



Angel Yard

The History

Angel Yard started life as Norwich Cohousing in 2008, evolved into Sussex Street Cohousing when the present site was acquired in 2015 and was finally renamed Angel Yard. You may still see the older names in some places. They are one and the same with the name Angel Yard being adopted in 2021 when the project started to move forwards apace.

During the first few years there were regular and irregular meetings as the project waxed and waned. Members came and went and hopes of progress were raised and dashed. A number of different sites were pursued.

A great step forward was taken in 2015 when the land at Sussex Street was acquired thanks to a generous directors loan. Around £650,000 was paid for the main site. This land already had planning permission for a mixture of housing types. At the time it was thought that as a result of this the project would be unlocked and progress would be smooth and rapid from then on. Little did we know.

With the aid of a small grant from "Locality" in 2017 a document was prepared (the client brief) to outline the aims desired for the project. Advisors came and went until in 2019 a group called TOWN became involved. TOWN had been instrumental in achieving success for a similar cohousing scheme in Cambridge, Marmalade Lane. They used their skills and experience of this project to move Angel Yard forwards.

A second smaller adjacent piece of land was purchased at the start of 2019 for an additional £138,000. In autumn 2019 the group took presentations from 3 firms of architects and the decision was made to proceed with the team at Archio. It had been hoped that funds would be available from the government Community Housing Fund to pay the approximate £250,000 for the work needed by the architects, TOWN and other professionals to get the project through the planning process. A complex application was submitted and we waited.. but then in January 2020 we were informed that all the funding had already been allocated.

Other possible sources of funding for this part of the project were examined but the conditions and interest rates were onerous. Undaunted the decision was made to look to members and supporters to make loans to raise the £250,000 needed to get the scheme through the planning process. With this achieved meetings with the architects started and the scheme went to the initial pre-planning stage in November 2021 with anticipated full planning in spring 2022.

The Future

Once planning permission is received a much larger sum of money is going to be needed to build Angel Yard. Around £6.8 million in fact. With planning in place we will look to other lenders for this. The more members committed to buy the easier this should be. We take advice from our

developer partners TOWN and they feel Angel Yard will be a good prospect for the government backed “Homes England” body to lend on. Homes England look for “partners who share their ambition to challenge traditional norms and build better homes faster”. So angel Yard should be a good fit for them. TOWN have other options of course should this not prove to be the case.

The Structure

Angel Yard is a Community Interest Company (CIC sometimes pronounced kick). These are fairly new entities designed to provide a legal form for enterprises which aim to provide benefit to the community or to trade with a “social purpose,” rather than to make a profit. CIC’s are different to charities, they are a means of making clear that the intention of an enterprise is to provide community benefit, while also having many of the advantages commonly associated with a limited company.

For someone new to the group it can be difficult to understand how we are made up, so these are the different elements of our structure at the moment. Lucy Hall, Peter Nicholls and Richard Crosby are currently the directors and the plan is to expand this number. The Steering group is the main driving force. The membership of the Steering group has changed over the years and the numbers gone up and down. At the moment there are 6 members on the Steering Group and this includes all the directors plus, Jill Firman, Cathy Nicholls and Christine Way. Up until now membership of the Steering Group has been by invitation and essentially comprises a core group of members who have the time available to attend the meetings and do some of the background work involved in running and organising Angel Yard. The Steering group meets weekly and is actively looking for new members.

The Design Group are members who have paid a commitment fee of £500 to participate in the meetings with our architects to plan Angel Yard. All the directors and Steering Group are members of the Design Group. Anyone can still become a member of this group.

The members are people paying £5 a month most of whom have expressed a wish to live at Angel Yard although a few are just keen to keep up to date and support the project. We have recently, and plan increasingly, to set up subgroups of members to look at specific aspects. At the moment there is a renting subgroup working out the policy for the possible letting of Angel Yard homes.

The Homes

The plan is to build around 32 homes. These will be a mixture of 1, 2 and 3 bed flats, 2 bed duplex apartments (essentially flats on 2 floors) and 3 bed town-houses. They will range in price from an estimated £220,000 to £340,000 and be built to high environmental and energy conserving standards. We are aiming for Passivhaus certification if possible. Passivhaus is the gold standard in energy conservation where design is focused on making best use of the “passive” influences in a building – like sunshine, shading and ventilation – rather than active heating and cooling systems such as air conditioning and central heating. Combined with very high levels of insulation and airtightness, this makes it possible for a passive home to use 90 percent less energy than a typical one.

As part of the project we are planning to allocate two affordable flats for people with mild to moderate learning disabilities who are moving from supported to independent living. Cohousing is uniquely suited as a stepping stone for individuals in this situation, and it is something that members are keen to offer.

An essential component of cohousing is the shared facilities: the Common House, workshop and laundry to name three. These are available to all members and their initial cost and running costs will be shared. When buying a home one needs to be aware that there will be around an additional 7% cost to the purchase price to cover these. As with any such development, there will also be an ongoing Service Charge. The aim would be to keep the Service Charge as low as possible by sharing management and practical tasks within the community. In a 'conventional' development, these would be bought in or provided by an external, profit-making company. These factors, together with the much lower energy costs, should be weighed against the higher initial outlay. We will also be offering a discount for early exchange on a new Angel Yard home.

The End

So that's about it, the history, the future, the structure and the homes. Some of the plan will almost certainly change but by being involved now you can be part of that.