Development of the year (large schemes): Finalist

Midland Heart: Oasis House

What is included in your development?

Midland Heart has developed Oasis House, a £5.3m landmark development in the heart of Northampton town centre which revolutionises homeless services in the borough. The supported housing scheme consolidates and greatly improves the homeless provision for town’s homeless population. The inspiring, multi-functional development connects people to the wider community through direct access accommodation, move on facilities, day drop-in facility and a social enterprise. Developed as part of the HCA’s Places of Change and National Affordable Housing Programme, Oasis House consists of:

- 39 self-contained essential move on apartments for previously homeless people who are ready to regain their independence
- Nine emergency direct access units of accommodation, three of which have dog kennels attached to enable people who have dogs to move in
- Arts and crafts room, IT suite, training room, quiet spaces, and courtyard garden which have all been designed to motivate and engage individuals in overcoming barriers to independent living
- Medical advice provided by Maple Access Partnership
- Housing advice provided by Northampton Borough Council
- A social enterprise operated by Hope enterprises comprising of a garden tool repair shop, PAT testing and catering business to give vulnerable people the skills and confidence they need to maintain a job and help break the cycle of homelessness
- A day-care centre open to the local community operated by the charity Hope
- Shared lounge with kitchen facilities, meeting rooms and facilities for clothes recycling.

How does your development address housing need in the area?

Oasis House delivers the aims of the Northampton Homelessness Strategy; to prevent homelessness and reduce rough sleeping. This multi-agency approach replaces institutional dormitory provision and enhances existing service provision.

Previous services for homeless people did not work due to unsuitable premises across the town. Oasis House is located in the centre to maximise access to the building. All services are provided under one roof as evidence from local providers shows that the cycle of homelessness would not be broken if services didn’t change in terms of delivery, accessibility and location. Many single homeless people struggle to maintain tenancies due to a lack of
coping skills, and a meaningful occupation. They were trapped in a cycle of homelessness. We have delivered a real solution to the problem by giving people the skills and confidence and opportunities to maintain a job. Oasis House allows rough sleepers to access accommodation, emergency food, shower facilities, clothing facilities, welfare support, a full range of housing options, medical support and move on accommodation to bridge the gap between hostel and independent living.

The need:
- Each week between 50 to 60 homeless households approach Northampton Borough Council for help
- Over 35 households are living in unsuitable temporary bed and breakfast accommodation
- 15 rough sleepers were reported during 2011 official rough sleepers count
- Over 9000 households are on the Borough’s housing register

The results:
- Oasis House is fully let
- 86 referrals since 18th June
- 48 referrals accepted
- 40 successful move-ons

How did you ensure that the highest levels of design, sustainability and build quality were met?

Located on a prominent site on Campbell Street, Oasis House is a significant landmark to Northampton’s architecture and streetscape. The prominent green copper drum makes a dramatic landmark and encloses the stairs and lift, together with an eye catching three-storey glass entrance. Architects Bm3 have designed a motivating space that combines elements of an office, college, business and home. The bright inspiring space is flooded with natural light through sun pipes and roof lights to illuminate corridors. Externally the three wings of the building enclose a private landscaped courtyard for both recreation and leisure with informal seating areas, a smoking shelter, an art feature and raised planting beds. There is also secured cycle store for 25 cycles, and a kitchen yard with recycling and composting facilities.

Oasis House was designed with a true partnership approach. An experienced architect was appointed and worked closely with partners through a monthly steering group to ensure the brief for the building led to plans which maximised the opportunities to work together and drew the best out from the partnership. Through thermal mass and the use of sustainable technologies, Oasis House achieves the highest available BREEAM (BRE Environmental Assessment Method) ‘excellent’ standard. Not only does this reduce its impact upon the environment, the renewable energy produced is in excess of 10% of the energy required. In addition, the courtyard gardening project, recycling programme, cycle stores and travel plans makes Oasis House an environmentally friendly place to live.
How did you work with residents and the local community and what benefits were delivered for them as a result of this development?

Oasis House is the vision of six key partners who were involved throughout the development along with their services users. These partners included:

- Northampton Borough Council
- The Hope Centre
- NAASH (Northampton Association for Accommodation for Single Homeless)
- CAN (County of Northampton Council on Addiction)
- YMCA
- Northampton Homeless Forum

A total of 47 involvement events were carried out from the very start with the potential users, residents, police, councillors and other local stakeholders. These consultations helped us understand the needs of the community, and helped them raise their own expectations of homeless services. We supported their vision through trips to existing Midland Heart homeless schemes along with our staff, partners, officials and politicians.

This ongoing involvement helped shape the design of Oasis House by:

- Engaging with over 40 homeless people to name the development following a year long consultation to agree on a name befitting the aspirational development
- Providing 3 dog kennels within the courtyards as the forums told us they were prevented from accessing support as they did not have facilities for dogs.
- Presenting design options at review meetings so service users could choose suitable kitchen and bathroom fittings, colour themes and key materials such as bricks, windows and render
- Creating designs that drew customers to the front of the site and provided a safe and secure courtyard to the back of the building to give them appropriate support. This was due to evidence that street drinking and crime and was a key problem for the police and local community.

Why should your development win this award?

Oasis House embraces Midland Heart’s vision to help our homeless customers regain their independence, rebuild their confidence and reintegrate back into society. The building pioneers the way forward for homeless services: helping to break down barriers and stigmas associated with homelessness and helping our customers in the best possible way we can. By harnessing our expertise across our partnership, Oasis House ensures a real force for change in Northampton.

The exceptional consultation activities have resulted in an inspirational space that reflects local requirements and motivates people to get back on their feet.
and turn their lives around. Oasis House offers individual support to each customer, making it tailor made for them: to ultimately help people to live happy and independent lives.

The close partnership has resulted in better outcomes for all, as well as better value for money as customers have access to a wide range of services under one roof which bridges the gap between hostel and independent living. The team at Oasis house look at the situation, rather than just the short-term fixes. Increasing the provision of move-on accommodation enables individuals to access support and advice and offers that intermediate step between direct access and independent living.

As well as outstanding designs, the building has rejuvenated the outlook of the area moving away from the former old dilapidated factory and warehouse units, to a high quality innovative development supporting the wider regeneration of the area and contributing to the local economy through its social enterprise.


http://www.midlandheart.org.uk/default.aspx?id=434696

http://www.midlandheartcustomerannualreport2012.org.uk/#slider-3