



Living in Devon's NEWEST TOWN

After decades in the planning, Sherford is taking shape as one of the most ambitious residential developments in the UK. So, what's it like? **CHRISSEY HARRIS** went to visit...



Sherford is a new town on the outskirts of Plymouth. Photo: Barrett Photographers

Imagine starting a new town from scratch. The Romans managed it pretty well. But where do you build the roads? Do you start from the middle and work outwards? What about shops and schools? And what's that interesting looking wooden bridge for?

These are the many questions on the mind of a first-time visitor to Sherford, a new Devon town on the edge of Plymouth and right in the middle of the South Hams countryside. When complete, the development – one of the largest in the South West – will have 5,500 homes, three neighbourhoods, several schools, shops, businesses and loads of green space, including a 500-acre country park.

'Did you see the bat bridge?' Ah, so that's what the interesting looking wooden bridge is for. My Sherford guide Anna Murray has just met me by the football pitches and tennis courts, not far from the wildlife-friendly town entrance. Anna is heading up Sherford's communications and has been immersed in this rapidly developing landscape for 11 years now. She's got her PR hat on today, of course, but Anna and I have known each other for ages (I'm sure she won't mind me saying) so this is going to be fun.

We set off on foot and Anna tells me about the clever mix of traditional and contemporary architecture here – unusual for a new development. The stock of much-

needed housing is a seamless blend of private ownership, affordable homes and shared-ownership home renters.

Sustainability is at the heart of everything. All of these smart-looking homes are energy efficient, allowing residents to reduce their bills and their carbon footprint. In addition, Sherford is a 'walkable community', with cycle, pedestrian and decent transport links already in place. Perhaps the most impressive green credential is the amount of actual green here. Half of Sherford is parkland, communal gardens or tucked away picnic spots, surrounded by flowers and plants.

We stop by the playground and skatepark, which has been in constant use since it opened >

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in 2021. Kids are busy practising their moves or eating sandwiches (some are managing both). The sun is out. Surely this is as good as it gets. Why don't we all move to this South Devon utopia?

Of course, Sherford is a work-in-progress. You don't have to spend long here to realise that parts of it are under construction. The first diggers arrived in 2015 and have been working non-stop ever since, finishing one area then starting another. Against this busy backdrop, families/young couples/retirees and more are moving in.

It's not a tried and tested system by any means. Projects on this kind of scale are pioneering and it's taken a few plucky 'pioneers' to take a chance and set up home here. We go to meet some residents in the local café, House of Brews.

Premila MacLennan and her husband moved to Sherford from London seven years ago after taking early retirement.

'We wanted a three-storey house and a garden and had heard about this development,' says Premila, a local parish councillor and member of Sherford Community Trust. 'We came here and felt, this is it,' she adds. At that time, there wasn't much else here apart from a couple of close neighbours, so Premila and her husband quickly made friends. 'It was a much tighter community then,' she says, with a hint of nostalgia. Premila is conscious that the larger Sherford gets, the more effort it will take to keep the community connected, but that's a challenge she and many other residents are willing to accept. 'It's a great place to be,' she says. 'But we still need to do more.'

Yani Trache is another original Sherforder. He moved here from Plymouth with his partner in 2019 – lured by the prospect of a house with roof terrace.

'We were the only ones up there by the country park for a while,' he says. Like Premila, Yani formed a close bond with his neighbours, united by their unique living conditions.

'We love it here,' he says. Yani runs his



The play area is a busy spot. Photo: John Allen

business, Candles of Sherford, from home and regularly organises candle-making workshops and sells at local markets. 'It's such a good community here,' he adds. 'In my country (Yani is from Romania) you don't really have this. Our neighbours are our best friends, there's lots going on – we don't really ever feel the need to leave!'

Helen Copson is a more recent arrival. She moved to Sherford from nearby Elburton last year because she wanted an easy-to-maintain new build. The single mum has three boys, aged 10 and eight-year-old twins. Helen says the kids have quickly found plenty of playmates in their cul-de-sac and she has slotted right into this unique new and diverse community.

'Everybody is really friendly,' says Helen, adding that she quickly bonded with her neighbour over a glass of prosecco. 'There's a bench out in our little garden where we can sit and chat and watch the kids play.'

Helen, a journalist and blogger who has an award-winning blog called *Twins, Tantrums and Cold Coffee*, is realistic about Sherford living.

'I went into this with my eyes wide open', she says. 'A lot of people moan that it hasn't got this, or it hasn't got that yet, but these things take time, don't they?' she adds. 'We



Sherford residents (l-r) Helen Copson, Judy Talbot, Yani Trache and Premila MacLennan



The town is a clever mix of traditional-style and contemporary architecture. Photo: John Allen



A unique project

Sherford is one of a handful of government-backed major housing developments in the UK.

The town is being created by the Sherford Consortium, a partnership between housebuilders Taylor Wimpey and Vistry Group, which includes Countryside Partnerships, Linden Homes and Bovis Homes.

More than £1 billion is being invested in the construction of Sherford and a further £2 billion injected into the local area.

'Since the first residents moved in, Sherford has always been a special location with a strong sense of community spirit,' says Peter Sadler, managing director of Vistry Cornwall South West, part of the Sherford Consortium. 'There is a real sense of place and belonging; residents are actively involved in shaping their community.'

Rob Baker, managing director of Taylor Wimpey Exeter, part of the Sherford Consortium, says: 'The vision has always been to create a town with its own identity and atmosphere. It takes time, but it's constantly growing and progressing and realistically this is a community that will continue expanding while construction continues for another decade.'

Many families have already settled into life here. Photo: John Allen



Residents have access to acres of green space.

Photo: Ian Caldwell

were writing news stories about this place 20 years ago, weren't we?' Gulp. (Helen and I used to work together on the local newspaper many moons ago). 'Anybody moving here will know what it is,' she continues.

'I live in the newer bit, so there's still a lot of building work going on, but I've actually come to find that reassuring, the reversing beepers and everything else. At least you know there's always somebody there!'

As more homes are completed and residents move in, so the next stage of the Sherford plan 'unlocks'. So far, around 1,500 houses are occupied with around 4,500 people. There's a primary school, shop, café, community hub, as well as outdoor play and sports areas. Plans have been submitted for the first neighbourhood square, with a convenience store, shops and a nursery, as well as a purpose-built care home.

Eventually, thousands more residents will arrive and there will be a town centre, complete with town hall, library, leisure centre, health and wellbeing facilities, care home, leisure centre, allotments and a business park.

Anna and I finish our coffees and teas with the locals and head up to Sherford's country park for a breather. The green and pleasant land includes wildflower meadows, stream valley, accessible paths and wildlife corridors. The views from the top of the hill are pretty amazing, miles of South Devon countryside and the sight of dozens of diggers working away in the distance. There's a kind of serenity to it all though; a sense of progress at work and fresh starts for the thousands of people who will eventually call this developing Devon town home. After all, Rome wasn't built in a day. ● sherford.uk