requirement for dementia care and accommodation, as referred to above, the architects consulted with the University of Stirling's Dementia Design Audit Tool to inform the design of both the individual flats and communal spaces.



Retirement living with access to support / personal care services on site enables individuals to remain independent for as long as possible. In turn, this reduces the risk of isolation for the ageing community, putting emphasis on greater socialisation and stimulation. Furthermore, catering plays a crucial part in promoting social connectedness as well as promoting health and wellbeing. It is provided from established facilities within Abbeyfield House, and new communal spaces, including lounges, dining rooms, and multi-function hobby and meeting rooms form a key part of the design.



Accessibility inside and out has been placed at the core of the design: The building and its gardens are fully accessible to all residents. There is a fully accessible circular route from the main building entrance, linking the existing building and their garden surroundings. These paths pass through several landscaped focal points and sensory habitats - all designed to stimulate the senses and encourage residents to enjoy the outdoor space.



Clearly defined boundaries help impart a sense of security to the scheme, creating a safe place that is multi-sensory and appealing to live in. We have removed the boundary fence which has now given it a spacious feel integrating into the community.

As highlighted in the recent independent Older People's Housing Taskforce report<sup>4</sup>, there is a significant

shortfall in purpose-built housing for an ageing population in England. For York, the outcome is a high quality older people's scheme which provides well designed and safe accommodation for 19 social rental customers and 6 purchasers in an area of significant housing need for older people.

The new homes are a positive contribution to the future financial sustainability of Abbeyfield York Society as a housing provider, in an environment where many housing providers are struggling to continue economically, as illustrated by the considerable Recycled Capital Grant Funds which went to making this scheme viable.

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(4) HM Government (2024), [Our Future Homes: Housing the promotes wellbeing and community for an ageing population](#).



# Lessons learned / concluding thoughts

The gestation period to realizing this scheme from initial concept to practical completion and residents moving in represents a decade long journey with many twists and turns along the way.

Nevertheless, the quality of the final product and the way in which the new homes sit and fit with their surroundings, the satisfaction it offers to the residents and the choice it creates for future generations of older people makes that long journey worthwhile. In York,

like in many other parts of the country, the need to have many more affordable older people schemes like Regency Mews is culpable and we need to accelerate the delivery if we as a nation are serious about planning for an increasingly ageing and diverse population.

After two unsuccessful planning submissions, Abbeyfield York Society resigned to the fact that this would not happen. But credit goes to the Abbeyfield Living Society Development Lead who worked with the Local Society and helped shape a third attempt which ultimately was successful. But this was only possible with the active input of Staff, Volunteers and Trustees all working closely with the full design team and funding partners to submit a credible and deliverable scheme that achieved planning and received funding support from a cocktail of sources and partners. The scheme is filling up and achieving outcomes far beyond the fabric of the building.



## Project data

Address	Abbeyfield House, Regency Mews, Dringhouses, York YO24 1LL
LA area	City of York
Project schedule	Planning Approval Construction started 29th March 2021 Completed 14th June 2024
Contract costs	£5.2 million
Total scheme cost	£6.44 million
Homes England grant	£1,318,000
Recycled grant	£1,189,690 (from 4 other Abbeyfield Societies)
Site area	0.44ha
GIFA	2500m <sup>2</sup>
Client	Abbeyfield York Society
Investment Partner	Abbeyfield Living Society
Architect	Brewster Bye Architects
Contractor	Vistry West Yorkshire
Image Credits	David Critchley

## Note

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

## About Abbeyfield York Society

This has been the culmination of many years of work by the Trustees of The Abbeyfield York Society, with additional funding also coming from other Abbeyfield Societies and Homes England accessed through the strategic investment partnership route that is held by the Abbeyfield Living Society.

Over the years Abbeyfield York, which originally had five smaller homes spread across the city, has now amalgamated into two larger purpose-built, residential homes on the same site. With enhanced facilities, the properties are now known as Abbeyfield House 1 and Abbeyfield House 2 and share a wider choice of communal activities. In total up to 50 residents can be accommodated in both houses.

As of June 2025, Abbeyfield House is pleased to announce that they will be able to offer a bespoke daytime respite package for the elderly who may require supported care.

The Abbeyfield Society is a charitable “not for profit” organisation with homes in Britain and throughout the World. The Society, whose Patron is King Charles III, was established in 1956 by Richard Carr-Gorm, whose aim was to reduce loneliness in the elderly, encouraging them to be part of a community.

## About Brewster Bye Architects

Brewster Bye’s UK-wide portfolio includes residential property work for private developers, house builders and social housing providers, commercial buildings in both the office and industrial sectors, community projects for the education, health, community enterprise and arts sectors, as well as several significant projects within the sports and leisure sector.

Established in 1992 Brewster Bye is a RIBA Chartered Practice. It is also BS EN 9001 accredited and Construction line approved. Services include master planning, site analysis, urban design and visioning.



## 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.

If you found this of interest, check out the older people' housing webpages curated by the Housing LIN at: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Housing/HousingforOlderPeople/>

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