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See our tour around Appleby Blue - the social housing scheme giving people a fresh lease of life



by **Isabel Ramirez** — 25th May 2024 in [Bermondsey](#), [Featured](#), [News](#)

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3.1k

VIEWS

A new ultra-modern Bermondsey almshouse, which residents say is 'like living in a hotel,' promises to improve the quality of life of over 65s living in social housing.

Appleby Blue, located on Southwark Park Road, opened eight months ago and residents are already settled into a new way of living.

The entire build, which was compared to a Scandinavian spa by [The Guardian](#), is made of oak and designed around a stunning courtyard with water features and a roof garden terrace.

It is home to 63 residents living across a mix of 57, mostly 1-bedroom flats.

The courtyard design and large windows framing the whole property are intentional; to provide community spirit where 'no one ever feels alone.'

A [study](#) done at the City University of London, which analysed up to 100 years' worth of residents' records from various almshouses in England, found that people living in these communities lived longer than is expected for older people living in poverty.

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The central courtyard and large windows foster a sense of community. (credit: Philip Vile)

The concept of almshouses, an affordable way of independent living with the opportunity to access support and be social, is not new. However, this build in Bermondsey run by United St Saviour's charity, is unique to the area.

Sixteen of the residents were moved to Appleby Blue by Southwark Charities from Edward Edwards House in Blackfriars. That was also a 25-flat almshouse but the building was dated, having stood there since the 1970s.

Currently, it is being redeveloped into a 15-storey site with offices, a roof terrace, leisure space, and a 62-bed almshouse, with construction due to start in June.

The 64-year-old artist says it is a model that should be 'rolled out everywhere.'

"It's like living in a hotel," he commented, "When they showed me my room I couldn't believe it was just for me. I thought I'd have to share with someone."

Rohan said this is especially meaningful to him because he knows what it's like to be homeless.

"I'm grateful for whatever I am given. But this is a really beautiful high-spec building. I can be very social but at the same time, I need a lot of space. This place gives me that."

He added: "It's a model that should be rolled out everywhere regardless of your age. If anything goes wrong they get it sorted, unlike certain councils."

Robert McLeary, 69, was one of the first to move in with his wife Sheree and said they are very happy. "Quality of life is excellent.

"It's like you come back to your apartment and it just feels like you're on holiday."

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The £25m project was funded by United St Saviour's, Southwark Council, and [JTRE's](#) development in Blackfriars (as their affordable housing obligation under Section 106). It was designed by Witherford Watson Mann Architects.

There is a whole program of activities that residents can take part in including cooking classes, digital workshops, tai chi and yoga, book clubs, and intergenerational activities.

This involves inviting local schools in so the children can interact with residents.

Additional facilities include a community kitchen, a garden room, a skills and hobby room, a library and a spa.

Gwendolyn Ann McCalla, 82, said it saved her.

She told us: "I didn't feel safe where I was living before. And I was all on my own and couldn't manage the stairs any more."

The 82-year-old, who is overjoyed to now be living right next to a lift, said she has already made friends and loves the mix of cultures.

"That's what life's all about, especially when you're our age and you don't know how long you've got left."

Gwen added: "Everyone is in here for the same reason. They've had to escape something or loneliness or they've got a disability."

Morgan Tume, Centre Manager who grew up just across the road, said: "First we had to build an internal community. But we now want to open up the beautiful space for the community to enjoy as well.

"A lot of the TRA halls have become run down but we know people make such amazing use of them. Everyone deserves a good space to use."

She explained that whilst community spaces are not 'drop-ins' for the public, they have regular times when 'open door' activities take place.

If you wish to host an activity or find out more about Appleby Blue, please email applebyblue@ustsc.org.uk

Where did the name come from?

The name 'Appleby Blue' pays homage to Dorothy Appleby, an early benefactor of United St. Saviour's Charity, and references the historic Blue market area in Bermondsey.

How much does it cost to live at Appleby Blue?

It is structured to be affordable in line with social housing rates.

The base rate is £850 per month for a one-bed apartment before benefits are applied. Many residents are eligible for housing benefits which can help cover the cost.

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How does someone apply to live at Appleby Blue?

To become an almshouse resident at Appleby Blue you must have lived in Southwark for three years before the application, be 65 years of age or over, and be on a limited income with low capital and savings.

You should be able to live independently with support from carers if necessary.

Prospective applicants can apply via the charity website or the Southwark Council website.

As expected, there is a very long waiting list.