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## Keys to housing: Walton Charity's keyworker housing



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Walton Charity is a local charitable foundation based in Elmbridge, Surrey. As a charity, we can trace our roots back over 800 years, pre-dating Magna Carta. As well as the charitable foundation and almshouse, we have allotments, farmland, community buildings and a foodbank, plus affordable housing for those in need.

We want to build an Elmbridge community free from poverty, and we know that one of the biggest obstacles to achieving this is housing that is affordable for people to rent or buy. This is particularly difficult in Elmbridge, one of the country's most expensive boroughs.

Our first almshouse was built in Walton-on-Thames 250 years ago, and an almshouse for older people has remained on that site ever since (we've re-built it three times in that time!). In common with many historic almshouses, the language of our original requirements for our beneficiaries would not be appropriate today –

*“the almspeople shall be poor persons of good character, who have resided in the Parish,....and who from age, ill-health, accident or infirmity, are wholly or in part, unable to maintain themselves by their own exertions”.*

A few years ago, the charity realised that we could and should do more to tackle housing and homelessness in Elmbridge. We set ourselves a modest target to build or acquire five new bedspaces a year, and we would target essential keyworkers. We know from the pandemic, and our own research, the essential role keyworkers play in our local community, and how much we rely on them to make the local and wider economy tick.

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/blogs/Keys-to-housing-Walton-Charitys-keyworker-housing/>

We also found how difficult it was for keyworkers to find secure, safe and affordable housing in this area.

Unlike our original requirements, we haven't been too prescriptive on what we mean by keyworkers, and the new residents are working in health, social care and education – all essential jobs to the local community, and meeting the Charity's aims and objectives. As long as they remain keyworkers, they can remain living there for life.

Despite working in social housing for 30 years, I had never managed almshouses before and didn't appreciate the scale – there are over 1,600 almshouse charities across the country, providing homes for over 36,000 people. Like our original properties, most traditional almshouses are for older people, but increasingly new almshouses are being built for families, keyworkers and some offer extra care. And like many others, it is great that we have been able to adapt and change to ensure almshouses are as relevant today as they were 250 years for us, or 1,000 years ago in the case of the oldest almshouse in the UK.