



Merlin Gardens, Benson

A sensitive approach to Roman discoveries during
a transformative two-phase development

Cala Homes (Chiltern)

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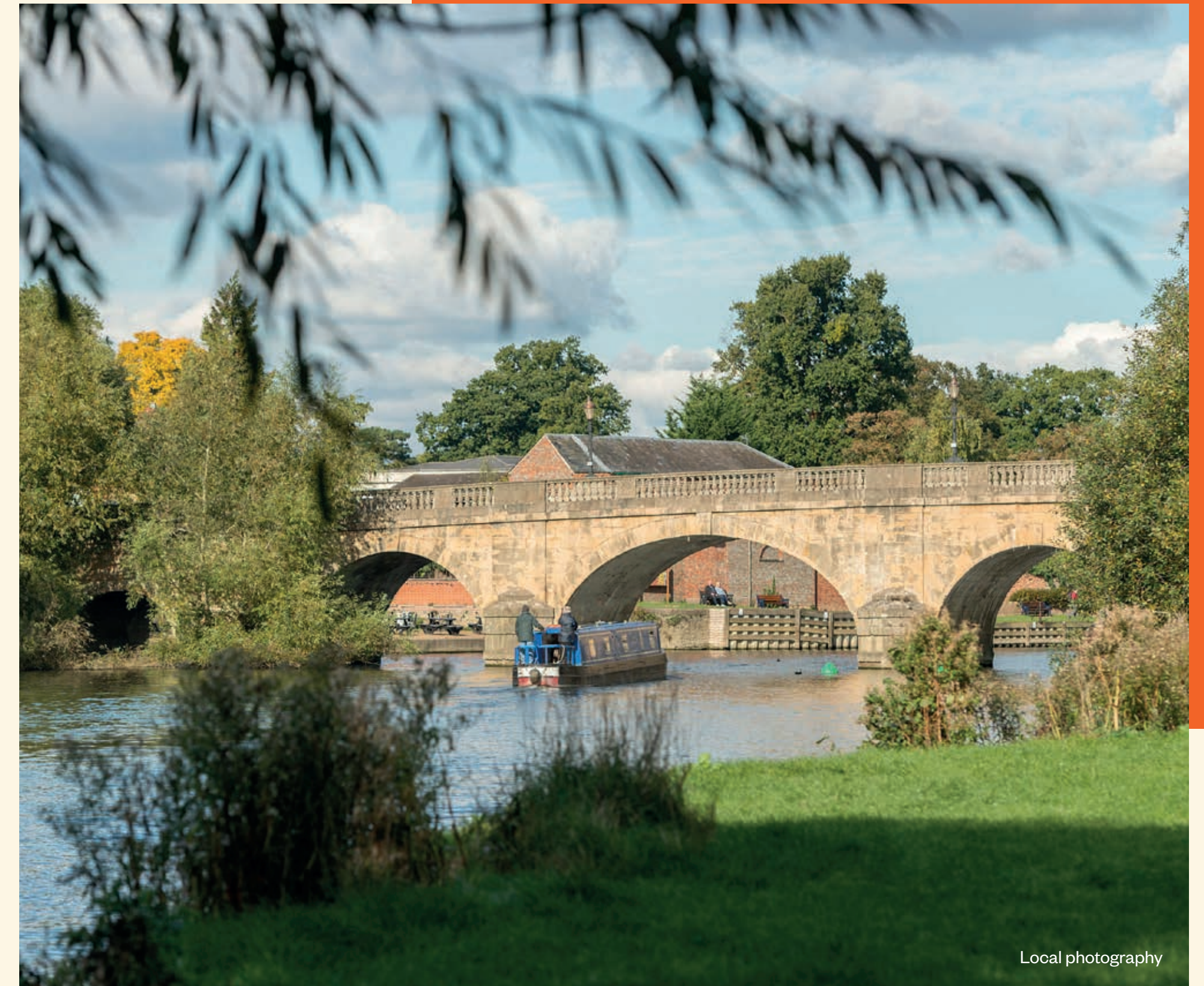
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Overview

After planning permission had been approved on appeal by Oxfordshire City Council, Cala acquired land at Hopefield Grange, Benson, for the first phase of the site in 2016. The first phase included the construction of 187 homes, with an additional 241 homes in the second phase. The two phases combined offered 40% affordable housing. The development also included public open spaces, sports facilities, a nature park, a community building, and various amenities for the local community.

The project involved converting a single-track road into a two-lane road and developing the land in two phases.



The opportunity

The opportunity presented by the identified area for development was primarily to bring high-quality homes to a community during a housing crisis. The land on Littleworth Road which had been disused for many years would eventually be transformed by Cala to address local demand for local housing.

Improvements to the land were necessary to ensure suitability for housing use, including the conversion of a single-track road into a two-lane road, providing better access and infrastructure in the area. In addition, Cala was also looking to build on their profile in Oxfordshire, following successful developments in Wantage, Bicester, Didcot and Fritwell.





Our approach

Cala acquired the land with an appeal already in place for phase one, which expedited the initial development. Phase one saw the construction of 187 homes, with careful attention to the high-water table, which posed challenges during foundation and sewer installation.

For Phase two, Cala engaged in extensive public consultation to ensure the project aligned with the community's needs and expectations. Cala also collaborated closely with local authorities, including Oxfordshire County Council, to deliver a relief road which now serves as a bypass for Benson.

The development of phase two placed a strong emphasis on community integration, with amenities such as public open spaces, sports facilities, a nature park, woodland, a community building, a skate park, and a LEAP play area.

Throughout the project, Cala engaged in robust negotiations with the local parish, leading to the expansion of the community building from one to two stories.

Cala also worked closely with the local school to design a play area and toilet block to ensure their requirements were met. Additionally, working closely in collaboration with the local environmental group, Benson Ecology Society and Parish Landscape Group, ensured environmentally responsible planting and landscaping.

In an unexpected twist during the site's development, archaeological searches uncovered a series of Roman artefacts, including remains and a collection of pottery. Cala sensitively approached these historically important discoveries, enabling careful extraction for best preservation.





Where are we now?

Phase one of Merlin Gardens has been successfully delivered, providing 187 new, 3, 4 and 5- bedroom homes, as well as addressing the required infrastructure improvements. Phase two is anticipated to be completed in late Autumn 2023 and will introduce an additional 241 homes alongside the promised amenities.

Merlin Gardens in Benson represents a notable transformation of a disused area into a thriving residential community with integrated amenities and improved infrastructure. Cala's collaborative approach ensured close engagement with local stakeholders and showcased its commitment to community integration which was integral to ensuring the final development met the needs of the existing community.





For more highlights from the
Cala Chiltern team visit:

cala.co.uk/chilternland

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