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South London Almshouse and Hackney Flats Among Finalists for Top Affordable Housing Award

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A selection of innovative housing developments across the UK, including a modern almshouse in Southwark and council-led homes in Hackney, have been shortlisted for the 2025 Neave Brown Award for Housing, one of the most prestigious honours in British architecture. The award, organised by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), recognises outstanding new affordable housing projects that place communities and social impact at the forefront of design.

The shortlist reflects efforts to address the UK's ongoing housing crisis through creative solutions that combine quality architecture with long-term social benefit. The chosen projects focus on offering dignity and a sense of community, all while remaining within the financial reach of local residents.

One of the leading entries is the Appleby Blue Almshouse in Southwark, south London. The scheme offers 59 affordable homes specifically for older residents, with rent levels aligned to social housing rates. Designed to reduce loneliness and support independent living, the development includes communal areas that promote interaction, such as shared gardens and gathering spaces. Built on a former care home site previously owned by the local council, the project was developed in partnership with Southwark Council, developer JTRE London, and the United St Saviour's charity.

Another finalist is Citizens' House in Lewisham, a small but significant development of just 11 flats. Prices are deliberately linked to local wages instead of market value, keeping one-bedroom homes at £215,000 and two-bedroom homes at £272,500. The initiative stemmed from a community-led campaign to utilise surplus council-owned land, with the result being homes priced at roughly 65 percent of the area's typical housing cost. Developed as a Community Land Trust (CLT) project, it aims to offer genuine affordability, a model that drew over 400 applicants when launched. RIBA judges praised the homes for their natural light, flexible design, and welcoming atmosphere.

Hackney's Tower Court is another scheme recognised on the shortlist. Developed as part of the borough's wider regeneration plan, this 132-home project includes properties available for social rent, shared ownership, and outright purchase. A major focus of the design was outdoor space, achieved through close collaboration with landscape architects. The outcome is a child-friendly environment where families feel safe and connected. According to the RIBA jury, "Residents speak of children mixing and playing together, with older children supervising the younger ones."

Also included is Hazelmead, a cohousing scheme in Bridport, Dorset, and the largest to be completed in the UK to date. Featuring 53 homes, a shared community building, and open green spaces, the development is built on principles of climate resilience and social inclusion. Hazelmead has reached net zero carbon in operation, using low-carbon construction methods while maintaining a balance between affordability and liveability. RIBA described it as a project where "sustainability is writ large throughout the development."

Dean Pike, chair of this year's jury and co-founder of Al-Jawad Pike, said the chosen schemes reflect Neave Brown's lasting influence on British housing. "Through careful detailing, low-impact construction, and a close reading of context, show what can be achieved within the constraints of contemporary housing delivery, affirming Neave Brown's belief in housing as a civic, generous, and transformative architecture," Pike said.

Brown, a modernist architect known for championing well-designed social housing, received the RIBA Royal Gold Medal in 2017, just months before his death. This award, which aims to celebrate housing that prioritises quality and social value, lives on in his legacy.

The winners of the Neave Brown Award will be announced at the Stirling Prize ceremony in London on October 16, where other architectural awards will also be presented. Among them is the Stephen Lawrence Prize, which honours outstanding work by early-career architects and is named in memory of the aspiring architect who was murdered in a racist attack in 1993. This year's shortlist includes the Knepp Wilding Kitchen and a conservation project at the former London home of composer George Frideric Handel and musician Jimi Hendrix.