

Bristol Housing Festival
Lessons Learnt Series: 1
September 2020



LaunchPad

Innovation in Practice



LESSONS LEARNT REPORTING

The Bristol One City Approach aims to make Bristol a fair, healthy and sustainable city by leveraging public, private, voluntary and third sector collaboration around a shared vision for 2050.

Faced with universal environmental, economic and social challenges, this joined-up approach calls for collaborative solutions that address specific needs and contribute to making Bristol a city of hope and aspiration.

The One City Plan sets out Bristol's aspiration to become a city where:

Everybody has access to affordable housing in a safe, thriving community.

Bristol Housing Festival partners with the One City office to champion, enable and share lessons learnt from collaborative action in housing.

The development of the Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) sector in housing has created a window of opportunity for system-wide, structural change in the delivery and lived experience of new housing, but we're not just interested in new ways to build houses, we're interested in new ways of thinking about the role of housing in creating great places that support communities.

Bristol Housing Festival is bringing healthy and resilient communities to the forefront of the conversation on housing and is a platform for action-learning, sharing what works and what doesn't, and identifying opportunities for improvement.

We believe that sharing lessons learnt is key to providing valuable insight for future developers and collaborators and maximising the rate at which best practice is advanced, affecting positive change for society.

In this series, we interview project teams delivering MMC housing in the South West to hear their stories, highlight outcomes and produce evidence-based lessons learnt reports, which can be shared widely to support positive growth in the MMC sector.

EDITOR'S SUMMARY

LaunchPad is an innovative mixed community of students, key workers and young people who have experienced homelessness or care in a modular development of 31 studio apartments with shared communal facilities in Fishponds, Bristol. It came about by a unique partnership between housing association United Communities, charity 1625 Independent People (1625ip), the University of Bristol Student Union, Alec French Architects, Bristol City Council, and the University of Bristol who share a vision for affordable, quality and energy-efficient accommodation for young people in the city.

It has been a privilege to explore the details of this transformational, community focused MMC housing development with the people involved. The project went from concept to completion in under two and half years, beginning with an inspirational and formative trip to a similar project in Amsterdam in June 2017, and culminating in the first residents moving in in October 2019. LaunchPad has since become a multi award-winning scheme.

As we unpacked the story, it became clear that this innovative development was made possible not only by the technical potential of MMC (the offsite construction and fit-out of 31 studio apartments in eight weeks), but by the collective vision and commitment of the project team. Enjoy some of their comments and tweets in the margins throughout this document.

Whether you're interested in the technical details of the build and fit out, or the process of selecting residents and setting up the community, we trust you'll find something to learn from this project's story. For us, it has become evident that this project was driven by the desire to achieve positive outcomes for future young residents, and this people-centred approach was critical in channelling the effort, investment and political support needed to make LaunchPad a reality.

We would like to thank everyone involved for their hard work and willingness to share their lessons learnt and experience.

Dr Ellen Grist,

Research and Evaluation Lead

Bristol Housing Festival



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1.0 PROJECT OVERVIEW & INITIATION

HOW THE PROJECT BEGAN

For housing association [United Communities](#) and charity [1625 Independent People](#), the LaunchPad housing model was inspired by their June 2017 visit enabled by a [Churchill Foundation grant](#), to [Startblok, Riekerhaven](#) in Amsterdam. Startblok is a self-managed, modular housing development housing 500 students and young refugees, and the concept planted a seed for piloting a mixed community development in Bristol.

At the same time, the [University of Bristol Student Union](#), who had a six-year history of ethical student lettings in the city, were exploring the possibility of starting a student-led housing cooperative. The idea was championed by a Student Officer who was aware of the challenges for students renting in the private sector and had been inspired by his stay in a 120-room student housing coop in Edinburgh. [The Edinburgh Housing Co-operative](#) was collectively bought in 2014 and continues to be owned and managed by students, for students in the city.

The Student Union had existing relationships with a number of Housing Associations in the city, but it was the University of Bristol's Finance Director who knew the Chief Executive of United Communities and linked these two separate conversations. At the time there was a real political will, both within the university and the city, to explore how student accommodation could be re-imagined to improve the relationship between the student body and the wider community. This ongoing dialogue and these two project ideas created an opportunity for partnership.

The project gained momentum and Bristol City Council (BCC) were supportive of the

Link to:

- [Churchill Fellowships](#)
- [Startblok Riekerhaven in Amsterdam](#)
- [Edinburgh housing coop](#)

"I was immensely proud to be part of it because it was innovative, but it was hard work. We were on a crazy programme and we were learning as we went along."

Alec French Architects



[Startblok, Riekerhaven](#)

“LaunchPad is a mixed community housing scheme set up for University of Bristol students, young people who have been at risk of homelessness, and key workers. The ambition is to bring young people together to build communities and futures.”

***University of Bristol,
Accommodation Office***

“United Communities wanted to demonstrate you could do things quickly and cost effectively using modular construction. We wanted to demonstrate that students could have a positive impact on their local community and could live in a mutually cooperative way.”

UoB SU

proposal and helped identify a number of potential sites around Bristol. Architectural practice [Alec French Architects](#) offered to undertake a feasibility study across all the sites and the under-utilised car park at Alexandra Road was chosen.

Student officers and staff in the University of Bristol Student Union worked directly with 1625 Independent People’s young people to capture the vision of the project. The goal was to include shared communal spaces, such as a shared kitchen and outdoor growing space, that would enable a self-managed and supportive community to develop.

So, the project began.

CHALLENGE: STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

Housing students is a challenge for cities with growing universities. Local councils need to strike a balance between spreading students out across residential areas, potentially displacing family homes and pushing up rental prices, or centralising students in purpose built accommodation blocks, where they risk being isolated from local communities and economies.

Click for a detailed look at the [challenge](#) and [discussion](#).

RESPONSE:

LaunchPad was a pilot project seeking to integrate students and other young people to demonstrate the positive impact of students and universities to the wider city.



2.0 PROJECT TEAM & STAKEHOLDERS

Relationships between individuals and organisations were critical to the success of this project. In this section, we identify and discuss key stakeholders and their role in making LaunchPad happen. We have included extracts from our interviews to demonstrate the contributions of the partners and provide evidence of the collaborative approach that enabled the project.

“Relationships were a key enabler, both those between the partners, and those relationships the partners had with wider connections.”

1625ip

“It was such a fantastic group of people working together. The investment of time, the lack of funding, the question about how it sits on your asset book as a Housing Association...there were so many reasons not to do it. It was just those people that made it happen, we really enjoyed working together.”

1625ip

THE CORE PROJECT TEAM

United Communities A community-based housing association (client)

1625 Independent People A charity supporting young people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness (client)

University of Bristol Students Union University Student Union (client)

Alec French Architects Bristol-based architectural practice (design & project management)

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Arup Structural engineering services

Bevan Brittan Legal advice (pro-bono)

Bristol City Council Leaseholder & some capital funding

Bristol Housing Festival Championing MMC in the region

Hydrock Groundworks engineering services

Integra Buildings Fabrication and installation of the MMC

LandAid Funding of the accommodation for young people who have experienced homelessness or care

Nationwide Building Society Funding of a community development role

Studio Hive Property development advice

University of Bristol Funding of the student accommodation

The stakeholders clearly cared deeply about the young people as end-users and devoted themselves to developing a new, innovative and functional design. The impact of the current housing crisis on young people was therefore a driver for both the outcome and the development process itself.

The common objective which united this partnership spoke both into the city's aims as outlined in the [One City Plan](#):

[By 2050, everybody has access to affordable housing in a safe, thriving community](#)

and to the [United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 11.1](#):

By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services.



This both unified the partnership in seeking a joint solution and shaped the design and learning process.



LaunchPad render courtesy of Alec French Architects

“It’s a shared crisis for young people not having affordable housing. It’s a shared problem and therefore no one organisation should be carrying all of the project risk. Everyone needed to play their part and that’s the point we got to on this project.”

1625ip



@simonunn
22 Oct 2019

@MarvinJRees pays tribute to the amazing @oonagolds for her advice and inspiration, reminding him that housing delivery has to be driven by political will @Bristol_HF



@oonagolds
22 Oct 2019

Thanks @simonunn. Working with @Bristol_HF has given courage to develop #LaunchPad by @U_Communities and unleash all that dormant energy and ideas with some great partners. And it does need political will!

3.0 DESIGN & PLANNING

The design and planning process was both challenging (because of the innovative nature of this development) and highly cooperative. The project team praised the exceptional speed and cooperation of planning officers on this project. In this section, we set out some of the specific challenges and recommendations of the project team based on their experience of designing and getting planning approval for this scheme.

“The project was completely different to the ‘bricks and mortar’ approach that we so commonly see with our major applications. This led to consideration of a whole different number of planning considerations.”

BCC Planning

“Individuals gave endless time before we even knew it would be possible...because they cared about young homeless people.”

1625ip

For a short tour of the units with Integra, [click here.](#)

DESIGN

The LaunchPad development consists of 31 studio apartments with a shared communal living space and laundrette. The original architectural intention was to utilise shipping containers for the apartments, much like Startblok Riekerhaven in Amsterdam, giving this structure a striking, contemporary aesthetic. Initially, the design was worked up using standard-sized shipping containers as modules. However, it became apparent that standard ISO shipping containers, once fully insulated, would not be sufficiently wide and would lack head room.

Searching online, the design team identified a small number of modular contractors who could supply shipping-container apartments, and soon discovered that some of these could build bespoke modules with a shipping container aesthetic, but wider and taller (within transportation parameters). This better suited the needs of the end users and maximised the available footprint of the development.

The design team commissioned Integra Buildings Limited to fabricate and supply bespoke modules.

RECOMMENDATION:

Early engagement with one or more suppliers maximises project value and is key in identifying manufacturing constraints and design flexibility.

The purpose-made modules also produced superior living spaces.

However, a lack of timely Site Investigation (SI) information prevented an options appraisal on the groundworks which made it difficult to cost and plan for this aspect of the project.

RECOMMENDATION:

Appoint a groundworks/civil engineer and procure the SI at an early stage to enable an appraisal of the foundation and draining options and accurately access sub-structure costs.

Similarly, a lack of timely M&E (Mechanical & Electrical) design information made it difficult to establish the required utility capacity.

RECOMMENDATION:

Appoint an M&E engineer at an early stage to assess the utility requirements and liaise with the local authority. An M&E engineer with specific experience of designing installations for modular schemes will save time onsite and allow for better service integration. For example, design of modularised service runs could be pre-installed and plugged into apartment risers.

RECOMMENDATION:

Consider early installation of a prefabricated plant room to enable main services to be brought to site and made live ahead of delivery of the residential dwellings for plug-and-play delivery and commissioning.

Delivery of this development suffered from a lack of clarity and understanding around building regulations compliance, specifically around whose remit this aspect of the design fell within.

RECOMMENDATION:

Ensure building regulations compliance is part of the scope of works of a professional consultant such as the project architect.

"I really love the height. It's one thing that residential developments don't often get right - new-build houses have very low ceilings and you don't get a sense of space. A studio apartment could feel oppressive, but we've created a really nice, spacious living area."

United Communities

"As long as we didn't make them too wide or too high the supplier was happy to make them any size we wanted, which is why we went with a supplier who could help us maximise the number of modules we could get on the site."

Alec French Architect

"Shipping containers are very restrictive - instead we've created a bespoke product. It's much larger, with more light, and meets stringent building regulations, including insulation standards."

Integra Design Technician

“The applicant and the council worked together to retrofit measures such as solar shades to stop overlooking and reducing the height of part of the scheme. We applied a more flexible approach to the policies, but United Communities were able to flex their scheme (which on the face of it was pretty rigid due to the nature of the build) to include things like solar panels and shading to improve the living environment and meet sustainability requirements. Compromise was key!”

BCC Planning

You can check out the public consultation boards for the project [here](#).

[You can read the full planning report here.](#)

PLANNING

Due to programme constraints, no pre-application was submitted for this project, but this additional step is recommended for future similar projects.

RECOMMENDATION:

Submit a pre-app as early as possible, to flush out any potential issues.

The public consultation for the development included, Ward Councillor meetings, a public exhibition event, social media, including engagement with Fishponds Planning Group, wider press and public relations and meetings with local businesses and community groups.

Feedback was largely positive. Key concerns raised included parking, securing affordable housing for young people and tree planting. There were only 13 comments on the application submitted, 11 of which were in objection to the scheme. The following specific concerns were raised:

- Site over development
- Lack of parking and trip generation
- The impact of the change of use (from car park to residential) on the local high street and community uses
- Loss of light/overshadowing of adjacent properties
- Overlooking and loss of privacy of neighbouring residents
- Noise generated by the communal area
- Poorly sited for transport connections and proximity to the city centre
- Suitability for deliveries and waste collection
- Out of keeping with local area

Alec French Architects submitted the scheme for Full Planning Approval on behalf of United Communities (Planning Portal reference 18/06358/F).

The planning report outlined key benefits of the proposed development, noting it would:

- Contribute positively to the meeting of housing needs for both students and young people.
- Be an appropriate reuse of a car park, considered to be surplus to requirements

- Meet immediate, short term needs for affordable housing for vulnerable people with tenancies of one to two years
- Contribute positively to the housing mix in the area

Additionally, the report noted:

“The proposed mix of tenancy types is to be commended as an approach to addressing significant shortages of housing supply for care leavers whilst offering the opportunity for different types of people to mix and to foster a community.”
Ref 18/06358/F

An innovative aspect of this community-focused development and planning application was the provision of communal spaces accommodating shared facilities including a communal room for meals and socialising, a laundry, bike store and an external deck.

The individual studio apartments were 21.5m², smaller than the 37m² which would normally be required for dwellings, but with the communal spaces being integral to this development, it was acceptably classified for sui generis (exceptional) residential use. The communal facilities meant the project was recognised as fundamental to the ambition to create a vibrant, mixed community.

The temporary nature of this development was reflected in two post occupation management conditions:

19. Limited Period Buildings: The building(s) hereby permitted shall be removed and the land restored to its former condition on or before 1 September 2029. Reason: In accordance with the application and because the proposed building(s) would otherwise prove unacceptable in this location.

20. Tenancy limit: The building(s) hereby permitted shall not be occupied by an individual tenant for a period longer than 2 years consecutively from the start date of the individual’s tenancy. Reason: To ensure that the proposed development meets the needs of short-term tenants.

Full Planning Permission was unanimously approved by the Planning Committee on 13th March 2019.

“The planning process is often adversarial, and it is set up like that (developer v planner) but it doesn’t need to be. It’s best when both parties understand the needs of the other and constructively work towards a good solution.”

Alec French Architects

“Normally there would have been a pre app but on this occasion, there simply wasn’t the time. That did mean some issues...had to be resolved later in the process and a couple were conditions of the approval in the end.”

Alec French Architects



@Development_UC
13 Mar 2019

We are delighted that our Launchpad project in #Bristol with @1625ip & @BristolUni received unanimous approval @BristolCouncil Planning Committee this evening.

4.0 PROCUREMENT & DELIVERY

A number of recommendations emerged from the challenges encountered and overcome in the procurement and delivery of this project. In this section, we provide details of the procurement process and make some recommendations.

“There were sixteen or eighteen months of madness, wondering ‘is it happening, is it not happening, have we got the funding, have we not got the funding.’ From January 2019 it went from ‘it’s probably not happening anytime soon,’ to by April, ‘wow we’ve got planning permission, we’re going to build this thing’...and they built it between April and September, which was amazing and not like anything I had ever been involved in before.”

UoB SU

PROCUREMENT

The greatest challenge in securing funding and ultimately procuring this development was the length of the lease on the land. As Alec French Architects recalls;

“The lease on the land from BCC was originally only five years but was extended to ten years. A normal Housing Association Scheme works on a minimum 30-year lease, to attract investment finance. No one is going to lend money on a five-year lease, ten was marginal.”

The length of the lease had significant implications on the project. Firstly, on the prospect of attracting investment finance. Secondly, the requirement for fully relocatable units increased the unit costs. With a ten-year lease on the site the modular studio apartments are self-contained and flexible can be relocated to a future site in an alternative configuration or as individual units.

RECOMMENDATION:

A 30-year lease term on the land would substantially ease access to funding and make the project replicable.

The funding profile for procuring MMC is different to traditional construction and this has to be accounted for in all financial forecasting.

RECOMMENDATION:

PQQ questions to tendering contractors should include questions to establish payment profile to enable the project budget and cashflow to be forecast accurately.

With these fast schemes it may be necessary to pay the suppliers before you get planning in order to maximise the programme benefits.

RECOMMENDATION:

The procurement and contract management process should enable an early commitment to a modular provider to gain the full programme benefits of MMC.

To procure this MMC development a bespoke contract was required to take account of the offsite construction. This included a 30% upfront commitment to reserve a slot on the production line. The United Communities JCT contract had to be amended into a form that was acceptable for offsite manufacture.

Another key challenge in the cost-planning and financing of this scheme was a lack of clarity around the VAT position, which led to budgetary uncertainty and associated programme delays.

RECOMMENDATION:

Take expert advice and establish the VAT position at the outset of the project. The 'supply only' or 'supply and delivery' of prefabricated buildings or components attracts VAT, unlike installation 'in the course of construction' of the buildings, which may be zero-rated.

DELIVERY

It was more economical for the groundworks package to be let separately to the supply of the modular units. These two work packages were tendered separately, but this led to challenges onsite. Inadequate coordination and no independent dimensional checks resulted in errors that weren't identified until the installation. Just In Time (JIT) delivery of modular units on a constrained site leaves little or no scope for error identification and remedial action once modules arrive. (See section 5.0 installation and handover)

RECOMMENDATION:

Where possible, procure the supply and works as one contract with main contractor. Alternatively, appoint a coordination/monitoring role to oversee the integration of different work packages and to include independent dimensional checks prior to delivery of the modular units.

“You have to adjust your financial model, there is so much investment needed up front, both in terms of design fees and the modular suppliers, and this spending is/was at risk before Planning Approval.”

Alec French Architects

[More information on the VAT position of MMC construction](#)



5.0 INSTALLATION & HANDOVER

A number of recommendations emerged from challenges encountered and overcome in the installation and handover of this development. In this section, we discuss some of the challenges and recommendations for installation and handover.

The bespoke modules were fabricated by East-Yorkshire based modular manufacturer [Integra Buildings Ltd.](#) in their factory in Paull, east of Hull. Work on the modules began mid-June 2019. Fabrication and onsite installation of the modules was on a tight programme as the new development needed to be ready for students at the start of the academic year. The modules were all built and fitted out with ensuite bathrooms and kitchenettes in just eight weeks and driven down the motorway and craned onto the site mid-August.

In comparison to the speed of the factory build and stacking of the modules into the final three storey form, the installation of the external walkways on site was complex and time-consuming. Site work and snagging took around seven weeks; right up the beginning of the academic term.

The design team have identified a number of opportunities to design-out onsite work and improve the handover process on similar future modular developments:

“What I liked best is Integra’s enthusiasm for the job - that passion really comes across. We’ve learnt a great deal from this pilot.”

United Communities



@oonagolds
13 Aug 2019

They've arrived and didn't fall off the lorry on way down! 31 new #LaunchPad modular homes will be on site by Friday and 4 weeks 'till the new @1625ip @BristolUni community moves in.

CHALLENGE:

The external corridors and walkways were time consuming to assemble on site.

RECOMMENDATION:

Look for a more modular solution or make the shared corridor integral to the residential modules.

CHALLENGE:

The lack of localised service distribution boards resulted in sub-mains cables being run to each unit.

RECOMMENDATION:

Consider including a localised distribution board in the design of each residential module or modular corridor.

CHALLENGE:

The requirement for chlorination of the new water supply to the site was not pre-agreed.

RECOMMENDATION:

Liaise with the water utility company to identify all the requirements for the new water connection and drainage. Early servicing of the plant room to include water chlorination may reduce the risk of delivering this essential utility later in the programme.

HANDOVER

CHALLENGE:

Transportation and lifting of the units resulted in additional snagging and excessive use of mastic.

RECOMMENDATION:

Detailed design of the fit-out and finishes needs to allow for the movement associated with transportation.

RECOMMENDATION:

The defects procedure, sign-off and retention level need to be agreed at an early stage and the snagging process managed onsite.

CHALLENGE:

The shipping container construction was found to act like Faraday cages, necessitating the introduction of WiFi boosters throughout the development.

RECOMMENDATION:

Be aware of this possible phenomenon and integrate WiFi boosters in the factory, where appropriate.

Take a virtual tour of the completed development.



@oonagolds
4 Jul 2019

We made it to Hull to see #LaunchPad coming off the production line, and they're great. They'll be heading down the m'way to Bristol in 4 weeks.



@U_Communities
13 Aug 2019

A very exciting week here! Our #Launchpad has made its way down the motorway and is being lifted onto site as we speak. More #modularhousing for Bristol - Thanks to all groups who have helped make this happen



Independent People @1625ip
20 Aug 2019

Ever seen a #modularhousing build come together? It's so interesting. Here's our #LaunchPad 'landing' on site... it's getting real! Continued thanks to @AlecFrenchArchs & @IntegraBuild - we're lucky to have you on board! @U_Communities @Bristol_SU @Bristol_HF



@U_Communities
7 Oct 2019

We have lift off! Our pioneering project welcomes its first residents. 31 young people have made #LaunchPad their home. Bringing people together to increase diversity in our communities and build wellbeing, for the best start in life.

6.0 HOUSING OPTIONS & NOMINATIONS

The speed of delivery of the modular construction necessitated a swift advertising and tenant selection process, which was complicated by the involvement of three recruiting organisations (United Communities, University of Bristol SU and 1625ip). Agreeing a shared set of values across the three organisations was fundamental to the housing options and nominations process and ultimately finding people who contribute to the formation of the community. This section discusses the recruitment of residents.

“You don’t necessarily need everyone to be actively involved, but you want everyone really knowing from the beginning what the project is aiming to do in terms of its sense of community and bringing people together to self-manage and be self-supporting as a community. Everyone needs to have bought into the ethos.”

1625ip

“We wanted to recruit students that wanted to do that community-living piece.”

UoB SU

OPTIONS AND NOMINATIONS

This development has 31 studio-apartments with approximately 50% students, 25% care leavers or young people who have experienced homelessness and 25% young key workers. It was originally the hope that young key workers would help create a healthy balance in the community, advertising to them proved difficult and the criteria was later extended to ‘young workers’ (aged 18 – 30).

[LandAid](#) grant of £60,000 enabled five studios to be made available to young people who have experienced homelessness or care. Charity 1625ip identified individuals who they thought were ready to ‘break-out’ from supported housing and ‘*ready for work and independent living, but unable to afford private-rented accommodation in the local area*’ (Land Aid Press release).



The student rooms were advertised through Bristol [Students Union Lettings Agency](#). The University of Bristol extended access to its facilities (libraries, IT network, gyms etc) to all the residents of the development. This provision significantly reduced inequalities, creating a common experience to unite this new community. This action was exemplary in meeting two UNSDG's targets, specifically [9.c](#) and [10.3](#).

9.c Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet by 2020.

10.3 Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.



All the organisations responsible for recruiting young people interviewed based on a shared set of values, but the process proved challenging due to the short timescale, the size of the group and the requirement that they all bought into the ethos.

"We interviewed everyone based on a set of values that the partnership agreed. We agreed that we'd recruit across the sectors, based on these shared values for the scheme. This will be easier the second time around. It was always going to be more difficult in year one, when you're recruiting everyone at once." 1625ip

"Not knowing that we were going live with it until June in the end, meant that we didn't have the run-in that we'd have liked to recruit the student group." UoB SU

RECOMMENDATION:

One organisation should manage this process end to end in future.

"At LandAid, we want to harness the energy, enthusiasm, and innovation of the construction industry to transform the lives of vulnerable, young people."

Paul Morrish, Chief Executive of LandAid

"We looked to select students who already demonstrated a community instinct, maybe had done some volunteering before, and wanted to live in the accommodation all year round as much as possible."

UoB SU

"We value co-living, community, equal opportunities, home and a sense of fun."

(Student lettings, 1625ip, United Communities)

7.0 RESIDENT EXPERIENCE & EVALUATION

This project had the resident experience of the young adults at its heart. The formation of a healthy, happy, resilient and self-managing community was critical to the success of the project for individual residents, the LaunchPad community and the wider city.

“There’s a chess evening and a pool evening, and once week everyone eats together and all those things are spontaneously happening. The main driver was the resilience of the community and that seems to be happening in spades.”

Alec French Architects

“I would have liked to have done an academic evaluation on this project and studied the real impacts on young people’s lives (their life chances, their outlook, their desire to be better citizen’s), but you can only really know that two or three years down the line.”

UoB SU

The design team did all they could in terms of place-making, the project partners had recruited individuals they hoped would buy into the vision for the project, Bristol University had offered all the residents access to its facilities, Nationwide Building Society had funded a community support worker, but now it was over to the new cohort of tenants to make their brand new homes work for themselves and for the wider group. This section discusses the resident experience.

RESIDENT EXPERIENCE

One way in which United Communities looked to make the new tenants feel at home and equal in the new development was to furnish all the studios. In addition to a kitchenette and ensuite, each studio apartment was furnished with a double bed, bookcase, desk, chair, wardrobe, sofa, chest of drawers, mirror, bedside table and wall-mounted shelving.

Additionally, there was a modest pot of money ring-fenced for furniture in the communal area, which could be chosen by the residents. They chose to purchase some sofas, chairs and tables as well as a TV and fridge.



The LaunchPad development was unique in offering a balance of personal and communal space, which was particularly important for the young people who had experienced homelessness or care.

"If you've been in foster care or been homeless, in these shared living environments you never have your own space. The risk is you then get all the space you've ever wanted in your own flat...The idea of LaunchPad is that you get your own space on those days you don't want to engage with people, but when you're feeling up to it and you feel that you want to mix you've got the chance of communal space as well. That combination... is a really good option." 1625ip

POST OCCUPANCY EVALUATION

A full Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) has yet to be conducted, but the design team had some reflections on how the scheme might be improved.

In the communal spaces, the cellular nature of modular construction didn't lend itself to creating smaller bits of social break out space, which would be beneficial. The exposed staircases collected leaves and water and became slippery. The location of the site was recognised as inconvenient for undergraduate students.

The experience of the first cohort of residents seems to have been a great success, although a full longitudinal evaluation is needed to assess the long-term impact of the LaunchPad community on the outlook and lives of its residents.

"All the things we worried about...the location, was it a healthy location, the ability of the groups to get on with each other, the potential for people with additional challenges to bring too much of that into the community. All of that hasn't materialised. We've typically had positive stories, with two-thirds of the young people engaging in some form of active community role." UoB SU

RECOMMENDATION:

Exposed walkways and external staircases need to be explicitly designed to shed water and be kept clear of leaves. Provide weather protection, suitable falls and non-slip external finishes and consider maintenance regime.

"Everything just looked wonderful. My reaction should have been recorded, because I was just shocked...that I had my own space and just the small things...that I had my own shower, my own sofa, a bed and a mattress. I was just grateful for the small things. The space was just perfect for me and it marked a new beginning for myself."

***LaunchPad resident.
([watch the full testimonial](#)).***

"The location is just about okay. It's a good bus ride from the University. It suits doctoral students who commute in for the whole day, but not so much students who want to pop in and out for lectures at the beginning and end of the day."

UoB SU

8.0 REPLICABILITY & AWARDS

The LaunchPad project was formally opened by Mayor Rees on 25th October 2019 as part of the Bristol Housing Festival’s annual expo. Since opening, it has been shortlisted for and won a number of industry awards and continues to attract interest. This section provides details of these and contact information for those interested in learning more.

“The University would be really keen to replicate this and is getting calls from other universities interested in the LaunchPad model.”

UoB SU

REPLICABILITY

The team have identified a number of high-level prerequisites for replication:

- Strategic backing
- Relationships in place
- Creating the environment in which something can happen

These elements were essential to the success of the LaunchPad development.



@U_Communities
25 Oct 2019

Exciting to be welcoming guests and celebrating the official opening of #LaunchPad. Wouldn't have happened without the huge amount of goodwill from lots of different people.

Thank you all. You know who you are



@RICSUKPress
15 May 20

Residential | Providing affordable homes for key workers, care leavers and students, Bristol’s LaunchPad is our Residential winner

Congrats to @AlecFrenchArchs, @_StudioHIVE, @U_Communities & @IntegraBuild

AWARDS

In May 2020, LaunchPad won the RICS 'Social Impact South West' for residential development. It also won 'Project of the Year' and has therefore been shortlisted for the national awards.



The scheme was shortlisted for the Small Residential Development of the Year (less than 100 units) at the Insider South West Residential Property Awards 2020. It also won OffSite Award



“I really enjoyed it. I’d been involved in student accommodation before, but this was very different. There were some very dynamic people which made it a lot of fun. I think we’re all pretty proud of it and would like to have a go at doing something else similar in the future.”

CONTACT INFORMATION

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hello@bristolhousingfestival.org.uk

PROJECT PARTNERS

UoB SU



AlecFrenchArchitects



ARUP

Bevan Brittan



Hydrock

LandAid
 THE PROPERTY INDUSTRY CHARITY





The Bristol Housing Festival supports the Sustainable Development Goals