

The Art of the Possible

Working together to deliver rural housing to meet local needs
and sustainable communities

Working with Estates

Affordable Housing Case Study... Howgate Close, Eakring , Nottinghamshire

Howgate Close is no ordinary rural affordable housing development. It is driven by the vision of the landowner who is committed to running a viable farm business that brings social, economic and environmental benefits to the local community. The result is a scheme that is designed to meet local housing needs, responds to climate change, improve biodiversity and community access to wildlife sites, all in the one development.

Homes to meet local housing needs

The 10 acre site is on the edge of the village of Eakring and from the outset the landowner recognised both its sensitivity and that housing within the village was not affordable to local people. One of his first steps was to speak to local residents, businesses, the Parish Council and local District Councillors to find out what was needed and explain his vision for the site, including the provision of homes to meet local needs.

The result is a scheme that provides nine single storey dwellings. These are let at rents 90% - 100% of open market rents, which is higher than a housing association rent, but the running costs are significantly reduced through the design of the homes. An additional 10% service charge covers the maintenance of the grounds and parking area, sewage and the provision and maintenance of the photovoltaic systems for use by the tenants.

After 15 years the landowner may decide to sell the homes, but the initial and future selling price will be pegged at 80% of the open market value for the lifetime of the houses. These arrangements are secured through the S106 agreement.

All the properties, whether rented or sold, will be occupied by residents with a local connection to the parish either through residency, employment or caring responsibilities. These arrangements are also enforced through the Section 106 for the lifetime of the houses.

Even before they were built there were more people interested in renting a property than houses available. They were immediately let on completion with no advertising. 80% of the tenants have contact within 400 yards of the Estate office and knew each other before moving in.



Homes designed for Energy efficiency, affordability and low maintenance costs

Responding to the challenges of climate change and affordability the homes are designed to have low maintenance costs and a low carbon footprint. Using known and tested technology they are some of the most energy efficient homes in the country with the 2-bedroom homes having a SAP rating of 143(A). Constructed with high internal mass within a super-insulated envelope with no traditional foundations, solar capture and triple glazing means they require no heating or cooling systems. The heat is harvested from PVs, sunlight and a 30W heat exchange ventilation fan which makes them very economical to run with between 5kw and 7kw spare peak power for the tenants to use from the PVs. These measures will mean the homes run at 21-25°C throughout the year with no additional heating or cooling costs.

In the longer term they will have a lower long term carbon footprint than a Passive House and will need less maintenance. Short of the usual kitchen, doors and normal maintenance, 50 years hence the main structure should be good, the ceramic floor should still be serviceable and the Estate may then be thinking of changing the windows. In that time a normal house will be in its third or fourth boiler/heat exchanger, needed two sets of window replacements, new flooring and fuel to run the heating/cooling system.

Improving biodiversity and public access to wildlife sites

Recognising the need to improve biodiversity the site will become a wildlife site with the income from the housing paying for its long-term maintenance. A wildlife pond /reedbed system will treat the scheme's waste water and increasing wetland area whilst native species planting over the next three years will contribute to habitat creation. In time it will provide the community with wildlife site on their doorstep and act as a buffer between the village and the intensive farming around it.

Gaining planning permission

Gaining planning permission for the site proved to be a challenge. Initially, it was turned down, but approved on appeal, confirmed by a High Court ruling. The principal contention was whether the development constituted isolated development in the open countryside. The Inspector judged that in the light of a recent High Court decision it did not, and that the proposal offered particular benefits in terms of the houses' environmental performance and their support for the economic and social viability of the rural community, underpinned by their controlled occupancy, low running costs and restricted sales values, and by the creation of ecologically enhanced publicly accessible green space. He concluded that as such it would contribute to the rural area's economic and social vitality, accorded with the NPPF and its uniqueness would not set a precedent.



Financing the scheme and maximising advantages to the farming business

The costings of building a high mass house in this project as a basic unit with none of the additional site features such as septic tank, pond, bunds, roadways and extensive tracts of services is just short of £2,400 m². The cost of the whole construction without professional fees was just short of £3,000m². In total the cost of the whole project including all the planning and related costs as well as the price of the land is £1,690,000. Using a simple calculation dividing this by the current gross income of £70,000 a year represents a 23-year payback time (or 4.4% return). Or looked at a different way, £188,000 per house over the whole project cost with the land.

The scheme will contribute to the stability of income within a diversified family farm business. In addition, due to the restrictive Section 106, the building plot and scheme will have reduced value and as it stands (the value is only just a little greater than the costs) this can be transferred into different parts of the farming business reducing/eliminating capital gains especially where 'hold over' is inappropriate. Therefore, ownership can be easily moved into a separate entity without undue tax. Its low value means it can be put into a Trust without tax consequences. Finally, although in the long term there will be a gradual build up in value, the S106 holds back the capital value, but does not alter the rental income.

Howgate Close would not have happened without the vision, passion and commitment of the landowner. This was shared by his appointed architect, the farm manager and the rest of the Estate team. Together they have created a template that others could follow as they too look to play their part in creating a countryside and rural communities fit for the future.

Looking at what he has achieved, Chris Parsons, the landowner reflected,



The dynamic between a family business as ours and the village is forever changing but our intimate knowledge of local needs has meant that Howgate Close is a delightful outcome. As well as providing a stable income with a long term return it has also been socially cohesive, built local trust and will in time provide a wildlife site. For me it shows that it's possible to provide housing for local needs hand in hand with funding something of public value with no external demands or funding. One of the greatest forces we face is inertia and the inability to change. What you see in this scheme could provide a wildlife site on the edge of every village in England without resorting grants or complex funding schemes.



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Technical and detail design taking the houses from the original planning SAP of 85B to the build SAP of 143A.

Original ground plan and design for planning provided by Hockerton Housing Project.



This information is available in alternative formats and languages