



Housing LIN

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Case Study 180

Rupali Court Cohousing: Affordable homes for an older ethnically diverse community of Lozells, Birmingham

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Written for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by **Harry Randhawa**, Director, Triangle Architects



Introduction

Rupali Court in Lozells, Birmingham was completed in May 2026 and is the flagship older persons' cohousing project developed by Housing 21 and designed by Triangle Architects.

Located at the heart of the Lozells ethnically diverse community, it has been created in close collaboration with future residents to support independent living while enabling people to grow older together within a supportive community environment. This building's name was selected by residents; 'Rupali' means 'silver' in Bengali and 'most beautiful' in Hindi, reflecting both cultural identity and shared ownership of the project.

The development offers 25 affordable apartments with shared facilities including a "Common House", a multi-faith room, a courtyard and a landscaped communal garden. The Common House forms the heart of the scheme with a communal kitchen and lounge that opens directly onto the garden. It is a place for residents and the wider community to come together to cook, eat and socialise.



Background

Housing 21, a leading not-for-profit provider of Extra Care and Retirement Living services for older people on modest incomes, created a cohousing strategy aimed at delivering schemes in areas characterised by multiple deprivation and/or where at least 30% of the population comes from ethnically diverse backgrounds. While other housing associates have explored cohousing, it is the first housing association to commit to a wider programme of cohousing developments. Triangle Architects were appointed in early 2020 to develop proposals for the first schemes, with Chain Walk progressing beyond pre-planning application discussions.

From the initial discussions with Housing 21, it was agreed that the involvement of local groups and organisation was essential. Groups such as this already undertake events, activities, know the people and as a result are trusted members of the local community.

Legacy West Midlands, where approached to undertake this role and have been closely involved in design discussions, residents outreach and help the residents understand their role within the scheme. Without their input and involvement, the delivery of Rupali Court would not have been as successful as it has.

Together

Central to the success of Rupali Court has been the collaborative and inclusive consultation process engrained with cohousing. Future residents, many of whom spoke English as a second language or not at all, were supported in expressing their views by interpreters from Legacy West Midlands. Early consultation allowed the residents to have actual power over the design and decision-making process, which aligns the scheme with the higher rungs of the “Ladder of Citizen Participation” and the aspirations of Housing 21.



Although consultation was delayed by Covid-19 restrictions until October 2020, the first workshops revealed the resident’s enthusiasm and confidence. They spoke passionately about their joy in growing vegetables, sharing, supporting each other and creating a vibrant and collaborative community. These early workshops and following events highlighted how residents envisaged living together and growing older together with dignity, security and mutual support. The consultation process and design development was supported and presented to residents with the use of written material, pictographs, precedents, physical and digital 3D models and

visualisations. Residents were shown views from individual apartments within the 3D model, which helped some decide which home best suited their needs.

Recognising that many residents were unfamiliar with the concept of cohousing, Triangle Architects described it as “Cohousing is all about community and people. It’s a place where residents know each other well and are signed up to be a part of a community together. Cohousing can offer a place where you can get to know your neighbours. A place to share with others. A place where you have a say in how your community is managed. A community that is more than just ‘Bricks and Mortar’ and that offers mutual respect and support for all its members.”

“I have grandchildren who will visit regularly and having the darker surfaces (for the worktops) helps with any spills and stains as they are easier to clean. I felt very happy to be asked and given the opportunity to choose from the options.”

Rashida, future cohousing resident



Micro and Macro - A HAPPI Place

The design process considered opportunities and details at both micro and macro scales. At the micro level, apartment layouts were informed by several factors including the HAPPI design principles, National Space Standard, Housing 21 standards, Building Regulations and dementia design guidance. Apartments have either enclosed or open plan kitchens with residents able to pick an apartment with their preference. Bathrooms had Jack-and-Jill access and, though hesitant at first having not seen the arrangement before, the residents widely accepted following a site visit to an existing Housing 21 scheme. The apartment layouts also incorporated:

- Clear line of sight from bedroom to kitchen with open plan living.
- Generous internal spaces for furniture & circulation.
- Living rooms and bedrooms with large windows to maximize natural light.

- Dual-aspect apartments were prioritised on the Chain Walk frontage to have eyes on the street.
- Access to balconies or a patio space looking into the courtyard.
- Choice of Colour for front door and kitchen finish.
- Resident consultations with Interior Designers

At the macro level, the design addressed challenging site constraints, the principles of good cohousing design, Housing 21 requirements, and the residents' aspirations. The site is located beside the A34 Birchfield Road which produces significant noise and air pollution, while significant level changes and overlooking from adjacent properties shaped the design.



Housing 21 intentionally limited the scheme to 25 apartments to maintain a socially connected community, recognising that a denser and taller development would struggle to foster the same level of familiarity and mutual support and increase the risk of isolation.

Alongside discussions around codesign and collective decision-making within the community, Triangle Architects introduced the key physical components of cohousing including; the Community Living Room (Common House), communal kitchen, isolated car parking and shared and private garden spaces. The consultation events revealed a strong desire for spaces that could accommodate hobbies and social activities, alongside quieter areas for privacy and reflection. Residents expressed the importance of having both private and communal gardens, opportunities for shared cooking and dining, multi-faith spaces, and welcoming areas where guests, family members, and local children could feel included within the wider community. These resident aspirations alongside the cohousing principles informed the development of the final design.

Codesigned Living For All

Rupali Court adopts an inward-facing layout centred around a generous communal courtyard that encourages social interaction, natural surveillance, and a strong sense of community with living space overlooking and accessing the space.

The building form follows the tapered shape of the site with a three-storey block along the A34 Birchfield Road acting as an acoustic and visual buffer, protecting the internal courtyard from traffic noise and pollution. A smaller two-storey block along Chain Walk respects the scale of neighbouring housing and minimises overlooking and overshadowing and allows interaction between the residents and wider community through openings in the building envelope.



The residents were unanimous in their aspiration for generous outdoor space and as such the landscape design has strongly informed the schemes form. The internal courtyard provides a private space for the residents to meet, socialise and garden. The common house garden is both for the residents and visitors to enjoy with space for seating, growing and by retaining the existing well-established trees a safe space for play by visiting grandchildren. Additional planting, terraces and green roofs contribute to biodiversity, sustainability, and resident wellbeing.

Access to the development is provided from Lozells Road and Chain Walk, with accessible circulation routes throughout the site. Parking is limited and located away from the central courtyard to maintain a pedestrian-focused environment consistent with cohousing principles. Social interaction is supported throughout with the common house located at the main entrance to be opened up to the greater community and circulation spaces used to allow for incidental meeting.

Conclusion

Although this development has only just been completed, expectations for its future are high that the residents will enjoy living there and living together for many years to come. It is hoped this development will demonstrate what is deliverable when people work collaboratively and with mutual benefit in mind, regardless of background, and that it inspires others to do the same.

“Rupali Court will not be just a retirement home. These 25 people, we are a family. We should look after each other because we are all older people. This will be a fantastic opportunity for everybody to become a family.”

Mohammed, future cohousing resident

Note

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

About Triangle Architects

Triangle Architects is an award-winning, employee-owned architectural practice based in Manchester, specialising in housing, healthcare, regeneration and community-focused projects across the UK. Founded in 1986, the firm is best known for delivering social and affordable housing, extra care schemes, mixed-tenure developments and sustainable urban renewal projects. The practice combines design quality with strong community engagement, working closely with residents, stakeholders and public-sector clients. Triangle Architects became employee-owned through an Employee Ownership Trust, reinforcing its collaborative culture and long-term commitment to sustainable, people-centred design.



About the Author

Harry Randhawa is a director at Triangle Architects Ltd, an award-winning architectural practice based in Manchester, founded in 1986. Our practice focus is primarily around the housing and healthcare sectors but also includes urban regeneration, community and workplace projects.

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 15,000 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
- provide access to intelligence on the latest funding, research, policy and practice developments
- raise the profile of specialist and supported housing with developers, commissioners and operators, and
- attract business to help and support clients plan, design and operate aspirational housing and services for people of all ages.

And if you found this new case study of interest, check out the other tools and resources the Housing LIN curates on its dedicated cohousing at:

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

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