

Welcome to 56 Morris Lane, otherwise known as the 'DIY House' and home to a group of men who have until recently been living in emergency accommodation following a spell of homelessness. Until a few months ago this house lay empty but a local charity has secured a temporary 'meanwhile' lease and worked with residents to do up the house and make it a rather special place to live. Let us show you around...

EASY CONNECTIONS

Many empty and underused buildings which might become available on a meanwhile licence are right in city-centres. The house is a quick walk, cycle or bus ride to social spaces, shops, and the services which some of the people who live here rely on.

ONGOING DEVELOPMENT

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Three other houses lie empty on Morris Lane, owned by the same college. The residents of 56 take part in regular design and build days, helping to develop new homes for people with similar experiences to their own. Residents enjoy using their newly-learnt skills to help others and a few of them are becoming ambassadors for the project, building skills in public speaking and project development. The project will keep accessing empty spaces as they come and go, ensuring the longevity of the project.

LOW RENT

As our city centres shift and change, buildings come into and out of use. Previously a small hotel, 56 Morris Lane has been empty for 7 years. Its owners, an Oxford University college have no current use for the building and pay an 'Empty Property Tax' on it. By making the house available to DIY House project for a rent of £1 p/year, the college saves by not paying the tax and the charity is able to provide accommodation at a very affordable rate. Without the need for enhanced housing benefit, rent can be decoupled from support costs enabling tenants to re-enter the workforce without having to move out.

COMMUNAL LIVING

Living in a shared house can be great, and it can also be difficult. Dealing with others' habits and mess can be frustrating. Prior to moving in, the residents of 56 Morris Lane took part in a series of workshops where they designed key areas of the house together, talked through potential frustrations, and decided how they would like to live together. As well as helping them live together in the DIY House, it's also good practice for moving into private rented accommodation.

DESIGNING OUT FRUSTRATION

Waiting for the shower when you're late can be frustrating and small, daily frustrations can lead to bigger tensions. The DIY House is designed with this in mind and includes multiple showers and toilets.

NATURAL LIGHT

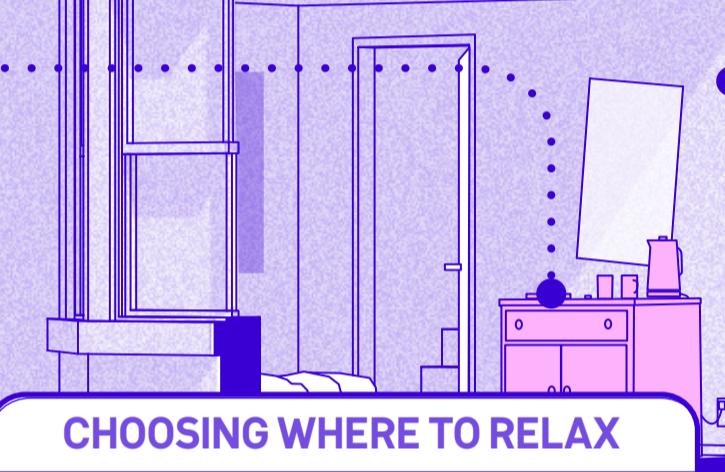
Refurbishment maximises natural light and views of greenery, creating an environment which encourages a sense of calm and conviviality. This is especially important for people living with trauma which is the case for many of the residents of 56 Morris Lane.

FLOATING SUPPORT

56 Morris Lane is a home. Whilst some of the residents do receive support in the house, it is done within the ethos of the home and kept low-key and casual. The support worker's office and therapy room is as homely as the rest of the house, with individuals able to receive general advice over a jigsaw puzzle sat in a cosy armchair.

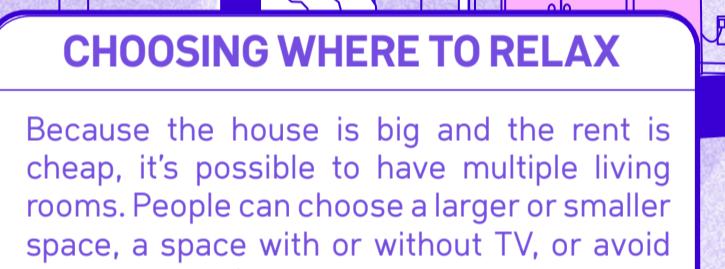
COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT

The house and its residents are connected to networks of community-based support including tenants unions, local community groups, and the Oxford Homeless Movement. Groups run workshops for the residents to help them engage meaningfully in the issues which affect them. By the time they leave, residents have a good understanding of the local private rental sector, and have new networks of mutual support and solidarity.



MAKING IT MINE

Residents have full control over the design of their bedrooms and can use the house tools, donated furniture and materials, and volunteer help to make their space their own. Some choose to put kettles, microwaves, or small fridges in their bedrooms, some don't.



CHOOSING WHERE TO RELAX

Because the house is big and the rent is cheap, it's possible to have multiple living rooms. People can choose a larger or smaller space, a space with or without TV, or avoid someone they're not keen on seeing on a particular night. This helps people adapt to shared living and life in the private rental market without creating pressure.



AN HONEST TIMEFRAME

56 Morris Lane is a wonderful home, for a while. Due to the nature of 'meanwhile use' it is only available for 4 years and residents know this. They can build their plans and expectations around the timescale of the building rather than an arbitrary 'move-on' target set by a professional. Residents report that this makes them feel more in control and creates a less paternalistic relationship with their housing support.

PLENTY OF SPACE

56 Morris Lane is far bigger than any other 'move-on' housing in the city. The additional space is used to make life easier for residents by reducing clutter in their bedrooms. There is a large shared utility space with plenty of drying and storage space. This minimises clutter in bedrooms and communal spaces and avoids frustrating queues to do laundry, and helps maintain a pleasant environment in the house.

WEEKLY MEETINGS

Weekly meetings cover items from the cleaning rota to having guests over, changes to utility providers and what to spend the communal budget on that month. Each tenant pays into the monthly pot which is match-funded by the project budget. As well as managing the house, these meetings build confidence and negotiating skills.

DIY RENOVATION

Many of the residents have experience working in the construction industry or as tradesmen, and have an interest in seeking work in this area. The house is stocked with tools, and together the residents manage a materials budget and are supported by a network of volunteers with skills in renovation.

SHARED MEALS

The kitchen is functional and frustration free. There is ample space for storing food, cooking and washing up. There are two cookers and two sinks so that more than one person can cook at a time. The kitchen cabinets were designed and built by the residents, supported by volunteers. Without the burden of paying rent on the building, the charity is able to pay for residents to have regular shared take-aways and cook Sunday dinner together once a month.

THE DIY HOUSE.

TRAINING A COMMUNITY OF HOUSE DESIGNERS



The temporary nature of 'meanwhile use' is discussed openly and honestly with the residents. The business model, and the time the residents spend in the house is geared up to provide each resident with new skills, relationships, networks, and confidence. Some of the group are becoming powerful voices in advocating for better housing in Oxford.