

PRCA PoliMonitor Public Affairs Awards 2024.

CAVENDISH

Planning Campaign of the Year

Client

Women's Pioneer Housing

Project

Brook House

Budget

£34,000

Cavendish are incredibly proud to have supported Women's Pioneer Housing (WPH) securing vital planning permission to build 102 new affordable homes for single women in Acton, West London.

Women make up 69% of all low earners in the UK. The gender pay gap builds up over a lifetime and women are three times more likely than men to retire solely on the basic state pension.

Consequently, there is no region in England where private rented housing is affordable on women's median earnings, whereas men can afford private rented housing in all regions, except London and the southeast.

Domestic abuse and other forms of gender-based violence are the leading cause of homelessness for women. Such abuse significantly increased during the Covid-19 pandemic.

WPH was founded in 1920 by suffragettes to house single women of modest means. Frustratingly, this mission remains as important today as it was over 100 years ago, and they are one of only two housing associations in the UK catering for the needs of women.



The Project

WPH own 1,000 properties in West London, the majority of which are in Kensington and Chelsea.

Most of their homes are converted flats within large Victorian buildings which are listed or in conservation areas, and so changes to suit residents can be difficult to achieve.

Many of their properties do not have lifts and are unsuitable for those with mobility problems so there is a need to expand and improve their stock. As residents age, they also need to deliver more properties that are lifetime homes and are capable of adapting to changing needs.

Brook House in Ealing is one of few opportunities WPH had for significant development as these homes are small, difficult to keep warm and inaccessible to anyone with mobility needs. The proposals were for 102 new homes, all of which would be for affordable rent for single women who otherwise wouldn't be able to afford a home of their own.

Challenges

The development was next to a conservation area with a loud and influential committee. Despite the great story that WPH had about the purpose behind the development, this group were set against it. They lobbied local politicians and used their links to ITV News, The Evening Standard, BBC London, The Sun and MyLondon to feature the development.

In addition, we knew that, as with any redevelopment project, there were vulnerable residents who would find the process difficult, and our detractors could exploit that for their own benefit.

Taken together, there was real risk that the project would become so high profile that this vital project could be at risk of being refused planning permission and these 102 affordable homes for single women would never be built.

Building Advocacy

We quickly identified that the mission of the charity would be our greatest selling point, particularly with the decision-making local politicians of Ealing. We set up meetings with key cabinet and ward members just to introduce them to the organisation. We were accompanied by WPH residents who were able to tell their stories of how they had their lives changed by achieving securing affordable homes or their own.

This early work ensured that decision makers were aware of the real life impact to the vulnerable women unable to access the accommodation. Building advocacy and reducing the planning risk throughout the project.

We also knew that working closely with residents would be crucial to achieving success. It was vital that residents knew what was happening and felt involved in the process. We ran a series of workshops with residents taking them through the design and asking for their input. These sessions were essential for ensuring the final designs were suitable for those who would be living in them. It also got residents excited by the prospect of living in these new, larger, more accessible homes ensuring that they were advocates for the scheme.

All of this work ensured that when local groups did increase pressure on decision makers, the project had received enough positive support to insulate us from it. We were also able to turn the media attention into a positive for the campaign. We engaged with ITV London and it provided WPH with a platform to promote the good work of the charity and showcase what this development would mean to the women who need secure affordable homes. It also meant that the decision makers viewed those who were attempting to stop the development as people whose values they did not share, reducing their impact.

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Cavendish not only mastered the initial brief very quickly but working collaboratively with us went on to develop key messaging to explain the purpose of our scheme effectively to the widest of audiences.

They also helped identify stakeholders whose buy-in to the scheme was felt to be critical to its success, and effected introductions which meant we were able to tell our story directly to people who might be able to move the project on.

**Sue Hockett
Development Director –
Women's Pioneer Housing**





The Outcome

When the proposals came to committee, local Councillors were full of praise for WPH and the scheme and were excited to be able to approve the proposals unanimously.

As a result of Cavendish's work, 102 single women will be given the opportunity to live in a large, warm, safe home that they otherwise wouldn't be able to afford. Their lives will be transformed and the women will have the stable foundations to achieve their full potential.

We are incredibly proud of our work on this vital project and look forward to working with this wonderful organisation again to help them to fulfil their objectives to provide even more homes for single women in the years ahead.

102 affordable homes built

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Their involvement played a really big part in our success thus far and I would go as far as to say that we could not have made the progress we have without them. It certainly helped that we found them to be really nice people to do business with.

Sue Hockett
Development Director -
Women's Pioneer Housing