



Housing LIN

Connecting people, ideas and resources

Case Study 172

Supported living homes for Wandsworth: Turning a dream into reality

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Introduction

This case study for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN), shares the 10-year journey taken by Wandsworth Council to improve the affordable housing choices for young people with support needs.

Our journey

It all started with a dream. The dream started over 10 years ago... with council officers who were frustrated and saddened that so many of the borough's young people had to move out of the area to find suitable specialist accommodation. The dream was to build supported living homes for young people within the borough, so they could remain living near their families.

And that vision has become reality for young people living in Wandsworth, not just once, but twice! And, thanks to the joint hard work of the Council's planners, housing enablement and development officers and adult social care commissioners, there are also two more developments in the pipeline.

Homes for Wandsworth

These supported schemes are part of the Council's '[Homes for Wandsworth](#)' (1,000 homes programme) which is led by the Housing Development Team. This programme identifies council-owned in-fill sites across the borough as potential spaces for new council rent homes. Most are allocated for general needs, but sites are also earmarked for supported housing where appropriate. The Council's design standard is for all new homes to be built as inclusive, adaptable and accessible, with M4(2) homes future-proofed for adaptation and over 10% M4(3) wheelchair user homes built out as fully accessible. All homes are fitted with contemporary, inclusive and flexible products.



Accessible kitchens and accessible parking for the most recently completed wheelchair accessible homes in Putney.

Spotlight on Stag House, Putney Vale

Designed by Stirling Prize winning architects Mae, [Stag House](#) - a £7million development in Putney Vale - was the first of the Development Team's supported housing projects. In 2016, planning permission was granted for 21 new homes on a former disused council community centre site, following input from the local community who were supportive throughout.



In 2021, 10 years after the original vision, the development was completed. There are 10 self-contained homes for young people with physical and learning disabilities, and a ground floor community flat which also serves as staff office and sleepover. Alongside these homes are 11 new general needs flats which were prioritised for local residents seeking to downsize, including 2 fully accessible wheelchair user flats. The area is green and leafy and the scheme is located directly adjacent to Wimbledon Common.

The supported flats at Stag House are all wheelchair accessible because double lift access is available (Wandsworth Council has insisted on double lifts for all new wheelchair homes above ground floor for the last 10+ years). The flats all have modern wet rooms and accessible kitchens with electric rise-fall worktops. They are spacious and light, with balconies jutting out amongst mature trees and overlooking the Common. Biodiverse roofs and photovoltaic panels were fitted to help the development exceed environmental planning requirements.



The Council also completed significant improvements to landscaping, access paths, lighting and parking and provided a completely renewed multi-use games area opposite the new development.

Shortlisted for Best Affordable Housing Development for Inside Housing's Development Awards 2021, Stag House is already well-loved, and staff report that it has been a life-giving scheme to many of the residents. Residents have reported they:

- have improved physical and mental health, new life skills and independence
- like the spacious communal area which they share with other residents and staff
- enjoy their spacious flats which are bright and can be personalised.
- appreciate the support of the staff on site and the ability to ask for help when needed.
- enjoy the peace and quiet of the area and their balconies - 'the views are amazing and I have taken loads of photos of the sunsets in the evenings'.

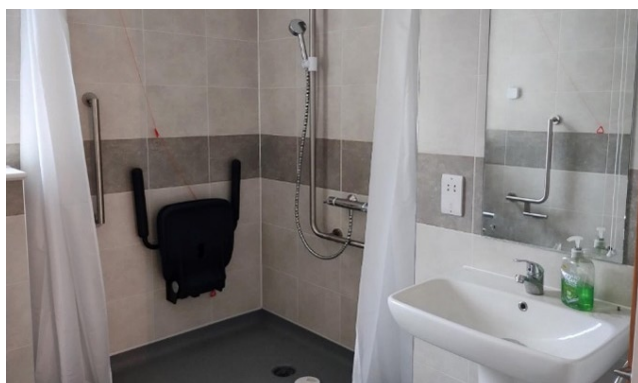
However, the end stages of build and handover were challenging because completion came right in the middle of the covid pandemic, which meant that no visits were permitted to check on products and fitting by the Development Team's Specialist Housing Occupational Therapist (OT). So the Housing OT worked hard to gain resident feedback and make changes, and the team is implementing these recommendations in current and future schemes. They include:

- *Communication*: ensure good contact between care provider, adult social care and area housing teams, and provide a photo-board of staff and council officers so residents feel safe.
- *Repairs*: ensure these are completed as a priority due to health and sensory needs of residents. Contractors should contact staff rather than residents to reduce anxiety.
- *Communal areas*: ensure that the design of communal areas minimises noise and echoes, including the stairwell which will encourage use of stairs for health and exercise. Provide colour or artwork either during build or via the care provider with resident choice
- *Bathrooms*: removable shower seats to be provided rather than fixed ones, to allow choice. Mid-tone shower flooring to be fitted, rather than too light or dark which can be difficult to clean, and provide contemporary tonal contrasting fixtures and fittings.
- *Kitchens*: to include backing on the rise and fall sections as standard for safety, and ensure that oven housing is the correct safe design (700mm clearance is required under the pull-out shelf to protect the knees of a wheelchair user).
- *Balcony doors and windows*: ensure mechanisms are easy, straightforward and intuitive to use.
- *Air conditioning and heating*: ensure communal areas and corridors are well ventilated in summer and heated appropriately in winter.
- *Garden*: provide a well-designed dedicated communal garden area with accessible planting.

As a result of feedback from residents at Stag House, and in consultation with internal and external colleagues, the Housing OT produced a Supported Housing specification which is now used for all council schemes across both Wandsworth and Richmond boroughs, and is [available here](#).

Spotlight on Colson Way, Tooting

Wandsworth's next supported housing development was completed at the end of 2023 in [Colson Way](#) in Furzedown, Tooting. Designed by Coloini & Lane, an underused garage site was transformed into 7 new homes and a ground floor communal flat with staff office and sleepover and improved neighbourhood facilities (including street upgrades, new trees and new refuse area). There is 1 lift in the building, so the upper floor homes are designed to M4(2) standards and the flat and communal space on the ground floor are M4(3) wheelchair accessible, but all flats have wet rooms and accessible or partially accessible kitchens.



Shower rooms in every flat with contemporary and flexible products, task-focused lighting and colour contrasting products and tiling

Learning from Stag House... acoustics are improved because there are no long corridors, washing machines have been incorporated in sound-proofed cupboards where possible, bathrooms have good tonal contrast and more flexible fixtures and fittings, kitchens include better quality accessible elements, and the communal garden has some raised planting areas. Resident feedback is currently being sought and will be included in the design of future schemes.



Accessible or partially accessible kitchens in every flat, with living space and balcony area



On the drawing board - what next?

The Council's next 2 schemes are in the pipeline. The first is another scheme for young people with learning and physical disabilities on another council infill site at [Bessborough Road](#) on the Alton Estate, Roehampton. Designed by BPTW architects, it has been shortlisted for best urban supported housing development with Inside Housing Development Awards 2024 (announcement on 27 September!). The size of the scheme is very similar to Colson Way, with 7 flats and a communal/staff flat, but this scheme will also be built to Passivhaus standards (high quality sustainable design delivering Net Zero Carbon emissions whilst also providing high levels resident comfort and lower heating bills) and will feature a beautiful dedicated sensory garden. This scheme will also provide several enhancements for access and use of the estate as part of the Council's commitment to engage with and benefit the community.



The Council's other pipeline scheme was a slight surprise for the Development Team. London Square had purchased part of the new [Springfield Village](#), Tooting, on the grounds of the South West London and St George's Mental Health Trust's Springfield Hospital site. For months they had been looking for a housing association to partner with, for a large 50+ flat supported accommodation building, but without success. Council colleagues suggested that the Development Team be approached to see if this building could be incorporated into the Homes for Wandsworth programme, and now the Council are partnering with London Square and Assael architects to design and build out this large building.



This is an exciting new scheme and a first for Wandsworth as it will be a mixed use supported housing development, for those with learning and physical disability, enduring mental health conditions, sheltered housing for older people, care leavers and temporary accommodation. All flats have the potential to be fully wheelchair accessible, with access to 3 lifts, will have contemporary wet rooms, inclusive fixtures and fittings, and a significant proportion will have fully accessible kitchens. There are also extensive shared gardens, large communal rooms, smaller communal/staff sleepover flats, and potential space for a community café.

With 60 supported housing flats in the current pipeline for Wandsworth, we are now trying to improve the supported housing offer in the neighbouring borough of Richmond, with which we have a shared staffing arrangement. The council doesn't have its own housing stock or development programme so this will be in partnership with existing trusted partners such as RHP. RHP currently have planning agreed on a former council site to build 12 affordable homes, including a dedicated mansion house of 7 flats for young people with learning and physical disabilities and a communal/staff flat.



Conclusion/key learning points

What have we learnt:

- **Be bold** - when you have a vision, run with it... you'll never know where it'll end up! Dream, discuss and be prepared to fight for it.
- **Be attentive** - listen to residents... they know what works and what doesn't work in their new homes. Include their feedback in your next development.
- **Be creative** - build beautiful contemporary homes... supported housing doesn't mean fitting clinical-looking products - there are wonderful products available which any one of us would be happy to have in our own home.
- **Be inspired** - work with those who are excited about your scheme and have great ideas. Don't be afraid to ask others, collaborate and come up with the best design possible.
- **Be realistic** - councils do have budgets, but it is still possible to build great homes!

And finally...

When those council officers stood on the site of the former community hall in Stag Lane all those years ago, they may not have dreamt that their vision of one supported housing scheme for the borough would lead to the building of all these new homes! These new homes are all exciting projects for Wandsworth council staff across many departments... but most importantly, they are improving local community facilities and transforming lives for good for borough residents.



Note

Rachel Wooden spoke at the Housing LIN HAPPI Hour webinar during Accessibility Homes Week 2024 about integrating accessibility into all our housing. Watch here:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Events/HAPPI-Hour-Embedding-accessibility-in-all-our-housing/>

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

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.

Access a selection of related resources on the Housing LIN's dedicated housing and learning disability pages at: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingLearningDisabilities/>

And learn more about accessible housing design at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design-building/AccessibleDesign/>

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