



## **CAMBRIDGE AHEAD RESPONSE CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2021-26 CONSULTATION**

Cambridge Ahead is pleased to make a submission to the Cambridge City Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Consultation. Our submission focusses on the role that modular housing can play in tackling homelessness and rough sleeping.

This year Cambridge has played host to one of the first schemes of its kind in England; a modular homes project which provides emergency help, support and accommodation to people experiencing homelessness in the city. The first phase of this project began as a collaboration between Jimmy's Cambridge, Allia, the New Meaning Foundation and the City Council to provide six new modular homes on Newmarket Road. The programme is now due to expand through work with Allia, and with the Hill Group Foundation, with two new sites having secured approval for 10 new modular homes and a third site identified for up to another 7 homes.

We welcome the approach the City Council has taken in making best use of spare land for this purpose. A particular strength of the project is the flexibility afforded within the design of units for them to be relocatable to other free or low-cost sites within the city if or when the land they are currently on is required for another purpose. We wish to state our strong support for the Council's plans to continue to expand the provision of modular homes in the city to prevent and relieve homelessness.

We are pleased that Cambridge Ahead has been able to play an important role in this work by facilitating collaboration between key partners and creating a forum for private sector support. A number of Cambridge Ahead members supported the project, including Allia, Brookgate, Hill, Howard Group, Marshall Group, Carter Jonas, Mick George, TTP and Urban and Civic. These organisations were brought together as Members of Cambridge Ahead by their common interest in creating long-term prosperity and improving quality of life in Cambridge and, more specifically, their interest in housing issues as Members of the Cambridge Ahead Housing Group.

Dr Gemma Burgess, who Chairs the Cambridge Ahead Housing Group, and her team at the University of Cambridge have analysed the impact of the project, summarising the positive reception the homes have received from residents who have been impressed with the design and quality of the units as well as the support service offered by Jimmy's<sup>1</sup>.

This demonstrates the huge value in creating forums where like-minded organisations from across industry and academia can come together, forging relationships around shared issues which mean that when opportunities to act arise those opportunities can be grasped quickly and effectively.

Dr Gemma Burgess said:

*"This housing project shows what can be achieved when the city's community works together to provide local solutions to homelessness. It makes innovative use of modern methods of construction and under utilised land to provide much needed homes for local homeless people."*

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<sup>1</sup> Cambridge Centre for Housing & Planning Research (2020), [Modular Housing Project: preliminary findings](#)

One of the key lessons learned in this process, which should be noted in the Cambridge City Council Strategy and by other Local Authorities, is the responsiveness of the planning system to enable modular housing to be delivered. Each small cluster of units is a major planning challenge in terms of cost and uncertainty, so it would be particularly helpful if a clear understanding and agreement could be reached around planning policy on each area's requirements for such units. This would enable more timely, cost-effective and coordinated delivery of the number and quality of units required.

The modular homes piloted here were small but were playing a specific role in better accommodating people who would otherwise be in hostels or shared housing, in their own affordable, independent but manageable space, as they are supported on their journey to independent living in other housing tenures and types. However, in general terms 'modular' does not necessarily mean small (below space standards) as modular built homes can be just as large and even indistinguishable from traditionally built homes. We are not advocating for small units across the board but where they have a role to play in meeting particular needs.

Moving forward we encourage the Council to:

- **Mainstream this approach and the use of modular to establish a pipeline of units so that they can truly address the scale of the challenge in the city.** The work should continue in the positive spirit of collaboration public, private and charity sectors which has made it such a success to date.
- **Establish a clear understanding around planning policy on each areas requirement for modular meanwhile housing.** This should include overall delivery targets and identification of individual sites where in-principle approval could be pre-agreed, with final delegated approval wherever possible.
- **Lead a collaborative approach across the wider Cambridge area so that the role of modular in tackling homelessness is established, well understood and standardised across the region.** The County Council And District Councils in the region should look to work with Cambridge City Council to understand the lessons learned from this work, and how their strategies and plans could support a wider roll-out of modular housing to other areas where homelessness and rough sleeping exists