



Birkbeck Lodge Haringey

Conversion of a vacant building to deliver much needed emergency accommodation in Haringey.

Following a review of its current provision, Homes for Haringey made the decision to increase its portfolio of emergency accommodation for vulnerable families and individuals.

With nightly paid emergency accommodation, such as B&Bs tending to be the most expensive, at an average cost of £44 per night against an average cost of £35 for a longer-term lease, Haringey's Housing Strategy for 2017 – 2022 set out clear priorities to 'provide suitable and affordable emergency or temporary accommodation when necessary, while overall reducing the number of households in temporary accommodation and the cost of it to the local taxpayer'.

The former site of the Adult Day Care Centre and the Kurdish Community Centre on Birkbeck Road in Hornsey was identified for development; having been vacant since April 2007. EQUANS was awarded the contract in 2018, as part of our long-term Partnership Agreement with Haringey and we took site possession in January 2019.

The creation of 22 new ensuite, double bedrooms at Birkbeck Lodge generates long-term cost savings for Haringey by significantly reducing the need to procure expensive and dispersed short-term housing to accommodate households while their permanent housing applications are being assessed,

The Challenges and Solutions

Site Security

As part of the planning application process, all local residents, including those living in the three floors of the block directly above Birkbeck Lodge, were consulted about the proposed change of use. During this consultation, it was identified that the residents' main concern was that they did not want the ground floor to remain vacant as it left it vulnerable to continued use by squatters.

Prior to EQUANS taking possession of the site, squatters were evicted, all entrances were sealed, and Haringey Council commissioned the services of Guardian 24 to provide 24 hour security. Once EQUANS took site possession, we assumed responsibility for funding Guardian 24 to maintain security of the building during the works. Haringey Council and EQUANS worked in partnership to respond to residents' concerns on an individual basis; with EQUANS also producing a regular local resident newsletter to keep them informed of works throughout the programme.



Asbestos

A slight delay was incurred due to the presence of asbestos in some of the internal doors.

Although asbestos surveys had been carried out prior to works starting, the doors were surveyed with external scratch tests and did not highlight any asbestos. However, during demolition, EQUANS Site Manager, Scott McNeil, identified the possible existence of asbestos inside some of the door panels. He immediately put any works relating to these doors on hold and clearly marked them so that all operatives would be aware of the potential risk. EQUANS then commissioned additional tests to be carried out to determine what type of asbestos was present and what removal measures would be necessary to ensure safety. Results showed that the doors were asbestos board lined with high risk fibre release asbestos, requiring notification to the HSE and specialist removal with a full enclosure, three stage air locks and a four stage air test. This necessary process is likely to take a minimum of two full days, resulting in a delay.

Responsible Business

A key element of the partnership between EQUANS and Homes for Haringey is a commitment to delivering social value activities which generate significant benefits for both local residents and the wider community.

As part of EQUANS Responsible Business commitment, in 2019 alone, our Community Impact team delivered more than £1,500,000 worth of social value through more than £65,000 of in-kind funding and donations and 480 volunteering hours for Haringey.

At Birkbeck Lodge, the garden to the rear of the block had become very overgrown prior to the conversion works and would have been completely unusable for any new families moving into the temporary accommodation.

Just as works were completing on the building, the ENGIE team organised an event to completely renovate the space. Our Community Impact Manager was joined by ten volunteers who came from roles across EQUANS wider business, from the Project Directors to Design Engineers; all making use of EQUANS volunteer day scheme to take part in the garden makeover.

The project took a full week to complete, with five volunteers per day, and works included:

- Clearing two skips of rubbish and undergrowth from the garden
- Renovating play equipment
- Installing three raised beds and planting new shrubs
- Fixing three fence panels/gates and refurbishing two benches
- Creating a new terraced seating area

The Outcome

The creation of Birkbeck Lodge increases Haringey's capacity to keep households within the borough during the critical first few weeks of crisis. For families and individuals in need, this will have tangible benefits, such as access to support networks and local provision, including schools, and will help to minimise disruption.

Ten of the 22 rooms are fire compartmented bedrooms with interconnecting doors to accommodate larger families with children and the provision of a warden on site 24 hours a day helps to ensure safety for residents, many of whom are likely to be extremely vulnerable.

Birkbeck Lodge also benefits from two adapted disability compliant rooms and a disabled access bathroom. This bathroom is communal and useful for families with infants and small children; providing a bath, in addition to the personal shower facilities in their rooms.

By providing this type of accommodation within the borough, Haringey Council is able to better focus and manage its support for people presenting to them as homeless whilst initial assessments are carried out, allowing additional support to be given and reducing costs that would otherwise arise from expensive nightly rate accommodation in or out of the borough.

In 2016/17, Haringey's net expenditure on Temporary Accommodation was £7.6m, however, with initiatives to increase the supply of high-quality but more cost-effective, in-borough temporary accommodation such as Birkbeck Lodge, the current trajectory looks set to achieve significant reductions in net expenditure by 2020/21 and beyond.

"EQUANS carried out the conversion of the former Adult Advice Centre and Kurdish Community Centre in Birkbeck Road, N8 into much needed emergency accommodation for Homes for Haringey in Summer 2019.

The conversion now has 22 ensuite bedrooms (including two adapted units) with shared laundry facilities, kitchens, dining rooms and a concierge's office. The building now provides much needed accommodation and additional support for homeless households in Haringey.

Not only has the creation of the lodge increased Haringey's capacity to keep households within the borough, it also allows households to continue to access vital support networks.

The scheme has been welcomed by residents living above the accommodation who are pleased with the facility and the extra security that the lodge has provided.

I would like to thank EQUANS Site Manager, Scott, for his professionalism, commitment and dedication to these works which is evident in the high standard of finish. I think I can speak for all of our team at Homes for Haringey when I say that he was a pleasure to work with, very flexible, friendly and always open to new ideas and suggestions."

Elena Wilmot
Project Manager, Homes for Haringey