

The logo features a stylized graphic of two overlapping, curved shapes in shades of blue and green, resembling a ribbon or a swoosh, positioned above the text.

RTPI SOUTH WEST
AWARDS FOR
PLANNING
EXCELLENCE 2020

Awards for Planning Excellence Case Study

Pilgrim Court, Plymouth

Entered by Plymouth City Council

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STRIDE TREGLOWN



1. Background

Please outline the background to the project:

- context
- timeline (including phase in project, eg. in recognition that some planning work may have been done earlier)

Owned by Plymouth City Council, the site was brought to the market through the 'Plan for Homes' initiative. The Plan for Homes initiative is an award winning scheme and has been a hugely successful way of identifying surplus land and buildings that can provide a wide range of housing, including affordable housing within the city of Plymouth.

As with many of the Plan for Home sites, the Local Planning Authority undertook a site analysis to produce a site specific planning statement identifying the constraints and opportunities setting out the aspirations of the Council based on the Plan for Homes scheme and broader policy.

Although the initial tendering stage was unsuccessful, an opportunity arose for Adult Social Care to partner with Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA) to deliver a new purpose built facility within the cities administrative boundary to provide bespoke accommodation for adults with learning disabilities.

Located in a street with mixed use characteristics it was identified that a housing led scheme would be most appropriate. The dual aspect nature of the site meant that a high quality design would need to be adopted, providing active frontages and welcoming views whilst protecting amenity was a key feature. Respecting the historic environment whilst creating a contemporary, sustainable design was also paramount. Working with a local architecture practice (ADG), the Councils own Historic Environment and Urban Design professionals and other stakeholders at pre-application stage a design and layout was agreed upon that was found to be a viable development proposal.

Through the full planning process many challenges arose due to the constrained nature of the site and the need to work closely with the developer of recently commenced Bretonside Leisure scheme opposite the site. The logistical challenges were managed in an effective way by the planning department, facilitating engagement between various stakeholders to ensure neither scheme was compromised in delivery and quality.

An unintentional consequence of the development and the continues liaison with the adjacent leisure complex was the ability to facilitate localised park improvements to enhance the overall sense of place and environment for the residents of Pilgrim Court, How Street and the wider community and visitors alike. The planning department was critical to this phase ensuring that the designs and layouts were joined up to create integrated access and use, ensuring that project timeframes were joined up so as not to prejudice the completion of the housing scheme.

The overall timeframe was circa 5 years however the outcome resulted in the holistic regeneration of a derelict site and unwelcoming public park to create much needed accommodation, enhanced public amenity space and a strategic pedestrian link between the Barbican and City Centre.

2. Outcomes

Please outline what positive impacts the project has provided for:

- the local community
- the economy
- the environment

The new development transformed a derelict, unused site located in one of the earliest conservation areas in the country, infilling the streetscape that repairs this neglected part of Plymouth's historic urban fabric. The existing site was left to ruin and effectively condemned structurally leaving a negative impact on the local environment and a source of much antisocial behaviour. The hoarded site overshadowed the potential of the adjacent park which appeared unwelcoming.

Pilgrim Court has been designed to reflect the numerous listed buildings that occupy a tightly knit network of cobbled streets, creating a sustainable development that creates a contemporary interpretation of the local vernacular housing. The overall scale, balance and warmth of the building is aesthetically pleasing and a demonstration of high quality development.

The adjacent play space was restricted and largely inward looking within the Conservation Area, the result of intensive development within the restricted area of the historic town. The development has facilitated community access to play site with the delivery of park improvements project on the site adjacent to the building and improved access for the community via the strategic pedestrian link from the waterfront to the city centre. The buildings design and introduction of enhanced street lighting provides high levels of passive surveillance over the adjoining park and footpath creating a safe and welcoming alternative for pedestrians moving around the city.

The development provides a specialist housing facility allowing adults with learning disabilities to gain independence and confidence whilst remaining within or close to their families and local community. Pilgrim House will give residents the chance to build connections and relationships and integrate themselves as valuable members of the community and the local workforce.

The development offered local employment and training opportunities through the use of a local contractor Coyde Construction, as well as using a number of local consultants throughout the project. Now finished, the development creates employment opportunities for support staff based at the service via Mencap as well as placing residents in a location with a wide range of employment opportunities. The increased permeability and access between the city centre and Barbican allows for greater connection between local business and services with the potential for greater economic stimulus.

In recognising the climate emergency facing our society Pilgrim Court has been designed with fabric first principals incorporating high levels of thermal insulation. The installation of PV panels on the south facing roof slope significantly offsets the amount of Carbon over and above Part L of the building regulations. The development benefits from a range of highly efficient energy saving techniques which will result in cutting water and fuel bills which in turn reduces fuel and water poverty. Increased levels of glazing allows greater amounts of daylight to enter a building, reducing the dependency upon artificial light and provide better well-being and levels of outlook for residents.

3. Planning contribution

Please outline how the project has benefitted from the involvement of a planner or planners:

- providing strong and effective leadership and vision
- working in partnership with others
- managing implementation and delivery

This development is part of the RTPI award winning Plan for Homes initiative aimed at boosting the number of affordable dwellings in the city. The site had been identified through the Councils strategic land review and was earmarked as an opportunity to regenerate immediate location through a housing led development whilst providing wider community benefits. Early engagement at the pre-application stage allowed planning officers to identify constraints and opportunities and influence the design and layout of the site. This included critically evaluating the adjacent land and uses to ensure a cohesive building could be provided that enhanced the area and to prevent prejudicing existing residents and businesses.

Working closely with a number of key consultee's officers were able to critically evaluate certain requirements giving clear direction to the architect's team. Bringing together and the Local Highway Authority, Lead Local Flood Authority, Historic Environment officers, Public Protection and Land and Property requires strong relationship and an understanding of a wide range of issues and requirements,. This invaluable roll of the planning officer ensured that Pilgrim Court complied with policies set out in the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.

A key priority was to deliver a strategic pedestrian link between barbican and the city centre, ensuring a seamless integration into the extensive public realm improvements attributed to the adjacent leisure development. Communication between the planning officers led to a coordinated approach to the delivery of public realm features, including drainage, landscaping and parking.

Planning officers provided support throughout the detailed design and early construction phases to assist in the quick discharge of planning conditions and to provide support and advice with respect to amendments and alteration to the scheme. This support was most critical with the adjacent play park which secured funding form environmental improvements, so negotiating suitable amendments by all parties to ensure that an accessible and functional space could be provided was key.

The role of the planning officer changed throughout the life of the project from early pre-app discussion through to a delivery partner providing consistency and continuity of advice and decision making. The relationships and linkages with other projects made for a smoother and coordinated approach that resulted in a cohesive final product to the benefit all stakeholders.

4. Sustainable development

Please outline how the project has supported:

- positive short, medium and long term public benefit
- a balance of economic, social and environmental objectives
- the UN's Sustainable Development Goals
- aimed to prevent or mitigate climate change

Pilgrim Court provides 12 new build rented flats for adults with learning disabilities and support needs. The scheme has been designed to include wheelchair accessible accommodation, as well as 24 hour support staff accommodation. This much needed specialist accommodation will allow vulnerable adults to live independently, in high quality affordable flats which have been purpose built to meet specific housing needs.

The project has been designed to meet the housing needs of vulnerable adults who cannot access housing in the private sector. The project will help to reduce pressure on the public purse (Adult Social Care budget) by providing independent housing - while enabling sleepover support costs to be shared. Savings have been estimated between £50,000 - £100,000 per year. The project has championed localism, utilising the skills and knowledge of local businesses which in turn stimulates the local economy.

From an environmental perspective the scheme has been carefully designed using high quality materials to enhance the conservation area surroundings in which the site is located. The inclusion of PV renewables on the roof of the development will help to provide clean energy and reduce carbon demand over and above the requirements of Part I of the Building Regulations which already champions advanced thermal efficiency. The development incorporates significant surface water drainage improvements which practically eliminate off site flood risk and surface water discharge in an area recognised by the Environment Agency as being a Critical Drainage Area.

The combined social, economic and environmental aspects of this affordable housing development are considered to be exemplary in terms of meeting UN sustainability objectives. In relation to the 17no. UN sustainable Development Goals, this project aims to significantly improved the health and well-being of residents (goal no 3), will provide Affordable and clean energy/climate action from renewables (goal no 7 and 13), will reduce inequalities for marginalised citizens (goal no 10), contributes to sustainable cities and communities development (goal no 11). The project would not have been achieved without partnership working between Local Authority and Housing Association partners (goal no 17) in Plymouth.

Provision of independent living for vulnerable clients in this central location, will allow access to nearby public transport, retail and leisure facilities. Development in this sustainable location will help to reduce car journeys for residents and carers

5. Community benefit

Please outline how the project has provided:

- positive and constructive engagement and dialogue with local people and businesses
- a better quality of life for people, especially for disadvantaged communities
- tangible benefits for communities such as facilities, infrastructure, jobs, training etc

The development at Pilgrim Court has increased the community presence and visibility of people with learning disabilities, and enabled them to take their rightful place in the heart of the community. Engagement and dialogue has taken place with local shops, cafes and businesses to ensure that they are able to provide equality of opportunity for all the tenants living at Pilgrim Court. We have provided access to training and awareness raising material that will be used where required to help businesses reasonably adjust their services.

As a result the quality of life improvements for the tenants of Pilgrim Court are significant. The location of the site, so close to major new leisure and cultural facilities in the city centre has provided a significant opportunity for the residents many of whom have previously struggled to find the right support in the community. This includes residents with physical as well as learning disabilities and younger people with a learning disability who have needed a level of support to enable them to move out of the family home for the first time.

Pilgrim Court has also enabled residents to live safely and independently within a beautifully designed, modern building with excellent connection to the centre of Plymouth. The location of Pilgrim Court will provide excellent opportunities for tenants to seek voluntary and paid employment. Work has already started to map this out and look at how this can be put in place. Connection has been made with employment services to support people to gain paid employment within the numerous local retail and entertainment facilities.

Work is being planned to give the tenants opportunities to act as mystery shoppers so that they can work with organisations in the local area to ensure that they are welcoming and able to offer excellent levels of service to all members of the local community. This proactive approach is really making a difference for all members of the disabled population of Plymouth who may have been marginalised in the past.

The accommodation provided at Pilgrim Court is exemplar in its quality of design and construction, accessibility and location and in 2020 – tenants living at Pilgrim Court will have a ring side seat to experience the international celebrations that will be taking part in the area to celebrate the Mayflower 400 commemorations.

We are proud of the opportunity that people now have to live within accommodation that meets their needs, is of a high quality standard, with flexible and creative support on site. The community presence of people with disabilities has now been significantly increased with the development of Pilgrim Court, where individuals with autism, learning and physical disabilities now have the opportunity to live rich and fulfilling lives at the very heart of the city of Plymouth.

6. Leading practice

Please outline how the project:

- is creative and innovative
- is an exemplar that is transferable across the UK
- promotes equality and diversity

The delivery of Pilgrim Court was made possible because of the strong relationship that existed between the Council and its RP partner Bournemouth Churches Housing Association (BCHA). At a time when most Registered Providers were steering away from challenging supported housing projects of this kind, because of uncertainties about revenue funding, we made a joint commitment to pursue this project. This commitment was made because both parties were acutely aware of the need to address the serious undersupply of housing of this type, and also because of the need to relieve the unsustainable pressure on Adult Social Care budgets. Senior politicians of both main parties in the city, responsible for land, planning, housing and social care, were also persuaded that their objectives were aligned in the delivery of this project. This helped deal with challenging logistical issues such as the release of an adjacent revenue generating council car park to act as a site compound for the development, necessitated by the very confined city centre location that the site occupies. This resulted in a loss of income to the Council for the period of around 18 months, but was possible because of the wide political and officer support the project received.

Most fundamentally of all the Council made its own land available for the project as well as £465,000 of capital funding available from its Plan for Homes budget to 'gap fund' the development.

The project is innovative in that it combines the provision of expensive overnight 'sleep in' support in a single building that will enable savings to be made to the Adult Social Care budget, by targeting allocation of the 12 flats to those who's overnight support costs provide poor value for money

We believe this model is replicable both within Plymouth and in other UK cities because the national pressure on Adult Social Care budget necessitates the rethinking of how care and support services are provided. It is a great example of partnership working between the public and voluntary sector, based on shared aims and a strong and trusting relationship, in that land and financial assets have been combined to achieve a goal.

The quality of the development speaks for itself and when combined with improvements to adjacent public open space and the surrounding public realm, we believe that this development has massively enhanced what was previously a neglected and unwelcoming street scene. The regeneration effects of this project are therefore considerable and have helped revitalise a historic part of the city close to the city centre, by taking the opportunity to repopulate the formerly derelict site. This is a theme which is very relevant to many towns and cities in the UK as they struggle to increase vibrancy of their city centres.

All partners are determined to ensure that disadvantaged groups such as adults with a learning disability are not excluded from the benefits of living close to the cultural and entertainment opportunities that are on offer in the centre of the city.

This residential scheme enables that community to live immediately adjacent to newly created leisure facilities that are being offered by the Drakes Leisure complex and will also enable residents to access training and employment opportunities from the businesses that occupy the complex.