

Heathcott Road Leicester

© David Thorpe

Useful lessons: The importance of key driving individual(s), comprehensive community consultation; asset transfer from council; 100% affordable housing; training and the link to food production. It is managed by a charity, with aims including the relief of poverty, environment/conservation/heritage and economic/community development/employment. The leasing of land to a developer, Passivhaus Standard homes, and the rent income used to pay, *inter alia*, for an on-site development officer.

The site contains 68 Passivhaus Standard homes for affordable rent set about 20% less than the assessed local market value. These homes can be heated for as little as £13 per year. There are four one-bedroom flats and 23 two-bedroom, 20 three-bedroom and three four-bedroom houses. In June 2017 the first residents moved in.

It is the brainchild of Neil Hodgkin, Head of Development for the resource centre Saffron Lane Neighbourhood Council (SLNC). The area is one of the most deprived in Leicester. 10 years ago he had an idea for an urban community farm to grow vegetables for SLNC's day care service users. From this, Saffron Acres was born: allotments and a community garden which provide education and volunteering opportunities. Now, fruit grown on Saffron Acres is turned into jams and chutneys to be sold as part of a project providing skills training for local unemployed people and adults with learning difficulties.



Determined to rejuvenate the area, Neil identified housing as a key issue. SLNC embarked on a lengthy process of consultation with hundreds of local residents about the area's housing needs. It acquired 22 acres of former derelict allotment land as an asset transfer from Leicester City Council for £1

SLNC oversaw the project. They leased the land to a developer: emh group, and engaged the architects: rg+p and builders: Westleigh Partnerships. The housing area is 13.3 acres. The cost: £9 million. It opened on 19 June 2017.

Construction took 70 weeks with 40 men on site every day, four of whom have been solely dedicated to achieving the Passivhaus credentials. Next to the houses is a permaculture farm, intended to provide education on food growing, cooking and healthy eating, an allotment, beehives, a flower meadow, rejuvenation of field ponds, reinstating of hedgerows and fruit tree planting. Residents are

encouraged to work and grow their own fruit, vegetables and supplies on the farm. Existing community gardens are next door.

The project has already won the RICS East Midlands Awards and Project of the Year – Building Projects at the East Midlands Celebrating Construction Awards. July 2017 and a Best New Affordable Housing Scheme award at the Housing Excellence Awards on 1 June 2017

The income generated by the development pays for a full time debt and welfare support officer who is also onsite and plays a key role in advising and liaising with the community. Buoyed by the success of the development, Neil and SLNC plans a further £1.6m project to build 20 more housing units on the same site. The income from these will help to pay for a further two SLNC staff so they can do more work in the community.

Resident Claire (right) says that the fact that the Resource Centre is so firmly integrated with the development is a real benefit. "The Centre has lots of services we can use; we've been invited there for morning coffee and my next plan is to see more of what's in the area and become part of the community. I can start working. I feel like I've really landed on my feet. Being here has changed our lives and opened up everything."

"This project shows that communities can plan, deliver and manage their own housing and address specific wider social needs," said Neil. "Retaining money within the community to also directly deliver services within the community to help solve local social issues can offer longer-term solutions towards sustainable regeneration of neighbourhoods."

