

ROUNDTABLE: BEST PRACTICE DESIGN IN HOUSING FOR OLDER PEOPLE

BRIGHTON AND HOVE CITY COUNCIL

22nd MARCH 2019

Attendance

Brighton and Hove City Council:

Satti Sidhu, Housing Performance and Improvement Officer
Scott Lunn, Housing Stock Review Manager
Justine Harris, Housing Options Manager
Jo Thompson, Project Manager, Estates Regeneration
Sarah Potter, Housing development manager
Janine Dodson, Project Manager, Housing Stock Team
Emma Gilbert, Tenancy Services Operation Manager for Housing
Ododo Dafé, Head of Income, Inclusion & Improvement
Sandra Rogers, Planning Manager, Policy, Projects and Heritage Team
Chris Swain, Principal Planning Officer

Chris Lamb, Director, DSE
Huw Trevorrow, DSE
Mary Liggins, DSE
Sarah Wigglesworth, Sarah Wigglesworth Architects
Khalil Rheman, PegasusLife
Tim Riley, RCKa
Artjoms Kuzmics, Proctor Matthews Architects
Rachel Sayers, Fielden Clegg Bradley
Nick Hayhurst, Hayhurst and Co.
Irene Craik, Levitt Bernstein
Robin Darton, University of Kent
Anna Kear, Project Tonic, LGBT Senior Housing group
Kevan Forde, Anchor Hanover

Introduction

There is an identified need for at least 30,000 new homes in Brighton and Hove. At the same time, the population is aging, and nationally the proportion of over 65s is predicted to rise from 18% to 26% over the next 25 years. Therefore, providing housing for older people is one of the greatest challenges facing the planning and development industry.

Bringing together council employees, designers, developers, academics and specialists, this event explored best practice design in housing for older people, to identify principles that can help guide new development and improvements to existing facilities in Brighton and Hove.

Seniors Housing in Brighton and Hove

There are 23 council owned Seniors Housing schemes in Brighton and Hove, providing accommodation for people of 55 years and older in self contained homes. These are not extra care facilities, but include an on-site scheme manager on weekdays, and communal facilities such as a lounge and garden.

This provides a highly valuable service, and often functions particularly well for residents who do not have the support of a family in the local area. However, the majority of these facilities were developed or converted in the 1970s and 80s, and though quality varies, many fall below modern standards. Particular issues include undersized private accommodation and limited accessibility. As part of this discussion, we aim to explore how the Seniors Housing stock in Brighton and Hove can be improved, and how new facilities could potentially be approached.

Summary of key discussion topics

Relocation into seniors housing as a choice not a necessity. Existing seniors housing in Brighton and Hove is aimed at those aged 55+, however there is a general reluctance for people to leave their homes at this age. Housing needs to be improved to encourage relocation as a positive decision rather than as a last resort.

Provision of housing for older people should be informed by consultation and research. The needs of older people have historically been assumed. Instead, we need to ask - what do they want? Research should be conducted within the generation of future occupants - the baby boomers who are expected to demand a higher standard of living. A key focus should be on the needs of the individual - with the creation of *homes*, not 'units'. Not all older people will have the same requirements and desires, and a range of housing should be offered.

Design standards should be reviewed. The HAPPI principals provide straightforward standards which should be seen as the minimum. Post-retirement, those who might previously have been out at work all day are now home alone. Seniors housing needs to cater for this, both in facilitating a level of social interaction, and providing a pleasant environment suited to occupants who will now spend the majority of the day in their home. 'Delight' should be a basic requirement, not a luxury.

Location is key. Research suggests that city-centre locations are more popular than suburban locations. Elderly people should be able to use the same facilities as the general public in the city/town centre. These facilities should not all be provided in-house, as this de-motivates residents to leave the site and interact with their local community and surroundings. If retail areas could be partially re-purposed as seniors housing, this could benefit struggling high streets - this might include some of Brighton and Hove Council's commercial building stock. Older people are key contributors to a local economy, and this is especially apparent in the centre of towns.

A social environment can be facilitated by the provision of more imaginative communal spaces. Stewardship of communal spaces has been shown to work well, with regular clubs and activities planned. Communal facilities should be located where residents will pass by or through them on a regular basis.

Nature is beneficial. The integration of nature provides a healthier environment as well as improving the social and health well-being of residents. Green spaces must be accessible, incorporating level access and raised beds. Private outdoor space is also key.

Flexibility of layout within accommodation. Accommodation should be provided which offers flexible living with sufficient storage. Homes should be adaptable to accommodate future mobility issues. Many older people require a second bedroom to offer care for grandchildren, host visiting family, or to run a business or undertake a hobby at home. There is an opportunity to provide mixed-age

accommodation within the same site, but this needs to be carefully considered to manage the different lifestyles of the residents, especially with regards to noise and behaviours. This can be addressed by zoning a development and taking care when planning internal layouts. Purpose built cohousing schemes might be well suited to incorporating seniors housing. However it should be remembered that not all older people have the same wants - some seek interaction with younger people, while others want peace and quiet.

Specific design to suit the scale of the site. Brighton and Hove have a number of smaller sites, and there should be a focus on how to develop these sites, alongside a broader view of larger sites which might become available. The current provision is driven by the desperate need for more housing, rather than being based on research. The cost and value of brownfield land in a city centre makes it hard for planners to resist densification, and developers are able to override the needs of the individual in order to maximise their profit. Planning policy could be reviewed to address this. Not all council seniors housing should be aimed at low rents, and the ability to sell off the leasehold of homes should be considered as a way to finance improved housing for tenants.

Community consultation. When developing new sites, community consultation is key to ensure that the seniors housing integrates with its environment, rather than becoming a ghetto. Shared community gardens and new facilities for public use can encourage this, as well as architectural design which is well suited to its context in scale and materiality.

Ask the right questions and communicate the vision. Very important is to get people to be more open-minded about the possibilities, and to ask the next generation what they want. Sometimes it can be hard to see beyond a current preconception. This can be overcome by asking “what are the barriers to you moving into seniors housing; why are you hesitant?” Communication of this vision and possibilities is crucial.

Brooke Mead Presentation

Rachel Sayers of Fielden Clegg Bradley Studios provided an overview of the recently completed extra care facilities at Brooke Mead, which is part of Brighton and Hove’s Senior Housing programme, and provides early-stage dementia care. The scheme aims to connect with the community, physically and socially. This was key to the pre-planning stage, with consultation with the local tenants’ association leading to the provision of a community garden within the scheme. Key design principals include:

- Overlooking issues are balanced against the desire to provide private external space for residents by virtue of inset balconies, which are accessible from bedrooms and living rooms.
- Deck access provides cross ventilation and more natural light, simultaneously bringing residents outside on a regular basis. Exposure to the elements is reduced by semi-permeable screening and residents’ satisfaction is reportedly high.

- The scheme is designed to get progressively more private as you ascend.
- The colour scheme was designed by a Dulux dementia care specialist.
- Communal facilities are located on the ground floor adjacent to the main entrance.

DWELL Presentation

Sarah Wigglesworth gave an overview of the principals of the DWELL Research Project (**D**esigning for **W**ell-being in **E**nvironments for **L**ater **L**ife, 2013-2016, University of Sheffield.) The key findings were presented, summarised below:

- The current housing market does not provide a sufficient quantity and quality of seniors housing. The range of housing available needs to improve, and this should include the option to own your own home in later life.
- Location is key and city centre living is a very popular option. Services such as retail, transport, healthcare and social opportunities should be accessible.
- Autonomy and independence are key priorities for those people considering a move into senior's housing, with institutionalised spaces to be avoided.
- Residents who feel comfortable and in control will live a longer and healthier life.
- Living accommodation should be flexible to allow for second bedrooms to be dual purpose, eg. a study or extended living room. Many new businesses are set up by retirees, and new accommodation should have full digital capabilities.
- There is a proven benefit to older people living alongside people of other generations and new housing could facilitate this.
- Service charges and bills are a cause of concern for the elderly and new construction should be sustainable and robust to minimise these costs.
- Deck access is encouraged to avoid double-loaded corridors, allowing for cross-ventilation and a reduced need for fire resistant glazing.
- Stewardship and curation of community spaces is very important.
- Integration with nature offers benefits to users as well as helping to prevent overheating.
- A number of different design models have been considered from courtyard bungalows to high-rise living.

Principles to help guide future approaches to seniors housing

Standards:

- The council should develop their own standards for new and existing seniors housing - above and beyond existing minimum standards.
- The focus should be on improving the lives of end users, rather than focusing on densification or financial motivation.

Location and Design:

- City centre locations are preferable and offer the best opportunity for mid-high rise development - allowing densification without sacrificing size or quality.
- Integration within existing high streets can benefit both parties.
- Where higher density developments are introduced, there should be a renewed

focus on providing external amenity space above ground level (eg. balconies and raised courtyards.) Higher density developments can help create a critical mass of activity to populate communal areas.

- The existing suburban sites could be re-purposed as temporary accommodation.
- The council's existing schemes could work harder and in some instances, replacement would be the best option.
- 'Delight' should be accounted for within the budget.

Tenure:

- Different options should be considered and integrated within schemes, including the option for selling off leasehold flats to help fund development.
- Higher rents could be justifiable where better standards of living are provided.
- The added value of the improved health and well being of occupants in better living accommodation must be considered within cost considerations.

Planning:

- Current planning policy should be reviewed with a view to facilitating the provision of new and/or improved seniors housing.
- Relaxed planning regulations on overlooking distances can open up opportunities.
- Existing successful schemes should be visited and publicised as examples.
- The design of new schemes should be opened up to a wider pool of architects, to include those with specific experience in this field.

Key Design Principals for Seniors Housing:

- Larger homes which can be used in a flexible way to allow for guests and/or home working and hobbies.
- Located within urban areas with key facilities within close walking distance.
- 'Care-ready' design or easily adaptable spaces.
- Access to both private and communal outdoor space.
- Communal rooms and facilities which are integral with or easily accessible from circulation, preferable located near the main entrance.
- Sufficient storage within homes and communally for larger items such as scooters and bicycles.
- Integration with nature.
- Double aspect units with adequate natural light and cross ventilation.
- Sustainable and robust design especially where leasehold purchases are proposed, to keep service charges and bills to a minimum.

