



South East England study tour of
Vancouver, Canada
4-11 November 2010

Report



Introduction

The Chartered Institute of Housing South East international group periodically organises international study tours to other countries for its members to learn how housing is organised outside the UK. Recent destinations have included Austria and South Africa.

This tour to Vancouver, Canada was one such visit organised by the international group. Arranged by Ian Beckett, the tour took place from 4-11 November 2010.

The tour offered members the opportunity to:

- challenge their thinking
- identify solutions to what are often very common problems across the world
- continue their professional development
- disseminate learning to others through written reports.

Group profile

The group was made up of both CIH members and non-members and included chief executives, directors, officers and consultants working in various areas of the housing sector or with an interest in housing. The international group had also made provision to part-sponsor two CIH student members to join the tour, who entered a competition to be selected to attend.

Though organised by CIH South East, the tour was open to members and non-members of the CIH from all parts of the UK.

Host

The group was hosted by Shayne Ramsay, Chief Executive of British Columbia Housing, the provincial housing authority with responsibility for Vancouver. Shayne is also the treasurer of the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association and President of the Crown Corporation Employers' Association.

Shayne was the main contact in Canada and, despite his busy schedule, gave his time generously to lead the group to all sites throughout the tour.

Background to Vancouver

Vancouver is located on the bank of the Fraser River in Western Canada. With a very diverse population of about two million people, Vancouver is the third largest metropolitan area in Canada. Vancouver is known historically as a centre for international trade and investment and for its natural beauty. It successfully hosted the 2010 winter Olympic Games. It is also the largest city in the province of British Columbia. The name British Columbia is believed to have been chosen for the province by Queen Victoria in 1858.

Housing in Vancouver

Vancouver holds a unique place in North American architecture: it pioneered the urban mixed-use developments style, with a medium-height, commercial base and narrow, high-rise residential towers which has come to be known in urban planning as *Vancouverism*. It is regarded as one of the most livable cities in the world.

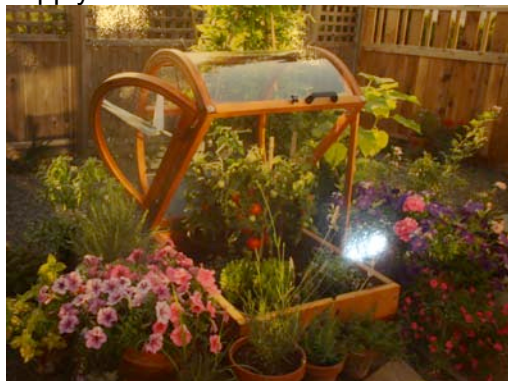
The Housing Centre in Vancouver is the body responsible for the city's housing policy, programs and research, while the provincial government of British Columbia (BC Housing) is the main funding body for social housing in the province. There are about 600 non-profit housing providers in Vancouver with a stock level of about 50,000 units. In Vancouver, 20% of all land in new developments is zoned for affordable housing and developed separately from the private housing, which differs from the British section 106 model, which secures units to be constructed by the developer. The affordable homes are generally funded by the provincial government through BC Housing.

Vancouver also faces significant housing challenges, with a vacancy rate of only 1.2%, which is among the lowest in the whole of Canada and is an indicator of the city's chronic housing supply and affordability issues. Since 2004, only 6% of all new market builds have been for rental housing creating a restricted rental market. In 2001, the government introduced a two and a half year Short Term Incentives for Rental Housing (STIR) program to provide incentives including: waiving development cost levies on rental units, reducing parking requirements, giving developers discretion on units size, increased density and fast tracking building permit processing.

The study group arrived in Vancouver at midday on Thursday 4 November after a ten and a half hour flight. The afternoon was spent settling in at our hotel The Inn at False Creek, unpacking, resting and starting to get our bearings in our immediate downtown neighbourhood. We gathered in the hotel bar at 6pm for a briefing – Garry and Gill Taylor had arrived the day before the rest of the group so were able to provide us with maps and some key information about getting around downtown. Fortunately, downtown Vancouver is very easy to navigate as, like most North American cities, it is designed on a grid system. Exhausted from the journey and the eight-hour time difference, we all had dinner locally and turned in early.

Day 1: Sustainable Building and housing overview

After a leisurely start to the morning on Friday, the group headed south in taxis to the Lighthouse Sustainability Centre, at number 2060 Pine Street, Granville. We were welcomed by the centre's Executive Director, Helen Goodland, who explained the work and purpose of the centre and informed us that our visit coincided with the centre's fifth anniversary. The centre began as a university research project on the green economy, and has since become a 'cluster intermediary' which provides links between the finance and investment, design and construction and building supply industries.



Sun pod which allows apartment dwellers to grow vegetables on their balconies

The centre also acts as a 'living laboratory', where new sustainable technologies are installed within the building and tested for efficiency and usability over a period of time. Helen explained some of the technologies surrounding us in the seminar room, including the super-efficient heat relocation system which is an ideal sustainable solution for retro-fitting in older buildings, and the overhead lighting with a holographic system which bends light in order to make most efficient use of it and focus it on the work station areas. After the introduction from Helen, we had the opportunity to wander around the centre's exhibition areas and view some of the show-cased products, which ranged from sustainable building techniques such as 'rammed earth' to solutions for individual households such as Sun Pod mini greenhouses which fit on small balconies. Many of us were also much impressed when visiting the toilets by the Australian water-recycling toilet and hand basin!



John tries out the water-saving hand basin

For further information about the Light House Sustainable Building Centre, please follow the link below:

<http://www.sustainablebuildingcentre.com/>

After a light lunch, our host for the week Shane Ramsey, CEO of British Columbian Housing, introduced speakers who gave us a valuable

overview of the social housing system in BC.

The first speaker was **Charlie McArthur, CEO of Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation**. Charlie explained that CMHC is a publicly owned national agency established in 1946 with the responsibility of addressing housing shortage in Canada after the Second World War. CMHC has four key aims:

Assisted housing: CMHC is the national social housing funder (similar to the Homes and Communities Agency in the UK), and has a particular focus on aboriginal housing projects.

Research and Information Transfer: CMHC advises the Canadian government on housing policy-making, and sponsors housing research projects.

CMCH International: CMCH also promotes Canadian exports in the construction industry.

Insurance and Securitisation: CMHC is also a major provider of mortgage protection insurance and the only provider of rented property insurance in Canada. The insurance arm of CMHC generates profit which is recycled into the housing funding programme. Not only is this an innovative way for a public body to fund its activities, but the prudence and careful scrutiny of CMCH also prevented Canadian banks from suffering the same problems as US and British banks with bad mortgage debts. In fact, since the economic downturn began, not one Canadian bank has required a bail-out from the state.

Further information about CMHC can be found by following the link below: <http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/>

British Columbia Housing

The next speaker was our host, Shayne Ramsey, who provided an overview of the activities of provincial crown agency BC Housing: developing new homes (and providing funding to the non-profit sector), maintaining the existing social housing stock, and providing rental assistance to low income families living in the private rented sector. BCH is also an approved insured lender, providing development finance for affordable housing projects during the construction period, and is the licensing agency for all construction companies in the province.

City of Vancouver

We also received a briefing on the City of Vancouver's role in housing provision from Brenda Proskan. The City's two key priorities are housing and homelessness, and urban health, although Vancouver also aims to be the greenest city in the world by 2020!

Brenda introduced us to the extreme affordability issues currently being experienced in Vancouver, with median incomes rising 9% in the past 20 years while house prices have risen up to 480% in some parts of the city. This was of particular interest to the group given the extreme affordability problems currently experienced in London and the South East UK. Unlike UK housing trends, over half of the population of Vancouver rent their homes, but there is a chronic under-supply of units to rent, and Vancouver also has high levels of street homelessness due to the high accommodation costs, relatively mild weather, and the closure of several mental health institutions during the 1970s.

British Columbia Non-Profit Housing Association

The final speaker was Karen Stone, Executive Director of the BC Non-profit

Housing Association. The association is an umbrella body representing non-profit affordable housing providers across the province. Interestingly, the non-profit sector in BC differs from that of the UK as it is made up predominantly of small local providers: 80% of BCNPHA members have fewer than 100 units and only 6% have over 250 units. BCNPHA procures services for members at preferable rates, and provides advice, advocacy and training and also encourages best practice although it is not involved in the regulation of its members.

The end of the briefings concluded business for the weekend, and the majority of us returned to the hotel via Granville Island, where activities included browsing the eclectic market stalls and indulging in some tasting at the Granville Island Brewery, followed by catching a tiny ferry boat across False Creek back to the hotel. In the evening, several of the group met in the hotel bar for a drink before going out to explore lively Yale Town, a regenerated former warehouse district which now hosts a plethora of bars and restaurants.



The weekend was free for exploring Vancouver and the surrounding area. Weekend activities included day trips to Victoria (the provincial capital of British Columbia) and Whistler, taking the cable car up stunning Grouse Mountain in North Vancouver (many thanks to Garry for the lift!), braving the heights of the suspension bridge over the Capilano River, exploring

beautiful Stanley Park and, for some members of the group, visiting friends and family in the area.



View over Stanley Park to North Vancouver



Totem in Victoria



Members of the group at the Capilano Suspension Bridge Park



The terrifying heights of Capilano Suspension Bridge

Day 2: Regeneration and Homelessness – East Downtown Vancouver

We reassembled bright and early on Monday morning to travel to east down-town and the Gas Town area. We met outside the Woodward's Building, a mixed-used mixed-tenure regeneration scheme on a former department store site. Our guide for the morning was architect Gregory Henriquez, who provided a brief history of the site before showing us around.



The regenerated Woodward's building seen from Vancouver Lookout

The original Woodward's building was constructed in 1903 to house the Woodward's departmental store, an essential part of the city of Vancouver's retail shopping district around Cordova. The department store became bankrupt in 1993, shortly after its 100th anniversary, leaving the surrounding area in decline. The history of the site is captured in the building design, with a photographic mural in the lobby depicting the 1971 Gas Town riots and capturing the history of conflict around the site.

Gregory explained that the site was considered to be of great importance locally as east down-town remains one of very few affordable areas of Vancouver. After more than one false start, the site was eventually purchased by the City in 2003, and a contract was let to private developer West Bank projects who usually specialise in developing luxury apartments. The project had a budget of \$400million.

In consultation with the community 21 guiding principles for redevelopment were established, including inclusivity

and zero displacement of current residents. The regenerated site reopened in 2009, and now accommodates:

- 536 units private market accommodation
- 125 units of single persons social accommodation
- 75 units family social housing
- Nesters Ford store
- London Drugs Store and TD Canada Trust
- The National Film Board of Canada
- office accommodation for provincial government departments
- a TV station
- a day care centre
- a 8,000-capacity performing arts campus for Simon Fraser University
- a public atrium with a basketball pitch and public art.

Three towers namely; the Abbott Tower, the 'W' Tower and the West Hastings Building have been added to the old Woodward's building. The social housing residents include original local residents from the Downtown East side and fifteen former squatters of the old Woodward's building. The 10th floor of one of the new towers contains a gym, an outdoor kitchen, space for BBQ, internet access points, a communal laundry and a furnished living space with a 52" flat screen TV. The iconic red 'W' shop sign has been retained and has even been replicated in the W-shaped hot tub on the roof terrace!



Woodward's atrium with photographic mural

Gregory led us on a tour of the residences, including affordable family homes, private sale and rental units and the block specifically designed for single homelessness people. The affordable housing units were funded through \$50m in grant from BCH. The group was impressed by the inclusive approach to regeneration which aimed to enable existing residents to stay in the neighbourhood at affordable rents, and the project has been hailed as the most inclusive mixed use building in the history of Canada. We also visited Simon Fraser University's new 'black-box' theatre in the basement.



Affordable homes at the Woodward's development

More details about Woodward's can be accessed via the following link: <http://www.woodwardsdistrict.com/>

In the afternoon we split into three groups to visit different aspects of housing provision in Vancouver.

ATIRA Women's Resource Society

The first tour was led by Janice Abbott, Executive Director of ATIRA Women's Resource Society, a non-profit organisation for the protection of women at risk of violence. Janice explained that as well as providing accommodation, ATIRA also has two profit-making arms, one providing property management services and "The Painter Sisters" which provides training for women accommodated by the charity. In this way, the organisation takes a holistic approach to women's welfare, providing not only shelter but also training and employment. Furthermore, the organisation works alongside the health authority to encourage harder-to-reach pregnant women to access health care facilities, and provides care and support right up until children reach age six.

In 2007, Janice made the decision to hire residents of the hostels run by the management arm to manage the hostels. This can be challenging due to the residents' often complex needs, but it is a principle that ATIRA is determined to make work. After giving us a briefing, Janice took us to visit ATIRA's Bridge Street shelter where we met staff and some of the residents. Janice explained that 50% of women involved with ATIRA experience violence every day of their lives.

We then visited two hostels for single homeless persons which are looked after by ATIRA's property management company, one which had been refurbished and one which had not. The contrast was extreme, and Janice explained that there were currently seven unlettable rooms in the unimproved hostel due to the scale of work required to ceilings and floors. Later in our stay in Vancouver, Shayne gave us the good news that \$6m had been secured from BCH for the refurbishment of the hostel. This part of the visit was particularly eye-

opening, as it included a walk down some of the most drug-affected streets in North America.

Shaldon Hotel, Lux Hotel Single Room Occupancy (SROs) and Harbour Light Shelter

The Lux hotel is a transitional residential housing scheme for homeless men and women some of whom have drugs and alcohol related problems. The hotel comprises of 25 bed studio flats with shared facilities for people with complex housing and health needs with supported living and another 67 units for homeless people who are able to live independently and are accessing community support through various agencies.

Shaldon Hotel on the other hand is a supported housing scheme with 55 rooms for homeless people who also require support to access further support from the community.

Both SROs are owned and operated by Raincity housing and support society. The hotel buildings were bought by BC Housing renovated and then leased out to Raincity housing and support society- a non-profit social housing provider. Both schemes also have facilities for people who have improved and are ready to move-on to a more independent leaving.

Each resident in the facility receives \$150 benefit a month from the government

The group also visited the Harbour Light Addiction and Rehabilitation Centre owned and operated by The Salvation Army in British Columbia in partnership with the greater Vancouver community Health Authority and BC Housing which provides capital grant for the acquisition of the building and running of the facility. The Salvation Army in British Columbia operates four such schemes in the Down Town area of Vancouver.

The group also visited The Haven and The Anchor of Hope emergency overnight shelters both owned by the Salvation Army in British Columbia. This facility also serves as the first point of contact by homeless people and drug and alcohol addicts who are homeless and/or require support to overcome such addiction. It is open in the evening at 4pm and closes in the morning at 8am. Residents are allowed in for 14 days but this can be reviewed upon the recommendation of a case worker. However 25-35 normally move-on to other schemes and services.

There is also a detox unit where residents referred by the Salvation Army and the Vancouver health authority can move-on to detox. The group had the opportunity to meet some former residents who have gone through the system and have successfully moved-on to independent living in other forms of accommodation. The Salvation Army also collaborates with the Vancouver community college to provide accreditation for language, cooking, computing and other life skills courses that are they run on the schemes. They also run a graduate hiring scheme where ex-service users who have successfully completed detox and moved on to independent living are they employed by the Salvation Army.

Laneway Developments

This is the brainchild of Jake Fry of Smallworks Studios and Laneways Housing Inc, who developed a small design and timber frame workshop, which undertake building small homes and studios in the backyard of existing properties in the Vancouver area. Smallworks specialise in the design and building of small homes in the lane ways, ie the roadways that back onto larger Vancouver homes,

predominately occupied by old garages and parking spaces.



A completed Laneway house

Garages have often fallen into disrepair or provide inadequate flexibility and, following changes to legislation, Jake came up with the idea to build small garage loft homes, which could be multipurpose, ie studios, small rental income housing, senior housing, move on and downsize accommodation with the original house providing an income and funding. The prime objective is that they must not remove the parking spaces, hence the provision of a garage or space for a garage within the accommodation.

These buildings are typically around 500 sq feet, which make them very small against Vancouver house types, which can be well in excess of 2,000 sq feet. They provide an alternative low energy, high performing unit for landowners.



A Laneway house under construction, Vancouver suburbs

Smallworks have already built nearly 150 units, which took off when they were encouraged by Simon Fraser University, to provide an exhibition case, called West House, the results of a partnership between Government, Academia and Industry. West House went on display during the Olympic Games at the Vancouver life city site and eventually moved to its current location on the outskirts of the city.

The tour group was able to look around West House prior to occupation in early 2011. The new occupants would be asked to provide feedback and monitoring of the various systems in the house that incorporate much of the latest technologies in heating, insulation control systems and PV energy panels on the roof. The group also visited three other Laneway properties, from a small senior's home of around 500m to a much larger downscaling home, where the original homeowners live in the laneway property at the rear. They now let the main house that fronts the main street, which provides an investment income and nil mortgage on their downscaled Laneway home.



Interior of a Laneway house

This is a very sensible use of land resources in a compact urban environment and enables the retention of the established community, those living with family members and assisting other family members to get on the property ladder.

Some people in the group were keen to maintain linkages with Simon Fraser

University regarding the data collection, which may prove useful in research of similar works being pioneered in the UK. For more information please visit the links below.

www.sfu.ca

www.smallworks.ca

Day 3: Olympic Legacy



On Tuesday, we headed South in pouring rain in a mini-bus to the town of Surrey, where modular housing which had been used as athletes' accommodation in Whistler for the winter Olympics is being reformed to be used as accommodation for single homeless people. This is one of six sister projects producing a total of 320 units, and in this case the City of Vancouver sold the land for the project to BC Housing for \$1 and the new homes will be managed by a non-profit housing association. BC Housing provided around 80% of the development funding with the remainder coming from the Federal Government of Canada.

The site manager took us on a tour of the site to view the units under construction, and explained the challenges of moving a reconstructing the modules particularly in Vancouver's wet weather. BC Housing had been involved in the design of the modules from the outset to ensure that they would be fit for their secondary

use as social housing – this included ensuring that sprinkler valves and kitchen power points etc were included in the design from the outset although they would not be required for the modules' initial use at the Olympics.

Each module measures 60ft x 40ft, weighs up to 45,000pds and has three pick-up points. Twenty-six modular units are being put together at the site to provide fifty units of accommodation over three storeys. The only use of bricks and mortar has been for stair wells and elevator shafts which have been constructed on site.



Modular housing under construction in Surrey

The group discussed the merits of this construction technique and its limitations: the main limitations were that it is not as flexible as it might appear as many aspects need to be designed in from the outset, and the use of thousands of nails to secure the modules makes it difficult to move them once constructed. The modules use more wood than traditional wood frame construction; this is not a problem in Canada where wood supplies are plentiful, but might make the method uneconomical in other countries. The site manager explained that the main advantage of the technique is the efficiency achieved onsite as the construction period is very short. This is particularly useful in the North of Canada where daylight hours are very short during winter months.

Leaving Surrey, we headed back to the False Creek area of downtown Vancouver where we dried out and were welcomed with warming coffee by the sales staff at the Olympic Village sales centre. We were joined by Brenda Prosen, Denis Carr and Bill Stuart from the City of Vancouver, who explained that the City had committed to the affordable housing element in 2003 so had been able to ensure that suitable infrastructure and facilities were installed.

The impact of the global economic crisis led to financial difficulties for the project and a lack of purchasers for the private housing units in the scheme, and the City of Vancouver has now become the lender for the developer. It has not been easy to find a landlord for the affordable homes either – Denis considered that this had been mainly because most of the non-profit organisations approached had been uncertain about their ability to efficiently manage the new environmental technologies within the buildings, as there are so many unknown quantities. Just days before our visit, a deal had been confirmed between the City and BC Housing Co-Operative; this will take the form of a lease of the buildings only in the first instance.



Model of Olympic village

The development is on the site of a defunct ship building operation, and comprises 1108 units of which 252 are affordable homes, including 67 units in a zero carbon building which is the

most sustainable development in Canada. Heating for the building is taken from a neighbourhood plant which captures the heat from the local sewage system, and the roof space is covered with a large scale solar thermal system. Individual plots on the roof terrace will be allocated to households who wish to grow vegetables.



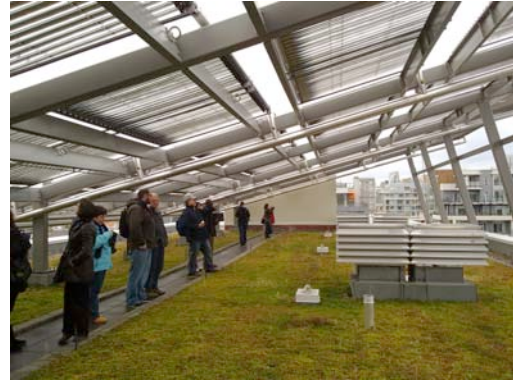
Roof terraces on an affordable housing block

As well as residential units, the Olympic village development also includes spaces for local shops, and a community centre containing a sports centre, rooms for hire and an 87-space day care centre. The Salt Building, an existing building which formed part of the shipyard, has been converted into space for offices and restaurants.

A virtual tour of the Olympic village is available via on the City of Vancouver's website (link below): <http://vancouver.ca/olympicvillage/>

We then toured the affordable housing buildings, including the net-zero building where we went up on the roof to see the huge the solar-thermal installations that boost the hot water system maintained for the most part

through district heating. We also visited one of the private apartments, a huge open plan penthouse with stunning views over the creek, ours for a cool \$4.5 million!



The group inspects solar-thermal installations on the net-zero affordable housing building

The rest of the afternoon was spent drying out, visiting the city, shopping or relaxing at the hotel. Many of us gathered in the hotel restaurant for dinner and then turned in early to be ready for our last day in Vancouver.



Making ourselves at home in the luxurious penthouse

Day 4: Older Persons Housing

At 8.30am a coach picked us up to take us to take us to the suburbs, where we visited an older persons residential care home called Fairhaven, which is owned and managed by non-profit society United Churches Charities although it is independent of the Church and receives no operational funding from the Church.

We were met by Carol Mothersill who gave us a brief overview of the residence before leading us on a tour. The scheme has 100 bed spaces of multilevel care, approximately 80% of which are occupied by residents with some form of dementia. The special care unit has 25 beds, and the whole facility has very wide corridors each of which is named as an avenue to make it easier for residents to find their way round. The centre has a contract with the health authority which provides nominations, and offers 24-hour nursing, at \$28.85-\$70.30 per resident per day depending on means testing. Each resident receives an average of 2.9 nursing care hours a day.

The centre has several restaurant areas, a beauty salon and a gift shop, communal and private sitting areas and a Chapel for regular and memorial services, and offers daytime activities like baking and arts and crafts. We were impressed by the sensitive yet innovative approaches taken at Fairhaven to protect residents, such as painting the doors in the special care unit with murals to disguise them in order to protect vulnerable residents.



Painted doors at Fairhaven

Fairhaven also offers respite care for people who are usually cared for at home – it is one of few respite centres that is able to offer immediate access in emergency cases – and was the first facility of its kind in Canada. The centre provides 24-hour care for seniors with physical frailties and mental health needs and has twelve beds of which two are for palliative care. Users can stay for up to thirty nights a year and day users may use the facility for bathing three times a week. Overnight stay is charged at \$29.40 per night and an additional \$10 a week for laundry. The facility has a 95% occupancy rate with peak times being the summer and holiday seasons.

Fairhaven also offers a day programme for older people in the community. We visited the day centre just as people were arriving by mini-bus for the day's activities, and had the chance to meet people who use the centre and chat about some of the things they would be doing at the centre that day. We met a lady who had moved to Vancouver from Lancashire back in 1923, and one lucky member of our group was even asked out on a date!

For more information about Fairhaven, please visit the following link:
<http://www.fairhaven.bc.ca/>

A short walk down the road was Shannon Oaks, an older persons' residence provided by Baptist Housing Ministries which was established in 1964. It provides housing and care for seniors aged 65 and over and has 147 independent living units, but also offers 57 units of assisted living accommodation in a specially adapted building. From the moment we were welcomed in the lobby (complete with giant tropical fish tank and an aviary!) by scheme manager Ron Abbott, we were all highly impressed at the quality of the accommodation and facilities on offer.



With our hosts in the lobby at Shannon Oaks

Outside each unit a glass case is provided for residents to display favourite items and personalise their entrance, and the units themselves provide bedrooms, separate living rooms and kitchenettes. Other facilities at Shannon Oaks include: a large garden with private plots for those able to tend them and a mini-golf course, a beauty salon, a coffee shop, a private dining room which can be booked for celebrations, a library with internet access, and downstairs and pool room and a huge auditorium with a cinema screen.

We also visited Clarendon Court, the assisted living centre where we met the centre's nurse who provides medical care to residents there and is sponsored by the health authority. Residents who receive funding from the provincial government are means tested, with funding provided for up to 70% of the costs. Ron explained that the focus of the assisted living programme is to get residents out of their rooms and engaging with one another and in activities as much as possible in order to preserve mobility and mental agility. A study undertaken by the University of British Columbia found that after one year living in the residence, the health and mobility of residents improved by an average of 20%.

Around ten of us stayed at Shannon Oaks to have lunch with Ron and Howard Johnson, the charity's director, which gave us a chance to

ask further questions and to sample the residents' lunch menu! One member of our group who works in the field of older persons' housing remarked that the rents at Shannon Oaks were much the same as in a UK sheltered housing scheme. Upon finding that overseas applications could be considered, many of us started to wonder how we could secure our retirement in Vancouver

For more information about Shannon Oaks please visit <http://baptisthousing.org/housing-care/independent-living>

Honour House: New Westminster

Our host Shayne Ramsey had invited us to attend the opening of a new rest home for injured military and service personnel, and after lunch, our smaller group headed to the suburb of New Westminster in taxis. Honour House is a traditional wooden building which has been refurbished to provide a ten-room disabled access home with media room and large communal kitchen and living facilities for veterans, emergency services personnel and their families on a short-term basis while recovering from injury. BC Housing provided \$2m towards the refurbishment, approximately 50% of the total cost.



Honour House, New Westminster

On arrival, we were greeted by Shayne who introduced to Housing Minister and Solicitor General Rich

Coleman, who kindly took the time to spend a few moments talking with us before returning to his official duties. Several of us were also very pleased to meet our first real live Mountie by the name of Ryan!



The group meets a Mountie

Representatives of the armed forces, police, ambulance and fire services had turned out for the event, and the house was formally opened in a moving ceremony by Captain Trevor Greene, an Afghanistan war veteran who had been severely injured in the line of duty, and whose story had inspired the Honour House Society to press on with the project. The opening was full of hope and we felt honoured to have been given the opportunity to attend.



Service Personnel at Honour House opening

After a brief tour, we headed back into the City by skytrain, to pack our bags and prepare for our farewell dinner with Shayne Ramsey and Janice Abbott. It was great to be able to thank Shayne in particular for all his hard work and the time he had spent with us, and all to thank our tour leader Ian

Beckett who had done such a great job organising the study tour. After a lovely dinner and (for some of us) a great night out, we retired to bed for the last time before leaving Vancouver.



With Shayne Ramsey and Janice Abbott on the last evening



Ian receives a 'totem' of our appreciation for organising the tour

