

SUMMER 2015



WILLMOTT DIXON

SINCE 1852

HOUSING MATTERS

Local heroes

The ambitious schemes leading the
new wave of council housing



Aberfeldy or bust

The £250 million London
regeneration scheme that
resisted the recession

Handled with care

How our specialists are
breathing new life into
retirement homes

Right first time

The Housing Quality
Academy's zero-tolerance
approach to defects





Charlie Scherer is chief operating officer at Willmott Dixon Housing

Pride and progress

Welcome to the first edition of Willmott Dixon's new magazine, *Housing Matters*. Whether you are an employee, client, consultant or supply chain partner, I hope this regular publication gives you a flavour of the work our housing company undertakes in partnership with clients in communities around the country, finding unique solutions to build much-needed homes. Projects such as Seabrooke Rise in Thurrock (page 4) and Shrewsbury Street in Manchester (page 10) are examples of just some of the work we are doing building more than 2,000 homes – a programme of which I am incredibly proud.

It is also our ambition that each edition of *Housing Matters* will chart the progress of our products and services that better fit the needs of our customers and the market. This is in the context of the new UK government, but is also very much the culmination of a long-term listening and information-gathering exercise my colleagues and I have embarked on in the past 18 months. The results of this fall under three key headings: investing in our clients, investing in the quality of our products and investing in our capacity.

First, we work with our clients on numerous challenging housing and regeneration projects every day. This is our lifeblood – it's what makes us tick. We see the effort on all sides of a partnership that goes into ensuring

sites can be assembled, homes improved and sustainable new ones provided. Yet, as the demand in many areas and government pressure to build more new homes increases, so do the challenges to delivering this goal.

We already work with many customers to facilitate construction through the Scape framework, but this is just a first step. We also want to help our clients, especially local authorities and housing associations, to unlock the capacity of their assets to fund housebuilding and regeneration projects. Our work with Poplar Harca at Aberfeldy Village in east London is a great example of this (page 8). In my view, providing creative solutions of this nature will be one of the key opportunities in the next five years.

Second, we recognise that providing a high-quality product that is right first time is all-important for our clients. To ensure we do this, we have launched our Housing Quality Academy, with the aim of training all our staff to build the best quality homes with zero snagging defects (page 11). This will allow us to become more efficient, eradicating the duplication of work and make a significant stride towards our internal target of reducing

on-site labour by 15% – and pass these savings onto our clients.

Finally, the most important challenge facing the construction industry today is the shortage of skilled workers. We are an ageing profession with an annual deficit of around 50,000 between skilled workers joining and leaving the industry. With only 7,300 apprentices being employed each year, more must be done. It is absolutely critical for UK housing that we, as a sector, are able to solve this skills and capacity crisis. At Willmott Dixon we train 250 apprentices a year, give 25,000 hours of worker experience and provide practical training to over 5,000 people at our 4Life Academy in Aston. We are pushing ourselves to do more and are working closely with Carole Wildman at Walsall Housing Group (page 15) to create further employment and training opportunities with our clients.

Although we are now putting some of what our clients have told us into action, the listening and learning process never stops. To that end, please do let me know what you think of *Housing Matters*. I look forward to working with you.

“We are an ageing profession with an annual deficit of around 50,000 between skilled workers joining and leaving the industry. With only 7,300 apprentices being employed each year, more must be done”

Contents

4 A new era of council housing?

Local authorities are building again. We analyse this growing trend, and shine the spotlight on one of England's most ambitious councils

7 The view from 2020

After the surprise election result, what do the next five years hold for housing?

8 Model village

With its innovative financial structure, the £250 million Aberfeldy Village could be the future of regeneration

10 North stars

A sneak preview of just some of the exciting Willmott Dixon schemes rising in northern England

11 Defect detectors

How Willmott Dixon's new Housing Quality Academy works to ensure that all homes are built to the highest standards – first time

12 Coming of age

Willmott Dixon puts a spring in the step of the retirement and care market

14 People make our business!

The latest stories and photos from customers and staff

15 Friendly fire

A message from a critical friend

On the cover: Seabrooke Rise in Thurrock, Essex. Photo by Simon Brandon

Housing Matters is the magazine for Willmott Dixon's residential construction business



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Willmott Dixon prepares to take Brentford to the next level

Brentford FC nearly won promotion to the Premier League this season, only falling at the play-off stage. It was the club's best-ever finish and a sign of things to come, with ambitious plans for a new 20,000-seat stadium and 900 homes close to Kew Bridge in west London, which Willmott Dixon will deliver over the next few years.

For Willmott Dixon's residential construction team, the focus is now on making a start on site early next year to build 700 homes simultaneously with the stadium (right) on an existing brownfield site. What separates this from most other large regeneration schemes is the fact that the masterplan contains nearly 350 homes for private rent, with institutional investment accelerating the delivery by two years.

Once the stadium is open in summer 2018, the construction team will convert the club's current Griffin Park ground into 75 more family homes – similar to the approach taken at Arsenal in north London – making this one of the area's largest housing regeneration projects.

Charlie Scherer, chief operating officer at Willmott Dixon Housing, said: "This huge project will utilise all our skills sets for



building high-rise, mixed-tenure homes over several phases. It will also be another large area of London where our creative approach to regeneration will create a modern community that will attract hundreds of people to live."

The project with Brentford FC brings the number of homes Willmott Dixon is delivering in London to more than 3,000. You can read in greater detail about a similarly advanced regeneration project, Aberfeldy Village in east London, on page 8.

Scape paves way for new generation of council housing

England's local authorities are building again, with Willmott Dixon working with various council partners to meet this rising demand. For many, it's the first time in a generation they have built homes. Yet local authorities are not just building homes to let at social and affordable rents –

many homes are also for the retirement community.

Examples of local authorities commissioning new homes this spring include Warwick District Council and Swindon Borough Council.

Increasingly, these and other authorities are using

the Scape framework, where Willmott Dixon is the constructing partner, to procure their work. Willmott Dixon is also carrying out early feasibility work across a number of London boroughs.

Using Scape allows councils to benefit from a faster procurement process and cuts out waste and duplication. Also, by contracting directly with Willmott Dixon, it reduces overall delivery costs by up to 20 per cent.

On page 6, Thurrock Council's head of housing, Barbara Brownlee, discusses its housing programme and the procurement routes that have been most helpful. With other councils set to follow suit (page 4), 2015 looks like the year when many local authorities turn carefully crafted plans into council house building reality.



↑ The 81-home Featherstone Court in Leamington Spa – Warwick District Council's first housing scheme in a generation

News in brief

New office opens in London

The Willmott Dixon team currently building 1,000 homes in east London and southern counties has moved to new offices in Islington, north London. The team is now based in Pentonville Road, close to Angel tube station, with a satellite office in Basingstoke. David Issott, managing director of Willmott Dixon Housing, explains: "Given the broad area of our work, which spans from London into Sussex and Hampshire, Islington is a great location for us." Current projects include retirement villages in Eastleigh, Hampshire and Ascot, Berkshire, plus the long-term regeneration at the Aberfeldy estate in Tower Hamlets (page 8) and a new care scheme in Brighton.

Top award for considerate scheme

An affordable housing scheme in Canning Town, east London, for Sanctuary Housing has been praised as one of the most considerate in the country. The scheme to build 44 homes in Tarling Road was recognised by the Considerate Constructors Scheme as one of the best five out of more than 8,000 projects for the way it engages with the local community.



A new era of council housing?

Changes to rules over council spending and borrowing have led to a noticeable rise in local authority development over the past five years. Could this be the answer to the housing shortage? By Simon Brandon



A

re we about to enter a new age of council-led housebuilding?

There has certainly been an understated renaissance over the past few years. In 2012/13, according to government figures, English councils completed work on 1,360 homes. Last year the figure was 910. That may be a slight dip and only a fraction of the 104,000 homes built by developers of all stripes that year, but the trend is upwards (see tables, right and overleaf). In 2009/10, for example, local authorities in England built just 370 homes between them.

But these figures, which pertain only to council housing in the traditional, social-rent sense of the term, are certain to under-represent the real volumes of properties under construction by councils. Council housing must be paid for by councils' housing departments – but properties built for affordable rent, or for sale at market rates or through schemes such as shared equity, can be paid for through general council borrowing.

Key fact

Using Scape, Willmott Dixon can deliver homes 12 months quicker than traditional procurement

Several local authorities have recently announced sizeable development programmes. The London Borough of Newham plans to build 20,000 new homes, and Southwark plans 10,000 over the next 30 years. According to the Association of Retained Council Housing (ARCH), three-quarters of councils are intending to start developing again – many for the first time in decades – and the upward trend is set to continue.

In 2013, ARCH commissioned the Chartered Institute of Housing to examine councils' plans for house building over the next five years. Based on responses from local authorities, the report concluded that councils were on course to build 5,000 homes a year between them within the next five years – and that if current rules around council borrowing limits were relaxed, there is scope for a far greater number.

"We estimate that, with the [borrowing] cap removed, councils would have the capacity to deliver up to an additional 60,000 homes within five years," ARCH's Innovation and Ambition report stated.

What's behind this fresh impetus? In 2012 the government changed the rules governing councils' receipts from rents and house and land sales, enabling local authorities to keep the income generated rather than funnelling it back to the Treasury. And last year, the government announced £300 million of extra borrowing for which councils could bid to fund development.

One of those successful bidders was Thurrock Council, situated on the Thames Estuary in south-west Essex. Barbara Brownlee, director of housing at Thurrock, says the local authority has founded a wholly

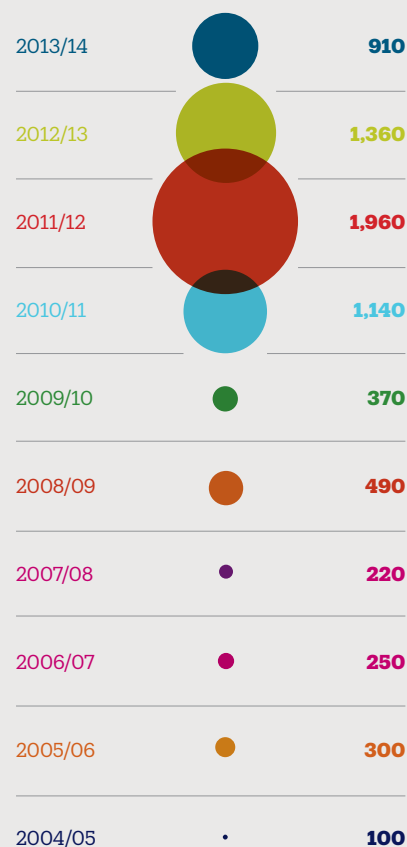
Seabrooke Rise in Thurrock, Essex, where Willmott Dixon is building 53 apartments and a community centre – part of the company's ongoing partnership with Thurrock Council (see overleaf)



Developing trend

Number of properties completed by local authorities over the past decade

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)



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“We estimate that, with the borrowing cap removed, councils would have the capacity to deliver up to an additional 60,000 homes within five years”

Innovation and Ambition report, ARCH



Active authorities

The top 10 developing local authorities by council homes completed in 2013/14

Source: DCLG

Newcastle City Council	250
Rugby Borough Council	190
Birmingham City Council	120
Cherwell District Council	50
Kirklees Council	50
Plymouth Unitary Authority	30
Southwark Council	30
Wyre Forest District Council	30

owned subsidiary – named Gloriana after the barge that carried Elizabeth I down the Thames to give her famous speech at Tilbury – that is developing “hundreds, not dozens” of properties for sale and affordable rent.

Brownlee adds: “We want to build more affordable rent and to offer a low-cost sale option for local people, and to do it quickly” (see Q&A, right).

Willmott Dixon is partnering with Thurrock Council on five development sites within the borough which, when completed, will represent £50 million of spend by the council and 250 new properties. In 2013/14, by comparison, only 260 properties of all tenures were completed in the area.

In 2013 Willmott Dixon was reselected as sole contractor for the Scape major works procurement framework. The framework, which is owned by a group of local authorities, has delivered more than 1,200 projects for its public sector clients over the past decade. It enables local authorities that work with Willmott Dixon – such as Thurrock – to get their development plans up and running as quickly as possible because both contractor and framework are ready to go from the start.

Changes to council rules, coupled with a country-wide thirst for quality housing, have created the conditions for local authorities to start breaking ground again. And with three-quarters of councils ready to start building, the local government sector could be about to make a sizeable dent in England's housing shortage.



Barbara Brownlee, director of housing at Thurrock Council



Q Why is Thurrock Council building homes?

A Thurrock is a growth borough and needs more than 20,000 new homes over the next 15 to 20 years. I got here three years ago and there was a massive need to build more affordable rent and to offer a low-cost sale option for local people, and to do it quickly.

But the private market wasn't building anything. Landowners have been really nervous since the 2008 crash. They've been hanging onto land. In some areas of Thurrock the land is worth more for industrial use than for housing.

Q So how are you developing?

A We had some money of our own, and quite a bit of grant from the Homes and Communities Agency, but it was never going to be enough to build the numbers needed. So we set up a wholly owned housing company called Gloriana, which allows the council to build housing for sale and

affordable rent – from its own borrowing. Gloriana can build hundreds of homes – it's a real difference in size and capacity over what the council can build with its own money.

The idea is not to compete [with the private sector]. We'll go where it's difficult for the market, and as soon as the market starts to pick up and deliver in big numbers we will quietly withdraw.

Q How did you get the schemes off the ground so quickly?

A The council was very clear about what it wanted and I have worked in development a long time. I went to the market straight away and made some quick appointments. We also ran mini-competitions to find an architect, a development adviser and someone to run the numbers. You have to bring the right expertise in and use it properly.

Also we used the Scape procurement framework. I joined in May 2012 and we

started the development process in August. That's the joy of Scape – if we had gone out to procure ourselves it would have taken longer, and we had access to an experienced builder in Willmott Dixon. It took us a year-and-a-half to set up our own framework, which we now use. Using Scape initially meant it only took us a few months to get going. There is a cost associated with this speed, so while Scape is very useful at certain points, I would always recommend a variety of procurement methods to ensure best value for a council.

Q What will success look like?

A When people realise that Thurrock is well connected and you can buy a gorgeous flat with a view of the Thames Estuary for £180,000 – although I hope that will be £280,000 when I'm finished! It's a desirable borough but people skip over us. I want to put a stop to that.



Emma Maier is the editor of Inside Housing

The view from 2020

The housing landscape is likely to look very different by the end of this parliament, as the government forges ahead with extended Right to Buy and continues to wrestle with the supply challenge

The 2015 election will be remembered for serving up the result that no one expected – the new government included. In the days following the election the uncertainty of negotiating a coalition programme for government was replaced by a different uncertainty. With no coalition partner to moderate, the Conservatives have been left with difficult choices about how to execute the manifesto pledges that they never expected to have to fulfil.

The new government's pledge to cut welfare spending by a further £12 billion looks daunting to say the least, given the commitment to protect the state pension, the speed of the cuts and the absence of much remaining low-hanging fruit.

The proposed extension of the Right to Buy to 1.3 million housing association tenants is not only eye-wateringly expensive (with individual tenants benefiting to the tune of up to £103,000), but also presents some serious hurdles for government. There are big questions about the compatibility of the policy with charitable law and the potential that it could lead to associations being reclassified as public bodies, putting their £60 billion of debt on the public balance sheet.

The government has two options on these difficult pledges: to use smoke and mirrors to give the appearance of achieving more

difficult promises, or to swallow hard and go for it. Under normal circumstances, the former may seem appealing. But the devastating impact of the tuition fees debacle on the Liberal Democrats, played out at the ballot box, underlines the importance the electorate places on keeping promises.

Full steam ahead it is. Convention dictates that the House of Lords doesn't stand in the way of manifesto policies, but there is room for challenge and refinement on the detail. Some key Conservative figures will privately welcome some push back in some areas.

So how will the landscape look by 2020? We can expect the extended Right to Buy to be up and running (albeit with continuing legal challenges still running). The final policy will include exemptions for supported housing and other specialist housing, and could include provision for places with city deals to suspend the policy according to local housing and economic needs. The government will be looking to minimise the cost where possible, so legislative amendments on cost floors on replacement homes and measures such as capping discounts relative to the cost of building the house may be successful.

There is a strong risk for government that the replacement of homes – both local authority sales to fund the programme and housing association properties sold through it – will not be done in time for the next

election. This has the potential to reflect badly, so by 2020 we may see councils buying rather than building replacement homes, beyond local authority boundaries in more expensive locations. A similar provision may be available for housing associations, or perhaps a do-it-yourself shared-ownership-style model, where tenants buy an equivalent home of the same value in their area instead of their housing association home.

These measures, and the clear need for housing associations and councils to support the government's pledges to build an additional 275,000 "affordable homes" and to provide 200,000 starter homes for first-time buyers under 40, will finally bring the supply challenge into sharper relief. So we could also see the government quietly drop plans to stop councils from building via council-owned companies. By 2020, this could see councils, in partnership with contractors and housing associations, providing the beginnings of a new stream of housing growth.

Meanwhile, in an effort to encourage housing associations to continue to build, government may extend new freedoms over rent policy and Right to Buy implementation to associations with ambitious development programmes. As 2020 nears, this could lead to a growth of merger talks between developing and non-developing organisations.

Emma Maier is donating her fee for this article to YWCA Great Britain

"The proposed extension of the Right to Buy to 1.3 million housing association tenants is not only eye-wateringly expensive, but also presents some serious hurdles for government"



Model village

Willmott Dixon and Poplar Harca's £250m Aberfeldy Village in east London started life in the depths of the recession. Now 338 homes have been built, with 800 to follow by 2020. **Chloe Stothart** finds out how it was done



S

tanding on the top floor of Lighterman Point you can see right across east London. To the right lies the Olympic Park with

its helter skelter sculpture and further still are the skyscrapers of Canary Wharf.

Immediately in front lies the 297-home Aberfeldy estate, a mix of double-decker maisonettes, low-rise flats and houses of various ages mostly owned by housing association Poplar Harca. Some have already been demolished to make way for the new blocks of flats and others will go over the next five years, to be replaced by the £250 million Aberfeldy Village, which is being built by Willmott Dixon. By February 2020, 1,176 homes, shops, a new doctor's surgery and community facilities will have been built as part of this mammoth regeneration project.

Residents have started moving into the first block of the scheme for sale, which includes Lighterman Point and has 105 homes for

private sale and 75 for social rent; the tenants of the second block of 158 flats for private rent will move in from the end of June (see box). Yet, when the project began in 2009 in the midst of the recession, the chances of having 338 homes built by this stage were slim. So how has it been done?

A funding first

Simon Chatfield, director of research and operations for Willmott Dixon's private rent subsidiary be:here, explains that the uncertain climate in the property market at the time meant the Willmott Dixon/Poplar Harca joint venture behind the project could only commit to building the first block of 105 homes for sale. However, the innovative structure of the deal, which includes institutionally funded private-rented units, has enabled the rest of phase one to go ahead.

The economy may be looking healthier now than it did six years ago, but the project

still has some useful lessons for other councils and housing associations. At Aberfeldy, asset manager M&G Investments paid Poplar Harca a confidential sum for a 250-year lease of the site. This helped to cover some upfront costs. In regeneration schemes funded by income from sales, developers would have to build out incrementally, selling homes in order to fund the building of the next phase, but Aberfeldy could be built out two years faster than normal because a deal was in place with M&G for the private rented units.

The Aberfeldy deal, which Chatfield thinks represents the first homes purpose-built for private tenants in London backed by an institutional investor, indicates that such funds may now be interested in build to rent, having been lukewarm when the concept was first mooted by the Montague Report into the private rented sector in 2012. Since then, declines in bond yields have sent investors looking for other places to put their money.

The first phase of Aberfeldy Village included 105 homes for private sale and 75 for social rent

Simon Chatfield of be:here looks out on the ongoing construction work. By 2020, there will be 1,176 new homes on the site



Smooth transition

Estate regeneration schemes can be controversial. Some estates end up with fewer social rented homes – either in a bid to mix tenures or because of a lack of funds – and in others leaseholders do not receive enough for their homes to buy a replacement property locally.

Yet these issues seem to have been well handled at Aberfeldy Village. The new development has far more homes in total than previously – 1,176 will be built and 297 demolished – but less social housing than before, as the estate used to have 211 social rented homes and will now have 170 affordable plus 20 intermediate rent.

Neal Hunt, development director of Poplar Harca, says tenants will all be found social homes on the estate or elsewhere nearby in Tower Hamlets. He adds that leaseholders are paid more than the market value of their homes.

Chatfield says: “The private rented sector is growing massively and nobody is in any doubt that there will be interest in it for a long time.”

The funding structure of the Aberfeldy deal was especially complicated because of the fragile state of the property market at the time. When the deal was done, Chatfield explains, institutional investors did not want the risk of receiving insufficient rent from the scheme. That’s why Poplar Harca makes a monthly payment to M&G with inflation-linked annual reviews for 30 years from the private rent it collects. Essentially it is giving M&G a guaranteed rental income.

Future models

Additional ways of funding regeneration schemes are likely to emerge to counter dwindling grant and further austerity. The Chartered Institute of Housing is beginning what it hopes will become a national framework for regeneration to show the ways

“The private rented sector is growing massively and nobody is in any doubt that there will be interest in it for a long time”

Simon Chatfield, be:here

Key fact

Willmott Dixon is building some of UK’s first purpose built homes for private renters

in which government could get involved.

Gavin Smart, deputy chief executive of the CIH, says the options could include the government using its land as an equity stake in a scheme, taking a deferred receipt or using financial instruments such as guarantees. Other tools like enterprise zones, faster planning and compulsory purchase powers, could all form part of the answer.

Alongside could sit various models of cross-subsidy, private investment and collaboration with public agencies to ensure the provision of the required facilities and infrastructure. “We all know there are more places where regeneration is going to be necessary. The question is how you make it workable now,” Smart says. The impressive view from Aberfeldy Village may also be a glimpse into the future of regeneration.



Watch the live project webcam at
www.willmottdixon.co.uk/projects



North stars

For many years, Willmott Dixon's residential construction business was focused on London and the South-east. That's changing ...

From new offices in Birmingham, Manchester and Rotherham, the Midlands and the North team, led by managing director Simon Leadbeater, is delivering new housing in cities like Manchester and Liverpool, as well as in towns such as Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire and Shrewsbury.

The mix of work is affordable housing and care and retirement properties, with local authorities and housing associations using our skills to build new housing or refurbish existing buildings for new accommodation.

Shrewsbury Street, Manchester

Trafford Housing Trust appointed Willmott Dixon to transform Shrewsbury Street in Old Trafford with a mixed-use development that includes a community centre, bistro cafe, pharmacy, health care facilities and 80 extra-care apartments. An integral part of the wider Old Trafford masterplan, the £20 million scheme will be completed in July 2017.



Marwood Tower, Liverpool

Willmott Dixon has been appointed by Liverpool Mutual Homes to overhaul the 15-storey Marwood Tower and transform it into 81 modern apartments for over-55s. The £8 million scheme is the company's first housing project in Liverpool and is expected to be completed in autumn 2016. It forms part of the new Liverpool Housing Partnership, which is delivering 1,500 new homes and 1,000 refurbished properties across the city.



Darlington Court, Hucknall

This retirement scheme is part of Ashfield district council's first housebuilding project in 30 years. Willmott Dixon was appointed under the Scape framework to provide 39 one- and two-bedroom apartments. The £7 million development will be built to Code for Sustainable Homes level 4, and is due for completion in February 2016.



Watch the live project webcam at www.willmottdixon.co.uk/projects

Mardol House, Shrewsbury

Shropshire council has appointed Willmott Dixon under the Scape framework to convert a magistrates court and tax office into 85 student homes with en-suite facilities. The £3 million scheme is due for completion in September 2015 to coincide with the opening of the new University Centre Shrewsbury.



Defect detectors

Willmott Dixon's Housing Quality Academy teaches our staff to eliminate all types of defects, cutting waste and ensuring that every single unit is delivered to the same exacting standards

Ready for occupation' means exactly that," says Peter Walton, compliance director at Willmott Dixon. "It is not our clients' job to inspect and snag our work. It is the team's responsibility to provide every unit to the same high standard where the client can take immediate handover on the day it is offered."

This may sound obvious, yet delays in handing over homes due to defects is the bane of most contractors' lives. As Jo Weston, compliance manager at Willmott Dixon, says: "As an industry, we have seen an enormous pace of change in different types of construction and a reduction in the availability of skilled labour. These factors all thrown in together mean that controlling quality from the outset is fundamental."

To address this industry-wide skills shortage, Willmott Dixon has launched its Housing Quality Academy. It is based within the 4Life Academy in Aston, Birmingham, that the company established three years ago to offer training to its employees, clients and the wider community. The Housing Quality Academy takes this focus on training up a notch with the aim of delivering Walton's "ready for occupation" mantra.

The HQA is a series of classroom tutorials and practical sessions in purpose-built



Some of the 70 building managers and supervisors who have already completed courses at the HQA



"pods" in the Aston training centre. The sessions are led by experienced on-site professionals from Willmott Dixon and key suppliers such as British Gypsum, IKO roofing systems, Rockwool fire protection, ROCA and Manhattan Kitchens. Course members are asked to find defects typical in metal stud partition walls, roofing systems, kitchens, bathrooms and several other dedicated pods.

To date, 70 Willmott Dixon building managers and supervisors have completed courses at the HQA, with a total of 500 due

to do so by the end of 2015. Every Willmott Dixon manager, designer and surveyor will attend training at the HQA at least once every two years. The company is also offering HQA sessions to key suppliers and clients.

Weston says feedback so far has been "fantastic". "Delegates are taking their learning back to their daily roles," she adds (see box). "We are also ensuring any good ideas for further controlling and managing quality raised through the programme are put back in the workplace."



Lessons from the pods

Steve Matthews, senior building manager, Willmott Dixon

"Everyone would like to deliver projects with zero defects, but it's another thing actually doing it. I attended a Housing Quality Academy course recently and the key message was, 'Stop, slow down and look at the schedule'. This sounds simple, but when you are pushing to get a job done, it's not always the case.

"For me the drylining section with British Gypsum was very useful. I certainly took away a load of notes and ideas that

I have shared with my team on-site at South Ockendon in Thurrock.

"It really helped that the emphasis of the day at the HQA was on the performance of the whole team. A typical cause of a defect is where a job has fallen between two subcontractors. That comes down to better supervision, but also to our teams knowing the emphasis we have on doing things right first time."

"It really helped that the emphasis of the day at the HQA was on the performance of the whole team"





Coming of age

The care and retirement living market is changing and expanding rapidly, covering everything from upmarket housing for the over-55s to dementia care. But what all developments have in common is the need for highly specialist skills



The historic Mount Hospital in the heart of Hampshire closed 10 years ago. Its glorious Victorian buildings had fallen into disrepair, until it was recently bought by housing association Anchor Trust and plans were made for its rebirth as a 170-home retirement village.

Bishopstoke Park, as the near-complete scheme is now called, has been rebuilt by Willmott Dixon and is just one example of the 1,000 homes for the over-55s the company will deliver in 2015 in this burgeoning sector. Indeed, a quarter of Willmott Dixon's construction activity is in care and retirement, ranging from large retirement villages such as Bishopstoke, to dementia and nursing care homes for local authorities (see box, right). Whatever the project, it requires the expert knowledge Willmott Dixon's teams bring to these highly specialised homes.

State of the art

Bishopstoke Park will open this summer and is Willmott Dixon's second village for Anchor after the company set the model for retirement villages with Denham Garden Village in Buckinghamshire five years ago.

Prices for homes on the 15ha Bishopstoke Park site start at £250,000 and rise to more than £870,000 for a two-bed penthouse. The quality and finish of the homes is very upmarket, reflecting the discerning nature of this market. Echoing the trend for these villages, it's a self-contained community, including a bistro, juice bar, delicatessen, general store and craft room. Taking pride of place at the heart of the village is the sensitively restored, 19th-century Mount – a Victorian building that now houses a luxurious pool, spa and wellness centre.

Key fact

25% of Willmott Dixon's residential activity is in the retirement and care sector

“Our teams need an empathy and compassion to know who they are building for. You have to approach these projects as if your grandmother was moving in”

Debbie Sizer, Willmott Dixon

Care and support services are also available on-site, should residents require them.

Bishopstoke Park reflects how retirement homes are really coming of age, with the model changing beyond all recognition in recent years. It's about providing the UK's growing older economy with a 5-star hotel experience and accommodation and services that will grow with an ageing population.

Charlie Scherer, chief operating officer at Willmott Dixon Housing, says: “Bishopstoke Park is about giving older people a lifestyle that fits their aspirations for energetic, full-on lifestyles, while having access to care by highly trained professionals should they need it. It's the sign of things to come and, likewise, requires specialised experience from a building perspective to get it right.”

High standards

Bishopstoke Park's high specification is reflected in a similar project that Willmott Dixon is completing near Ascot for BEN, the Motor and Allied Trades Benevolent Fund. Both are built to a similar scale as self-contained communities.

However, homes for older people come in all shapes and types. Scherer adds: “This is an evolving market with several different providers all investing in homes. We also have projects in Manchester, Swindon, Evesham, Derbyshire and Warwickshire focused on homes for the over-55s.”

“It's about equipping communities with a choice of accommodation that will provide the level of care needed, from independent living with little support, to full-time nursing, dementia and short-term respite care.”

- The Bishopstoke Park buildings contain a mix of one- and two-bed apartments
- The development is laid out as a self-contained village



Care in communities

Shrewsbury Street, Manchester

£20 million scheme of 80 extra-care apartments, community centre and healthcare facilities for Trafford Housing Trust. Completes in July 2017.

Atherstone, Warwickshire

£9 million scheme of 80 retirement homes for Housing & Care 21. Completes in 2016.

Yates Court, Evesham, Worcestershire

£7 million extension of extra-care facility for Rooftop Housing Group to provide 48 homes for rent, shared ownership and private sale. Completed in March 2015.



Read more about these schemes at
www.willmott Dixon.co.uk/projects

Meticulous planning

“The secret of successful delivery in the care market is meticulous planning, attention to detail and a good helping of empathy,” says Debbie Sizer, national care sector manager at Willmott Dixon. “The quality has to be very, very high for people in care, due to the dependence they have on their environment.”

“Experience brings understanding of the complexity and high-quality of programming needed,” says Sizer. “The final phase is very intense. All the apartments, shops and leisure facilities have to be ready by the end date.” Expertise in complex M&E systems is particularly crucial, she adds.

In addition to having the right technical skills in place, teams have to make the right emotional connection. “Care clients are very sensitive to the needs of their customers,” says Sizer. “Our teams need an empathy and compassion to know who they are building for. You have to approach these projects as if your grandmother was moving in.”

With a flourishing market, it's this attention and care that will define the best providers of the next generation of retirement housing.



People make our business!

Selfies, seafaring yarns and other stories from Willmott Dixon Housing's staff and customers



Happy snapper

What better opportunity for a "selfie" than with your chief executive. When Rick Willmott visited our recently completed Maywood extra care home in Wolverhampton for Wrekin Housing Trust, it made perfect sense for our team to capture the moment as only a selfie can! It looks like they have started a trend for Rick's site visits ...

Gladiator comes to Mancetter

Our housing project in Mancetter, Warwickshire has become a local landmark thanks to the soldiers on the site hoarding, which reflect the village's Roman history. During the Roman occupation of Britain, a posting station was built nearby and Mancetter is considered the likely location of the Battle of Watling Street between Boudica's army and Gaius Suetonius Paulinus' Roman legions. Thanks to pupils from Wathen Grange School, local history has come alive on our hoardings for all passers-by to see!



All around the world

No, we're not getting into the cruise ship business! This is development director Phil Green on a boat during his year-long sabbatical when he skippered several voyages around Europe and Australia. Phil's now back on dry land with Willmott Dixon, swapping the Med for CIH Manchester.



Running for other people's lives

One great thing about running for charity is that it does wonders for fitness! Our Housing team were out in force at the London Marathon where chief operating officer Charlie Scherer led eight runners in raising £18,000 for Shelter. Some also got into the competitive spirit, with Matt Turner (centre) running it in 3 hours 26 minutes, followed by Ross Taylor (right) in 3 hours 30 minutes and Stephen Hosty (left) in 3 hours 32 minutes.



Carole Wildman is corporate director – growth at Walsall Housing Group

Key fact

Willmott Dixon won the Queen's Award for Enterprise for our track record of community investment

Friendly fire

As a 'critical friend', I don't always tell Willmott Dixon what they want to hear, but now our relationship is really starting to bear fruit – for both parties

I had never done anything like this before, but when Charlie Scherer, chief operating officer at Willmott Dixon Housing, asked me in December 2013 to become a "critical friend" to the business, focusing on its social value work, I jumped at the chance.

It was a chance to work on something close to my heart with a company that's determined to make a contribution to social value and sustainability. We're transferring knowledge between us. I'm often on the other side of the table interviewing contractors, so this gives me a better insight into how they operate and how I could influence them to support the small, local enterprises I work with.

So, 18 months down the track, what have we achieved and what lessons might other housing providers take from our experience?

The first thing I would say is that being an effective critical friend takes time. Both parties need to fully understand the other's perspective and how they operate before meaningful and tangible results are possible. Although Willmott Dixon and I have been meeting regularly in the past year-and-a-half and have run a workshop together for Willmott Dixon staff, it is only recently that I feel the critical friend approach has really begun to bear fruit.

One area in which I feel I have been of value to Willmott Dixon is in ensuring it pushes itself as hard as it can to get the most from its community interventions. For instance, when you are providing employment and skills training, don't just aim

to help anybody. Ensure you identify those furthest from the labour market and target your resources accordingly.

Now, our critical friend relationship is really gaining momentum and I am excited by the social value programme we have planned for the next 18 months. First, I will be conducting a "deep dive" review of Willmott Dixon's social value work. I will be asking questions such as: what is most effective in the approach of Willmott Dixon's community managers? How can different aspects of the work Willmott Dixon does be better linked together?

Second, we will be exploring how the company's work through the Scape framework can best support "catalyst companies" – social enterprises in the areas where Scape is operating. This support will in turn help them to support other businesses – it's about doing all we can

to ensure that the multiplier effect of the investment through Scape benefits the local economy.

Third, I'll be helping Willmott Dixon to compile a paper on the bottom-line benefits of sustainability. It's all very well to have an ISO 14001 certification, but to what extent does the development industry really deliver and realise the benefits of a comprehensive approach to waste and carbon?

Finally, highlighting the fact this is a true two-way relationship, maintenance and development teams from Walsall Housing Group will shortly begin training at the Willmott Dixon Housing Quality Academy. I take the view that the critical friend relationship should be a mature, constructive partnership that works for both parties. I am delighted to say that, in my experience, this is proving to be the case with Willmott Dixon.



Carole Wildman's advice is shaping Willmott Dixon's impact in the community, including its recent makeover for St Basils hostel for homeless people in Birmingham

"When you are providing employment and skills training, don't just aim to help anybody. Ensure you identify those furthest from the labour market and target your resources accordingly"



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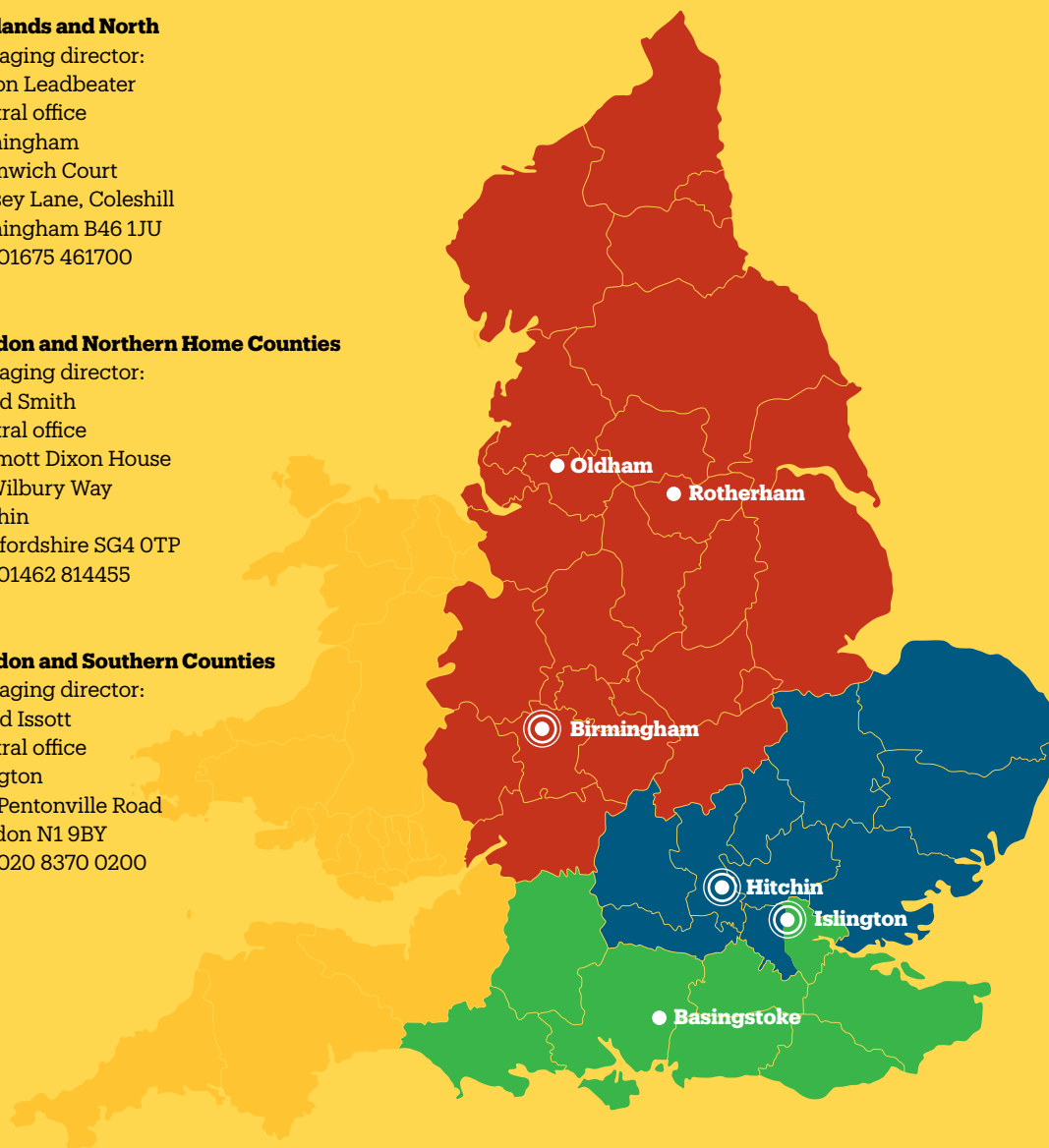
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