

Active Design



CREATING ACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS
THROUGH PLANNING AND DESIGN

CASE STUDY

Houlton: Large-scale residential-led development

Supported by



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Fact File

Name: **Houlton**

Location (town, county): **Rugby, Warwickshire**

Local planning authority: **Rugby Borough Council**

Date of planning consent/
construction/completion: **Under construction, first completions in 2018**

Case study type: **6,200 home residential-led development on former brownfield site**

Houlton is a residential-led development of 6,200 homes, located to the east of Rugby, Warwickshire on the site of the former Rugby Radio Station. Designed to be a complete new community, it includes schools, shops, community facilities, sports pitches and employment space, linked together with an extensive and varied network of green open spaces and active travel networks.

Houlton is being developed by master developer Urban&Civic, who deliver the site infrastructure including open spaces, schools and other key placemaking ingredients. Urban&Civic then sell parcels of land to housebuilders, who develop within this overall framework.

Health, wellbeing and physical activity are considered throughout the design at all scales. The site demonstrates a comprehensive consideration of the principles of Active Design when applied to major new development.



ACTIVE DESIGN PRINCIPLES IN ACTION:



How it happened

- An overarching masterplan set the core structure for the site.
- At a later stage, more detailed design codes are set out for key phases of development, with landscape and open space networks prioritised. This enables flexibility and responsiveness in the detailed design.
- The key infrastructure that supports and enables activity and active behaviours is delivered by the master developer Urban&Civic. This supports the long-term investment in the quality and value of the site.
- Development parcels are sold to housebuilders, to be developed in line with the design code for that key phase, which defines clearly how these areas should connect into active travel and green infrastructure networks.

Why is it successful?

- Although only 900 homes have been occupied to date, participation in community activities and usage of physical activity facilities such as allotments, community gardens and the open space network is high, as a proportion of the total population.
- In its early stages, Houlton saw a considerably higher sales rate of homes than the surrounding area, and is now seeing increase sales values, reflecting the attractiveness of the new community and its quality of life, driven by the open space network and facilities within easy reach of new residents. Urban&Civic have 14 development sites across England following a similar model.

Lessons learned

- The open space network brings the place together and enables physical activity interventions.
- Having a continuing interest in the site enables Urban&Civic to invest for long-term quality, which in turn leads to faster sales and higher values. Active behaviours, health and walkable communities and opportunities for higher quality of life are a key part of the attraction for potential new residents.
- An ongoing flexible approach to development ensures that decisions can be revisited, adaptations can be made, and new opportunities to improve physical activity, health and wellbeing can be taken in response to changing trends and in consultation with local residents.
- In this case, this approach is being delivered by a private developer but these lessons are applicable to all sites.



Applying the principles



Principle 1: Activity for all

Houlton is designed to be a self-contained new community, and offers homes and facilities for a wide range of groups, including a proportion of affordable homes as well as other specialist accommodation types.

Active travel and open space networks and open spaces are designed to be inclusive to those with different levels of accessibility, and Urban&Civic regularly undertakes residents' surveys to understand issues that emerge.

Children's play is extensively and inventively provided throughout the development, with a major neighbourhood park that includes a wide range of equipment for different ages, through to informal play incorporated within open space networks and streets by simple interventions like logs to climb on. Urban&Civic is funding a 3-year research project to understand how to integrate and encourage children's play even more successfully in the future.

The site has newly-opened allotments which have been oversubscribed, and along with the neighbouring community garden, these offer another activity option for the community.

Below left: Picnic benches provided next to open spaces

Below right top: Community garden space next to allotments

Below right bottom: Natural and informal play equipment provided within open space





Principle 2: Walkable communities

Local centres, schools, sports facilities and community facilities are designed and delivered in key locations at the heart of the masterplan, and are typically delivered prior to homes. This ensures the ingredients of a walkable place are there when new residents arrive, encouraging active travel habits from day one. Houlton is designed so that children can be educated at all age levels within one mile of all homes on site. Coupled with the early delivery of primary schools and a secondary school which are integrated with the active travel network, this also encourages early and consistent adoption of active travel habits.

As part of the travel planning package for the development, new residents get a free bus pass with each new household, and a travel pack with information about active travel networks and local public transport options. A monitor and manage approach to parking provision has ensured that car parking at the Dollman Farm centre (see Principle 4 text, below) is significantly lower than local authority requirements, due to the success of active travel options.



Principle 3: Connected walking and cycling routes

The entire development is linked by a comprehensive network of active travel routes. These are designed to be appropriate to the street or space they are within, and their function within the network. They vary from dedicated cycleways and segregated footways along main streets, to shared surface spaces within quiet residential streets. Wider connections are considered and active travel connections to nearby employment areas are coming forward soon.

'Green' pedestrian links form an alternative network away from streets, overlooked by homes. Many of these are 'trim trails', offering informal play and fitness equipment along the route. School routes offer 'play along the way' opportunities.

The principle of filtered permeability is employed for all neighbourhoods and development parcels. Continuous networks are provided for active travel, but not for vehicles, which are directed towards main roads, where active travel facilities have the space to be segregated.



Principle 4: Mixing uses and co-locating facilities

Careful thought has been given to the co-location of land uses and facilities, which are mixed throughout the residential parcels and connected to the active travel network. An important early project has been the conversion of the former Dollman Farm into a centre combining a café/restaurant, community hall, co-working space, nursery and local shop, next to sports pitches, allotments and a community garden.

The secondary school is located in the former buildings of the Rugby Radio Station, and has been retrofitted and reimagined in an award-winning development. It will form a key part of the district centre in later phases, envisaged as the mixed-use heart of the new community.

Urban&Civic have delivered the non-residential land uses and facilities, investing in their quality as important placemaking components of the new community.



Above: Houlton School in the District Centre is envisaged as the mixed-use heart of the new community and walkable from all new homes



Principle 5: Network of multifunctional open space

Houlton is brought together by its comprehensive open space network.

This continuous network contains civic parks, play areas, nature reserves, sports pitches, allotments, community gardens, surface water management and wetland habitat. It also hosts a complete active travel network that links with the street network to allow a choice of routes throughout the site. These networks create leisure as well as utility networks, and host nature trails and wayfinding with information about nature and heritage en route to encourage their use.



Principle 6: High quality streets and spaces

There is a mix of street types that have been considered as part of the masterplanning process to deliver pedestrian and cycling movement first, with vehicles segregated on most main streets. Cyclists only join vehicle carriageways in quiet residential streets. Some streets that link open spaces are only designated for active uses, with vehicle access kept away or limited to private drives and separated by fences.

Street trees are provided throughout the design of the street, and side road crossings are designed to make it clear (through materials and raised tables) to drivers that pedestrians and cyclists have priority. Civic spaces, such as those at Dollman Farm and outside schools, are protected from traffic and prioritise pedestrians.

As well as formal streets and civic spaces, a major natural space has been set aside on Normandy Hill for walks and outdoor recreation. It is centrally located and within a close distance of homes on the site, and offers views across the surrounding countryside.



Top: Wayfinding through open spaces helps to encourage use of the active travel network

Bottom: Priority for pedestrians and cyclists at side road crossing shown through use of materials



Principle 7: Providing activity infrastructure

Active travel is supported by provision of cycle parking at key destinations and facilities throughout the site. There is seating within the open space networks at appropriate locations, and this is considered as part of the landscape plan. Outdoor gyms and play equipment are provided along trim trails and within open spaces, particularly on potential routes to school. Wayfinding and information boards are located along the active travel networks and within natural open spaces to encourage their use as a leisure activity. A financial contribution was also provided to improve the existing canal towpath which runs through the site, improving its role as part of the active travel network.

Larger infrastructure investments include a future new pedestrian bridge to the neighbouring Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT), a major employer, and dedicated cycleways to surrounding areas and neighbouring Rugby.



Principle 8: Active buildings, inside and out

A community use agreement with the secondary school enables local residents and local sports clubs to benefit from the school's sports hall by safeguarding bookable slots for them to utilise. This is supported by an additional entrance to the school so the public can access the facilities without needing to enter the school itself. An additional agreement with a new on-site commercial gym enables the primary school to access swimming pool facilities.



Principle 9: Maintaining high quality flexible spaces

Open spaces are maintained by a management company, who charge all residents an annual fee. The quality of outdoor spaces, their upkeep and their contribution to quality of life is a key part of the commercial strategy of the development to sell homes.

As Urban&Civic maintains a long-term interest in the site, a continuous programme of monitoring how people use spaces is undertaken. This information can result in changes to the masterplan and ongoing development of the site.



Principle 10: Activating spaces

Early conversion of part of Dollman Farm into the Tuning Fork restaurant created a walkable destination to focus the early community around. Its success caused a rethink of the masterplan to site a local centre there.

During the early stages of establishing the community, the developer has supported community groups looking to use sports, community and school facilities, and looks to identify community 'champions' who can take forward the governance of the site into the future.



Top: Trim trails and play equipment is provided in open spaces and potential routes to schools

Bottom: The Tuning Fork restaurant became a walkable destination for the early community

