



# Press release

## **Exemplar Eco-homes show future of affordable housing**

The award winning development of 26 homes in Elmswell, Suffolk was officially opened on Friday 28 November 2008 when eight Suffolk-apple trees were planted in the development's orchard. The scheme is an exciting exemplar of the future of affordable housing and has attained an Eco-Homes 'excellent' rating. The homes are believed to be as close to zero carbon as any multi-unit residential project in the UK.

The £4.67 million scheme has been developed by Orwell Housing Association whose aim was to build attractive, comfortable homes which met the Eco-Homes' highest rating. The project was initiated jointly, by Orwell Housing Association and Suffolk Preservation Society, to mark their 40<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> anniversaries, respectively. A partnership was then formed with Elmswell Parish Council and Mid Suffolk District Council before a national design competition was organised to bring forward a high quality affordable housing scheme which would set a new precedent for development the future.

Local residents have also been involved since the beginning, some of whom are now enjoying a different way of living in the newly built homes. A representative from each partner, together with representatives from the builder, architect and local school, each planted a tree in the orchard.

Charlotte Coleman planted a tree on behalf of the tenants, moved to Clay Fields with her partner Scott and three-year old daughter Trinity from a small two bedroom flat in Elmswell with no garden. They love their new home, particularly the eco aspects, the spaciousness of the interior and the amount of green space on the development.

"We can't praise the development enough. We're so happy and have no intention of ever moving," she says.

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Clay Fields combines contemporary design and sustainable construction with low energy use and innovative local materials. The homes have been designed to maximize the heat of the sun and create optimum space and light internally. A heat recovery system minimizes the need for additional heating. Hot water and additional heating are supplied via a Biomass community boiler fuelled by locally sourced wood pellets.

Wherever possible, natural materials with low carbon footprints have been incorporated into the build. The homes are of a timber-frame construction using sustainable timbers filled with Hemcrete, a mix of hemp and lime, sprayed onto the frames to provide mass, rigidity and insulation to the walls. This innovative insulant material has the huge advantage of being carbon negative as it locks in CO<sub>2</sub>.

An important aspect of the design is the amount of communal green space – totalling half the site. There are four distinct areas that can be used by both the residents and the local community – a low maintenance wildflower meadow, a Suffolk-apple orchard, allotments with composting facilities and a 'kick around' area.

This ground breaking scheme is attracting much interest and acclaim. In 2007 it was awarded a Housing Design Award by RIBA and has recently been shortlisted for Inside Housing's Sustainable Housing Award.

"When we launched this scheme in 2004 to mark our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, our aim was to create a community of affordable homes for local people that were attractive and comfortable to live in within a development which added value to the local area. We also wanted to ensure they were truly sustainable and achieved the highest Eco-Homes rating. I believe we have achieved our goals," says Stephen Javes, chief executive of Orwell Housing Association.

Richard Ward, director of Suffolk Preservation Society, said: "When we first started work on this project, we always knew this development would set a national benchmark by showing that it is possible to develop high quality, low cost, truly sustainable and well designed affordable housing.

"We have long been concerned about the quality and quantity of affordable housing schemes currently available in the county, and felt bringing forward something exceptional such as the scheme at Elmswell would be a fitting way to mark our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We are delighted with the end result and hope the new residents at Clay Fields continue to enjoy their homes for years to come."

E N D S

28 November 2008