

The Marlfield development Riverside Housing Co-operative



79 homes
Shared ownership and
affordable rented

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The Marlfield development is a 79 home development that is part of Riverside Housing Co-operative in Redditch. Riverside was originally developed as part of the Redditch Co-operative Homes (RCH) development in 2003, which was initiated by Redditch Borough Council (RBC) working with local housing association Accord Housing Group.

RBC wanted to expand affordable housing in the borough and chose a co-operative approach in order to develop strong local self-sustaining communities. Accord Housing Group was a natural partner to the development because it had previous experience of providing support to co-ops in the West Midlands through Birmingham Co-operative Housing Services.

RCH brings together 5 housing co-ops across Redditch who each have a 7 year lease with RCH from whom they buy services. Co-op representatives form the largest part of the RCH Board, which also includes representation from RBC and Accord. Between them the Redditch co-ops now own 453 homes, most of them affordable rented homes, but also including some shared ownership homes. Whilst co-op members have particular loyalty to their own co-ops, Redditch's local community nature has lent itself to co-op members also feeling a sense of ownership of RCH as a whole.

From when Riverside was set up in 2003 with 22 homes, its members had aspirations to grow the co-op so that it could provide more homes and ensure that more people could have the same opportunities that they had had. The co-op identified a local opportunity on the nearby Marlfield site, which had been previously earmarked by a private developer for a care home, but he had had to sell due to financial problems caused by the global crash.

The co-op persuaded Accord to buy the site in 2009 and then set up a design group which included 10 co-op members (mostly Riverside members, but also including members of another RCH co-op who had participated in another recent development), and representation from RCH, working alongside an Accord in-house architect. The design group threw out initial traditional housing association style designs, and then 2 subsequent further iterations, to eventually decide on a design around a central square in order to provide more open space at the centre of the estate for communal events and interaction, at the cost of smaller individual gardens. The design group also wanted code level 6 standards of energy efficiency, achieved using Accord's in-house build factory insulative materials, resulting in energy costs 50% cheaper than traditional housing, and solar panels reducing service charges and providing income to RCH.



With planning permission granted in 2011, the process started to allocate to the 79 homes from RBC's Choice Based Lettings system, with an emphasis placed on co-operability. This led to regular Marlfield member meetings until the 2013 scheme completion about how they would run their part of the co-op.

The co-op took over Redditch's Town Hall to hold the meetings, it being the only place large enough to hold the 150 members regularly attending. The buzz of excitement amongst the developing community led to problems for Redditch's Chief Executive working next door who didn't want to stem the growing community enthusiasm! The group developed its own system to decide who would live in each home, leading to each member being able to

personalise their homes and elected representatives to attend site meetings.

The large growth of the co-op meant that it needed to establish a system to enable members to participate across its three sites, including the Marlfield site. With representation from all three sites on the co-op's committee, the co-op now operates three monthly meetings on each site prior to the monthly committee meeting to enable members from each site to discuss local issues. As well as traditional elected officer roles, the co-op elects officers to oversee rents, repairs and lettings who work with RCH staff who provide services to the co-op.



It's great that we get to control how our housing works, but actually Marlfield is more about our local community – we have developed our own Facebook Group – which covers everything from lost clothes and parcels to bigger questions about our homes. We run a local holiday club and we hold big parties on our square in the summer. It's a fantastic place to live and its ours!

Ian Clements, Riverside Housing Co-op committee member from Marlfield



We were sceptical about co-operative housing when we first heard about the claims being made about it, but we went with it, and it has really worked to make amazing local communities in our borough. Co-op housing is the country's best kept housing secret and it should form part of every local authority's housing strategy.

Cllr Bill Hartnett – Leader of Redditch Borough Council