

Press statement from Connolly & Callaghan

Builders and landlords, Connolly & Callaghan (C&C), have been accommodating homeless people in Bristol for 30 years. The decision to focus the family business on helping the homeless is due to the vision of co-owner, Martin Connolly, to make the world a better place.

Thanks to this vision, C&C also pioneers sustainable housing including the award-winning solid-wooden apartment at Pennywell Green and zero-carbon strawbale homes in Shirehampton which eliminate fuel poverty. C&C also own Hamilton House, supporting Coexist to create a community hub, and helping revitalise Stokes Croft.

In early spring 2016, C&C bought Carpenters House, an apartment building with 25 flats, to increase availability of much-needed emergency accommodation. Initially with vacant possession, Carpenters House came with private tenants.

Martin Connolly says: "It was a horrendous dilemma: a pressing need for emergency accommodation versus disruption and hardship for working families. We did everything we could to alleviate the stress of moving home for the tenants. Our dedicated team helped them find alternative accommodation, we refunded deposits regardless of any rent arrears, and we paid for deposits on new properties."

He adds: "This was the first time in 30 years we had bought an existing property. We prefer to create homes by refurbishing redundant buildings and constructing new homes on brownfield sites - we have created around 300 homes this way. But government departments have been asking us to help deal with an increase in homelessness, and the need to house some of the most vulnerable people in society felt priority."

Over four months, the majority of tenants were rehoused, with some writing letters to C&C thanking them for their help in moving. As far as C&C know, none have been made homeless. Two tenants have chosen to remain.

Martin Connolly says: "We are not profit-driven - instead we invest our surplus back into emergency accommodation, including renovation, maintenance, and staff. We aim for the quality of our accommodation to match best practice, and have a two-day call-and-repair response to any issues. Our staff check every property daily and we have a complaints system on our website. Additionally, our properties are regularly reviewed by various government agencies. We are proud of the services we offer homeless people. We achieve high standards in what is often a crisis situation."

An article on the Bristol Cable and an online petition critique C&C for making money out of the homeless. Martin Connolly says: “We support the campaigning work of Bristol’s politicians and community groups, including The Bristol Cable and Acorn, and we welcome this opportunity to have open and transparent dialogue about the UK’s housing problem. The story is not about us. The real story is the UK’s national housing policy, government benefit cuts, the deregulation of house prices and rents and, as a consequence, an unprecedented rise in homelessness. Let us work together to remedy this situation.”