

Harehill Court –a brief history

Introduction

On the afternoon of Friday, 14th September 2012, staff, residents and visitors gathered in the dining room and community lounge at Harehill Court to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the year of the building's completion. There was a short, informal speech and a large cake to share which was graciously cut by the oldest resident who, it was noted, was rather more than five times the age of the building. Afterwards, it was remarked that very few of those present knew how this complex of thirty one homes came to be built and wasn't it time someone wrote an account while there were still a few founders left who remembered the story?

This was taken up at the next board meeting as an excellent way of marking the twenty years and recording appreciation for all those who have contributed to making Harehill Court what it is today.

How it all began

More than twenty five years have now elapsed since the very first meeting that planted the seed that grew into the well loved home illustrated in the accompanying photographs.

This was a regular meeting of the "Churches' Association for Social Work" (CASW) held in the Friend's Meeting House on Goldwell Hill. CASW, now rebranded as "Christian Action", is an inter church group with representatives from most main stream denominations in the Chesterfield area. Amongst the Baptist, Methodist, Anglican and other delegates on that occasion was a member of the Church of the Annunciation, Mary Carroll, who had been persuaded to attend by her good friend Terry Crowley who had observed that this was a worthwhile cause and the Catholic churches were under represented.

At that meeting, CASW members were seeking a new project in line with their ethos that as Christ himself loved and cared for the people around him, so should his followers. Now it so happened that just at that time, two or three elderly friends of Mary had been discharged hospital unable to properly care for themselves and with no family to help. Mary felt a conviction that something should be done about

this issue which was beginning to affect more and more people. The number of frail elderly people was growing. At the same time families were becoming increasingly scattered and the relatives that might at one time have lived locally were often now too geographically remote to help. Mary realised that CASW was just the sort of campaign group that might be willing to mobilise the churches of the town to do something to tackle the problem. It was, and they did.

Back in the nineteen eighties CASW members were amongst the first to identify a need for residential accommodation that could bridge the yawning gap between ordinary housing for the fully self sufficient and, at the opposite extreme, nursing homes for the totally dependent. There were a limited number of local authority bed-sits with wardens but public housing was already under pressure and no new ones were planned. In fact, during the ensuing years, the residential wardens have gone and the provision has been reduced. Local authorities have been forced by central government pressure to accept spending cuts and loss of housing stock. Housing Associations have been encouraged to fill the gap in provision, often in partnership with local authorities who have provided sites in return for the right to nominate a proportion of the tenants from their own waiting lists. Only very recently, however, have local authorities been in a position to address the particular residential needs that CASW sought to answer.

Mary, in great fear and trepidation, volunteered to go to the Town Hall and speak with the councillors and the housing department about the need for a new kind of home where people could live out their twilight years in comfort and dignity. To her surprise and relief Chesterfield Borough Council Housing Committee recognised the value of what CASW was seeking to do and pledged their support. The head of housing, Pat McLaughlin, proved to be the best professional advisor that CASW could have wished for and did all he could to facilitate progress.

There were just two primary obstacles between CASW members and their objective. They had no money and no land.

Chesterfield Churches Housing Association (CCHA)

In the 1980s, the main source of funding for this kind of project was the Housing Corporation. Applications for a grant were limited to “registered providers of social housing” which meant local authorities and Housing Associations. There was only one way forward. CASW took legal advice and started proceedings to set up a properly constituted Housing Association whose expressed purpose would be to provide the kind of sheltered accommodation that was needed. Registration was achieved on 12th March 1991.

Meanwhile, preparations for the scheme began to gather pace. A multi skilled Management Committee was recruited to run CCHA including a solicitor, accountant, doctor, local councillors, church leaders and of course Mary and Terry with Pat McLaughlin as advisor. Rita Sawyer was the Association’s secretary through those critical formative years.

In anticipation that CCHA would soon be up and running, negotiations proceeded with CBC to formalise a partnership and to secure a suitable site. Local authority land was available in a particular area of need at the top of the Grangewood estate. A site of just over an acre was identified. This was of sufficient size for a scheme of thirty one apartments with a comprehensive range of ancillary facilities. A 125 year lease in return for a peppercorn rent was signed on the same day that CCHA was registered.

The next step was to commission a design team. At that time the CCHA committee had no experience of building design or procurement but they found a willing partner to take things forward in the shape of Northern Counties Housing Association who in turn recommended Sheffield architects, Michael Self Partnership.

Neither firm were left in any doubt, however, that Harehill Court, as it would come to be called, would not be a copy of existing sheltered housing schemes but would offer a better quality of life than any hitherto built in the region.

Prominent in formulating the design brief was Dr Billy Gray, a well liked and respected senior partner in a local medical practice. Dr Gray knew from personal experience how much loneliness, neglect and poor diet contributed to declining

health in his elderly patients. He strongly supported the inclusion of a full catering kitchen and well appointed dining room where a nutritious, two course, daily meal would be served for all residents. Building, staffing and running this facility at an affordable cost presented many challenges, not least for the treasurer, but it remains today one of Harehill Court's most popular features, praised by residents and visitors alike.

Other facilities incorporated into the design included a main lounge, quiet lounge (which often acts as a chapel), laundry, hairdressing salon and hobbies room, assisted bathing and guest room, all with high quality finishes. In many ways, the complex is more like a residential hotel than a sheltered housing scheme.

Design of the individual apartments was nevertheless influenced by earlier examples. There is a balance to be struck between how much space people would like and how much they can comfortably manage as mobility and energy levels decline. The floor areas of single apartments are therefore not much greater than the bedsits of other sheltered schemes. It was resolved, however, that there would be key differences. Each apartment has its own distinctive front door and letter box. Every kitchen has a built in fridge and cooker. Every bathroom has an easily accessible shower. Privacy and independence are respected. The six larger units have proved comfortable for couples and also for wheelchair users.

Over the next twenty years, other good quality schemes have been designed but CCHA can justly claim to have been among the first to build to such a high standard.

Church and Community

From the outset CCHA hoped and prayed that funding would be found for one very special feature. The long serving chair of the Association, Roland Beckingham was also chair of Chesterfield Care Group. This organisation ran day care facilities for elderly folk in various locations around the Borough, providing a range of social activities. To establish such a group at Harehill Court with membership open to others living on the estate as well as their own residents was agreed to be a high priority. If there were other social groups needing a place to

meet why not make the facilities available for wider community use? The Association was already committed to having a full catering kitchen and there was sufficient space to have a community lounge on one side and a dining room on the other side besides some extra parking. Clearly, for the centre to operate independently of the retirement home there would have to be a separate meeting room accessible from the main entrance with adjacent cloakroom and loos. The problem was finding the funds to build it. A community lounge of that sort was not eligible for a Housing Corporation grant. The partnership would have to raise an extra £40 000 pounds.

Much to the credit of the local council, when Mary was delegated to visit the Town Hall again and beg support from Pat and the members, they gave CCHA's fundraising appeal a generous start with a £15000 donation. Every church in the town was contacted and virtually every church responded with donations from £100 to £1000 or more. Individuals too, dug deep and designs were completed.

In the event of the appeal failing, the architects prepared Plan A, with a dining room on the front of the building and Plan B with a community lounge on the front and the residents' dining room in the courtyard on the opposite side of the kitchen. The contractors were already on site by the time the appeal reached its target but were happy to be instructed to build Plan B.

Building the Dream

Detailed designs for the final version of the scheme were completed by May 1991 and planning consent duly granted. This was followed by more detailed specifications for everything from foundations to TV aerials before submitting the plans for Building Regulation approval and going out to tender.

With all consents in place and the winning tender accepted, construction began early in 1992. A date stone in the wall next to the main entrance commemorates the official start in March.

The pictures on the left show the building nearing completion in the autumn of 1992. The pictures on the right were taken from a similar position in 2014. The grounds have matured nicely and the building remains in good shape.



The main contractors were Millwards of Mansfield under the watchful eye of Northern Counties employers' agent, members of the management team and half the population of Grangewood estate. Construction was largely finished by the end of the year but fitting out and commissioning the building , recruiting staff , advertising vacancies and having all facilities up and running took several months under the expert direction of Northern Counties managing agent, John Cochrane.

Finally, amid great rejoicing, The Duchess of Devonshire declared Harehill Court officially open in October 1993.

The first tenants, Mr and Mrs Paton, had already moved in at the end of May and others followed during June. At the time of writing, the last of those, Eve Swindell, had only recently moved into full time nursing care. Eve remembered the early years with some affection, having found a good companion in her next door neighbour which resulted in Harehill Court's first wedding!

While weddings have been rare events, wedding anniversaries and birthday celebrations have been less so. Parties have been high points in the social calendar every year including Charlie and Elsie's 70th anniversary, Dora Bryant's 90th birthday with a full choir in attendance, Peg's and Rosa's 100th birthdays amongst many others.

Reflecting on the first twenty years, it must be said that once the doors were open, the story of Harehill Court as a building soon became secondary to the story of the people living and working in it.

Social Activities and Voluntary Support

The community lounge was the last bit of building to be completed and since it needed to be financially independent of the residential accommodation, it had its own accounts and management sub group. Minutes of those meetings show that the furnishings were finally ordered in February 1994 and community activities began shortly after the chairs were delivered. The first people to meet in the lounge on a regular basis were a visually handicapped group. Soon afterwards, a weekly day care centre was inaugurated and has continued up to the time of writing with a happy mixture of clients from both within and without the home.

Many other groups have enjoyed the benefit of the facilities. Over the years, storage cupboards, a tea bar and boiler have been added in response to changing needs.

When not booked by others, the lounge provides a venue for Harehill's own social events. A coffee morning has been run by the manager and tenants for many years. Special birthdays and anniversary parties have already been mentioned. Concerts and services at Christmas, Easter and Harvest Festival are held to which visitors are made welcome.

In the residents' quiet lounge, volunteers from local churches have run a regular communion service. There is also a Saturday singing group which prepares and leads the seasonal celebration services. All of these have been appreciated, particularly by those residents whose mobility prevents them from attending events elsewhere in the town.

It would be appropriate here to note that both jobs and tenancies at Harehill Court are open to all faiths and no faith, with participation in social activities and events purely a matter of personal choice.

In the early years, staff and volunteers were able to organise occasional trips out in response to tenants' suggestions. While there were folk with the ability and motivation to travel (albeit with escort assistance) destinations as far as Blackpool and even, on one occasion, Bruges, were reached. In more recent years, increasing average age with a consequent reduction in mobility has curtailed these adventures and made "in house" activities the order of the day. Nevertheless, an active tenants' association still keeps the staff, volunteers and the residents themselves on their toes.

Care Support

Part of Harehill Court's success must be attributed to effective partnership working. Chesterfield Borough Council and Northern Counties Housing Association have already been mentioned. Once the home was open it was evident that a key partner was going to be Derbyshire County Council Social Services department. Once again, the staff proved to be understanding and supportive. Some have even spent time on the management committee. In recent years Brendan Stone served an admirable turn as our calm and capable chairman.

Regarding the provision of a mid-day meal it was quickly recognised that our own “in house” service was an effective alternative to meals on wheels and there should be an appropriate financial contribution to help sustain this.

Regarding care, It was understood from the outset that in this category of housing most tenants would in due course have to have their needs assessed and some ongoing support arranged to supplement the assistance that could be given by Harehill staff.

This developed into a mutually beneficial working relationship whereby for many years the local carers and supervisor actually used the ground floor office as their local base for care services on the estate.

Initially, the number of tenants needing daily visits was relatively small, but as time has gone by, the average age of residents and consequent level of dependency has risen. Partly, this can be attributed to demographic change. Partly it reflects on the overall level of care and quality of life at Harehill Court. No-one wants to leave, and every effort is made by the manager and other members of the team to extend their stay as long as individual circumstances allow.

We are deeply indebted to our DCC partners who have worked alongside us to meet this growing need, reviewing their own care in the community policy and upgrading their support to the point in 2006 when Harehill Court became officially classed as “Extra Care Housing”. This guaranteed the availability of care services at whatever time of day or night they were needed, enabling independent living far longer than was previously possible. It is a sad reflection on political change and ongoing DCC budget cuts that both the meals subsidy and the extra care status were withdrawn in 2014. Fortunately, we were able to secure excellent alternative provision from private sector care providers so we can still offer the same high standard of support at an affordable price.

Finance

How much did it all cost?

The answer proved to be surprisingly close to budget.

The land was valued at £224,548, but by leasing the whole of this was saved.

Building costs, including all plant and equipment installed came to a total of £1,517,858, which corresponded very closely to the Housing Corporation Grant.

A Cheshire Building Society loan was negotiated which, amongst other things, allowed for staffing and running costs during the first year until Harehill Court was fully occupied and (hopefully) income balanced outgoings.

In the event, despite the steep “learning curve”, that first year went according to plan. Once people had visited the new premises to see for themselves what was on offer, there was no shortage of applicants.

The weekly rent and service charge, inclusive of that all important mid-day meal, was set at £85-78 for a single person and £101-96 for a fully occupied two person flat. The meal charge element in this was set at £12 per week per person.

By the end of the first full year it was evident that this was just about right to balance the books and subsequent increases have only needed to compensate for national rises in the cost of living. Some years, with a saving or two here and there, it has been possible to avoid an increase altogether.

Twenty years later, during which time the cost of many items has doubled and doubled again, the all inclusive rent, service, support and meals charges stood at just £139.65 for single residents and £179.70 for two. This compares so favourably with other homes of a similar kind that people often ask how it is possible. There are lots of reasons.

In the beginning, raising the capital for facilities that were inadmissible for grant aid would have imposed a long term financial burden on the Association. This was not needed due to the sterling work of the fundraisers and generous support from the churches of the town.

Since opening, thanks must be recorded for the work of an exceptional treasurer, Terry Jennings, who has taken such a keen interest in all aspects of the financial management of Harehill Court that when it was finally suggested that the post be re-titled “Financial Director” (on the same modest salary), Board approval was unanimous.

Credit should also go to our managers and all staff on the payroll. As the tenants themselves have remarked many times, not only do they carry out their regular duties, but they have also co-operated brilliantly as a team when colleagues have been ill or equipment has failed or major maintenance has disrupted day to day operations.

Finally, appreciation should be expressed to the Board members and volunteers who give their time freely to support the staff and residents at no cost at all to CCHA.

Maintaining Standards

Buildings, like the people living in them, do age. One of the reasons for Harehill Court's continued popularity is a planned maintenance programme and reserve funds to ensure that whenever re-decoration, carpets, or other replacements are needed, they are carried out to a high standard and within a sensible time frame.

As the building reaches twenty years of age, we have already been through several cycles of decorating and established regular service contracts for maintaining the grounds, the heating system, the water supply and the lift to name but a few.

Refrigerators to flats, catering equipment in the main kitchen, valves to radiators and replacement of the main boilers have all taken their turn on the shopping list. The guest room has been upgraded. The roof space insulation has been topped up to the latest standards. Light fittings, entry systems and other electrical parts of the electrical installation have been checked and renewed.

Where standards have changed, we have upgraded whenever necessary. It is an ongoing process.

To ensure that the Board remained well informed on all relevant legislation and best practice, an informal relationship was established in 2012 with a larger local Housing Association (South Yorkshire). This has been useful, for example, when we have been seeking recommended contractors for specialist work outside the scope of normal "trusted trader" lists. Links have also been maintained with Chesterfield Borough Council.

Harehill Court is not only a delightful place in which to live, it is also an object lesson in what can be achieved when churches and secular organisations co-operate together in a common cause.

Vision Statement

“CCHA is committed to providing good quality, affordable, secure, accessible and energy efficient sheltered homes that meet the identified long term social and physical needs of residents. We are committed to both quality of environment and quality of life, managed within a Christian ethos.”



Harehill Court| Quiet Room window in memory of Chairman Roland Beckingham

Schedule of accommodation (approximate areas given in square metres)

Site area 4400m² including car park, gardens and drying area

Internal floor areas:-

Ground floor	1148m ²
First floor	780m ²
Total	1928m ²
comprising	
24 single person units,	31m ² each
7 two person units	41m ² each
One four person unit	74m ² (manager's flat)
Quiet lounge	39m ²
Residents lounge	65m ²
Community lounge	77m ²
Toilets and cloakroom	36m ²
Catering kitchen and stores	36m ²
Dining room	70m ²
Laundry	24m ²
Assisted bathing facility	10m ²
Hair dressing/ hobbies room	14m ²
Manager's office	10m ²
Care workers office	9m ²
Guest room with en suite	18m ²
Lift and motor room	6+6+4m ²
Boiler room	20m ²
Internal stores	20m ²
Garden store	3m ²
Switch room	5m ²
First Aid room	9m ²
Bin store and chute	15m ²