



Ottery Feoffee Charity is a small almshouse charity based in the town of Ottery St. Mary, Devon. The earliest record of our existence dates back to 1440 - a deed whereby a *John Lawrence* gifted land and housing to be used for the benefit of elderly parishioners, to be held and managed by twelve trustees. Further housing was added in the 16th century by *Robert Hone* and *William Sherman*, although sites have been rebuilt over time; and a donation of land made by *Henry Beaumont* in 1590 was sold in the 1970s to fund the construction of more local housing. The Charity currently manages 4 one-bedroom flats, 12 studios and 6 bungalows as of 2025; these are spread across 3 sites and provide accommodation to both singles and couples.

The Charity was gifted a second-hand portable classroom in the 1970's which was used for community use. However, the building was dated and dilapidated. This, combined with the fall in usage, meant it was no longer viable to maintain, so options were considered for the future of the Centre and the land it stood on. The trustees saw the opportunity to convert the site into brand new accommodation to address our growing list of applicants, which was seen as a far better use of the space.



The old day centre before demolition.

The initial plan was to demolish the day centre and build 6 flats in its place. This was rejected by East Devon District Council who advised a redraft of the plans to reduce the size of the

proposed building. The charity approached the council again in 2024 with a new proposal of 4 flats which was, thankfully, accepted. Our trustees wasted no time researching the next steps. We engaged with Savills and New Space Architecture, both in Exeter, to provide a design for the new build:



Proposed new almshouse accommodation of 4 flats - © Savills.

OFC did consider applying for a Homes England grant, via the Almshouse Consortium, but after much discussion felt that the build could be completed at a lower cost if handled directly. After a competitive tender process to decide on a contractor, the project was assigned to South West Heritage. The estimated cost of the new development was £432,158.00 + VAT, £46,822.00.

We reached out to numerous charities for financial support to make this idea a reality. Thanks to the generosity of the following organisations, we received a significant proportion of the total estimated cost:

- The Almshouse Association - £100,000 interest-free loan over 10 years
- Quaker Housing Trust - £20,000 interest-free loan over 10 years
- Garfield Weston Foundation - £20,000 grant

The remaining funds were taken from our own reserves. Without the support of these charities, we would not have been able to proceed with the building project which represented our most expensive and ambitious undertaking in decades - indeed, the most recent new-builds for Ottery Feoffee Charity were completed in 1974.

Before the new development could start, the old day centre had to be demolished which necessitated an asbestos survey (completed by **Wyle Building Surveying Ltd**). After a small amount of asbestos was identified and safely removed, we could then begin excavating the foundations for the new building. We engaged with South West Water, National Grid, and OpenReach to initiate the connection of the new building to utilities.



There have been many issues along the way, including:

- Selecting the most appropriate contractor through the tender process. One company initially seemed positive but then was not able to provide an outline program of building works, raising questions about what their intended timeline would be and whether they had the capacity to deliver the project at all. Another company which had initially been discounted due to their long lead time was then re-considered due to the change in time-frames which led to South West Heritage being appointed.
- Because our first choice of contractor fell through, we then had to make a quick decision to get the project started to avoid falling too far behind schedule.
- There was a discovery of a small amount of asbestos in the old building; this had to be removed by a specialist team.
- When it came to installing water/sewerage connections, South West Water gave us an estimated lead time of 14 weeks, which caused a significant delay.
- It was necessary to redesign the timber frame of the new structure in order to avoid rerouting all wiring, which would have incurred excessive charges from National Grid (£38k).
- Further delays were experienced, with holidays delaying the signing of party wall contracts.
- An existing almshouse resident raised concerns about the placement of the contractors' welfare unit in front of her own flat which overlooked the site. The welfare unit partially blocked her view of the outside. Although we tried our best to come up with a compromise, there was no way that the welfare unit could be placed anywhere else. We are maintaining ongoing communication and reassurance with our resident throughout the project.

These issues naturally have affected building progress, and as a result, the estimated completion date has been moved from December 2025 to February 2026.

Currently we are at the stage where the foundations and footings are complete, and work has commenced on the timber frame. We are awaiting the installation of roofing, windows and doors, plumbing and heating, electricity, plastering, joinery, painting, flooring... and more!



The foundations of Feoffee Rise with Robert Hone House in the background.

The new block of flats, named “Feoffee Rise” in honour of our charity (partly to raise local awareness!), is in a central location close to shops and amenities. The accommodation will be fitted with modern conveniences and will benefit from a small, landscaped garden, designed by **Clark Landscape Design**. As a new build, we have been able to prioritise residents’ comfort and energy efficiency from the start by incorporating design features such as double glazing and solar panels.

The completion of Feoffee Rise will create an additional four flats to offer to local people in need, enabling them to transition from precarious living situations to achieving independence and stability. We’re very proud of what we are achieving in terms of creating affordable accommodation for our community, and we would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the realisation of this project.