

Telling the story of Hartfields: A new retirement village for the twenty-first century

Findings
Informing change

April 2010

Hartfields is a new retirement village in Hartlepool, developed by the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust in partnership with Hartlepool Borough Council and other local agencies. This study tracked key decisions made, and challenges faced, as the scheme developed from initial plans in 2004 to the first residents arriving in 2008.

Key points

- Hartfields is a highly successful scheme, designed and built within budget and on schedule. Its range of accommodation and facilities is entirely new to Hartlepool, dramatically improving choices for older people.
- Hartfields' success can be attributed to a number of key factors, including:
 - a clear strategic view of the future housing and support needs of older people;
 - local planners proactively identifying suitable sites;
 - funding from the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund;
 - an effective partnership committee with a clear remit and capacity to engage with a range of local stakeholders; and
 - community consultation and a carefully developed marketing strategy.
- Developing realistic expectations and an understanding of what such schemes can offer is crucial with a large and diverse group of residents.
- Skills in community engagement, and managing housing, neighbourhood and facilities, are as essential as care management skills in these schemes.
- Locating other services and professional groups (for example GPs and specialist nurses) in the scheme provides opportunities to promote healthy living and well-being in later life, both for residents and the wider community.
- It is important for planners to understand how the local community and culture will shape the new community that evolves.
- Managing large and complex schemes requires great skill. Opportunities for sharing experience and learning should be considered at a national level.

The research

By a team at the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York.

Background

In 2004 the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (JRHT), Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) and other local partners started working together to develop Hartfields, a new retirement village in Hartlepool. The development was supported by funding from the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund and the Housing Corporation. The first residents moved into the scheme in August 2008. Researchers at the Centre for Housing Policy (CHP) at the University of York were asked to track this new and exciting development, and to 'tell the story' of Hartfields. The task was to describe, scrutinise and identify learning from Hartfields, to inform both JRHT and partner agencies, as well as other similar developments.

What is Hartfields?

Hartfields is located on part of a green field site that was designated for extensive housing development. It has 242 units of one and two bedroom accommodation (predominantly apartments) all designed to Lifetime Homes standards. It has extensive communal facilities including a restaurant, healthy living suite, arts and crafts room, convenience store, bar, library, IT room, and hair salon, and offers a range of care and support services. It is a mixed tenure development: properties are available for full purchase, shared ownership, or for rent to those nominated by HBC.

Hartfields is intended to be an independent living setting, but can accommodate significant numbers of people with high levels of need for care and support, who would otherwise be living in residential care. It is owned and managed by JRHT, which provides almost all the services within the scheme.

Key factors for a successful development

Hartfields is a highly successful scheme. It was designed and built within budget and on schedule. It provides a range of accommodation and facilities that are entirely new to Hartlepool, and has dramatically improved the future accommodation and care options for older people. It has also offered learning opportunities for the development of other extra care housing schemes in the town and beyond. A number of factors were key to this success.

Considerable unmet need for new forms of housing with care in Hartlepool had already been identified. When an opportunity arose to take forward an ambitious new development, it was willingly taken up by partner organisations, facilitating a successful bid to the Extra Care Housing Fund and drawing considerable external funding into Hartlepool. Initially, planners played a crucial enabling role in identifying a suitable site which was already designated for residential development.

The Hartfields Extra Care Partnership Committee had a clear remit of tasks and responsibilities, involved a wide range of stakeholders, and allowed for robust discussion and early troubleshooting. It proved a highly effective mechanism for taking the development forward. In the early phase, it allowed key decisions around the building and design to be made quickly to enable the development to take place. It also provided a solid framework for other key decisions (the allocation criteria for residents, for example) and responses to changing external factors, such as the collapse in the housing market.

The concept of extra care was new to Hartlepool, and an effective marketing strategy was crucial to 'sell' the scheme to the local community. This highlighted that extra care aimed to provide independent living with care and support, and what Hartfields could offer in the way of accommodation, support and facilities in relation to the cost of living there.

Marketing activities included:

- local media coverage;
- promotional leaflets and posters distributed to local providers and individual homes;
- adverts in regional publications;
- information and promotional materials distributed to GP surgeries, health centres, council offices, and the local library; and
- roadshows promoting the scheme.

Challenges and opportunities

A challenge for Hartfields has been balancing the expectations and needs of a diverse group of residents, and identifying how best to enable and empower residents to take an active role in developing their communities. A key learning point was that the different 'ethos' and styles of housing management and care management need to be synthesised in order to effectively manage a large, complex housing with care community such as Hartfields.

Managers need to be in place well before schemes become operational, and working closely with all partner organisations – not just to coordinate the services but to understand and manage future expectations for the scheme. It is also important to understand the local community in which such schemes are located, and to develop a sense of how local cultures will shape the new communities that evolve.

A further challenge faced by Hartfields was the collapse in the housing market and the difficulties in selling properties intended for full ownership. Various mechanisms have been put in place to allow greater flexibility for those who wish to buy but cannot sell their former homes.

The location of other professional groups on site, particularly primary care services, alongside the facilities offered within the scheme (such as the healthy living suite, restaurant and library) offer considerable opportunities to promote healthy living and well-being in later life. The evolving Day Centre also has the potential to benefit both Hartfields residents and people from the wider community. For many of the residents, it was the first time they had had an opportunity to shape the community where they lived, and many were responding very positively to this.

Reflections on the early development of Hartfields highlight the need for housing, neighbourhood and community engagement skills, as well as care management and delivery skills. While some would argue that Hartfields is no different from any other community, evidence from this and other studies suggests that there is something particular about 'managing' communities of older people and the opportunities and challenges presented by large scale schemes such as Hartfields.

Previous work with residents in housing with care schemes highlights a general perception among residents that living in these schemes is "a different way of life". It is important to acknowledge that residents are at a certain point in their lives; this has influenced their decision to move to housing with care environments, and must shape their expectations and experiences of living in such developments.

About the project

The research took place over a two year period (2007–2009). Three methods were used to collect data: documents and plans relating to the development of the scheme; semi-structured interviews with key staff in the partner agencies and members of the Partnership Committee; and focus groups and interviews with residents.

For more information

For more information about the project please see the full report at www.jrf.org.uk or contact Karen Croucher (email: klc1@york.ac.uk) or Mark Bevan (email: mab13@york.ac.uk) at the Centre for Housing Policy, University of York. For more information about the work of the Centre and other related projects, please see www.york.ac.uk/chp. For more information about Hartfields, please see www.jrht.org.uk/Hartfields.

Published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Homestead, 40 Water End, York YO30 6WP. This project is part of the JRF's research and development programme. These findings, however, are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation. ISSN 0958-3084

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Tel: 01904 615905 email: info@jrf.org.uk
