

AGE CONCERNS

THIRD AGE ARCHITECTURE

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By 2050 the number of over-60s is expected to reach some 22 per cent of the world's population. In the UK, architects are finally being given opportunities to design humane and aspirational schemes for 'third age housing'



EVERY CLOUD has a silver lining. That populations in the developed world are increasingly living into their 80s and 90s, as our healthcare systems become ever more successful at treating diseases that used to finish people off in their 60s (heart disease, stroke, cancer, emphysema), is causing a massive re-evaluation of how people are looked after and accommodated as they age.

The UK is one of the worst providers of accommodation and care, sadly: scandals emerge on an almost monthly basis, revealing shoddy hospital or care-home treatment, and widespread loneliness and isolation. So it is heartening to report that both politicians and those involved in designing and developing housing for the elderly are suddenly showing new vigour in grappling with how to do it better than through the frankly shameful 'warehousing of the old' that has been the default position for the past 50 years.

In the past 18 months, leading UK design

and architecture institutions have held seminars and conferences for their fellow professionals on how to create accommodation that is fit for and desirable to the over-60s, from the NLA's 'Delivering Homes for the Ageing Population' conference in November 2013 to the RIBA's 'Design for Ageing' event in November 2014.

The NLA may be London-focused but the issues of how to provide good-quality, accessible, affordable housing in cities is relevant everywhere. It is, it seems, a fallacy that people want to move out to the country when they get older. People who have spent their lives in cities have a far better quality of life if they stay within their communities, closer to friends and family, and to amenities. London already has a large amount of sheltered accommodation, owned by councils and housing associations, and most of it was declared 'not fit for purpose' by David Birkbeck, CEO of Design for Homes, speaking at the NLA conference. Luckily, guidelines are on hand for creating something much better. >

Below OWCH working with Hanover has the Union Street Cohousing scheme in North Barnet, with two others planned elsewhere

CASE STUDY

Union Street Cohousing

The Older Women's Cohousing Group (OWCH) was formed around 15 years ago to address the issues often afflicting women into old age: as research from the Office of National Statistics shows, 60 per cent of women over 75 live alone, risking isolation and loneliness. Cohousing – pooling whatever resources they have from home ownership or pensions to create housing specifically suited to their needs – seemed an obvious solution. Having secured a finance deal with Hanover, a retirement housing specialist, OWCH started working with architecture practice Pollard Thomas Edwards, to see what kind of accommodation they might like to create. Four years on and its mission is about to bear fruit, in not just one housing scheme – Union Street in North Barnet, due to start building this year – but three, with other schemes in planning stages in Forest Hill and Muswell Hill. At the point where PTE got involved a site had been found in Barnet and the architects began a long process of collaborating with the future residents and Hanover to see what kind of space and configuration they wanted. Set in a conservation area, the proposed scheme offers a collection of apartments designed to look like houses, two and three storeys high along the front of the street, with clusters of three-storey and two-storey buildings behind and a large garden in the centre. PTE architect Tim Metcalfe says: 'The approach is innovative and inspires community, building on a belief in mutual support.' Because it's in a conservation area, the street facade is more formal with period detailing, but the interior elevation is modern,



with large windows, deck access and open corridors that can take planting. A large common room is at the fulcrum of the two wings, with space for group dining, activities – dance, exercise, performance. The flats themselves have a special feature – a sliding door across the living room that can create a spare bedroom, or carer's room, or study.

Client Hanover, OWCH, Housing for Women

Architecture Pollard Thomas Edwards

Area 1,750 sq m

Cost £4.4m



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Design for Homes, along with the Homes and Communities Agency and a team of architects and experts, produced an excellent booklet on best practice for designing for ageing communities, called the HAPPI report (HAPPI standing for Housing our Ageing Population, Panel for Innovation). The original 2009 report featured a wealth of research and case studies of diverse types, from all over Europe. The follow up, HAPPI2, looks at how to implement the recommendations. It suggested that national and local government should join forces to push for better accommodation across the UK for the ageing population. The private sector and social landlords are also urged to provide 'elegant, functional, sustainable and manageable homes for later life'. The Department of Health's £300m Health, Care and Support housing fund pledged itself to designing more schemes along HAPPI principles. And it was suggested that planners, local-housing and social-care departments

should prioritise assessing and investing in older people's housing along HAPPI lines.

Five years after the first HAPPI report was published it seems these initiatives are bearing fruit. Roger Black, creative director for PegasusLife, is one of the developers taking up the challenge. He argues that there are many good economic reasons for investing in high-quality 'third age' developments. The home-owning population, certainly within the UK, is 'equity rich'. 'Equity is all in the hands of the over-60s,' he says. Some figures suggest that, if older home-owners were persuaded to move, >

Some figures suggest that if older home-owners moved, 2.5 million family homes would be freed up

Below Accommodation with a five-star-hotel-style interior atmosphere was the aim for St Bede's in Bedford

CASE STUDY

St Bede's, Bedford



A specialist in accommodation for the elderly, PRP was charged by client Orbit to create a five-star-hotel interior atmosphere for residents in St Bede's Extra Care scheme, which is designed along HAPPI principles. Set within a Victorian school building, it offers a variety of architectural approaches to enhance quality of life for residents and provide an elegant asset within Bedford's Conservation Area, with high-quality brick detailing, rendered bays and timber. Several apartments have been inserted into the old building, offering dual aspects on to the street and the central garden. The majority of the one and two-bedroom flats offer private balconies or terraces.

Communal areas are inviting and open to residents, friends and the general public – a restaurant, lounge, games room, hair salon, fitness suite and guest room. Within the new-build area, a triple-height atrium maximises light into the communal elements and vistas on to the handsome internal garden, which offers water features – and a croquet lawn.

Client Orbit Housing

Architecture, Landscape Architecture, Interior Design PRP

No of flats 104, ranging from 55 sq m to 95 sq m, mixed tenure

Value £12.9m

Completed July 2014

2.5 million family homes would be released on to the market. The HAPPI report cited (2009 figures) that homeowners aged 65 and over in just England and Wales are sitting on £611bn of equity in their properties. With the recent hike in the housing market, that figure will now be far higher. Black is clear that the only thing that will entice these often affluent, educated, retired people to move is if the quality of new accommodation is vastly better than the current sector norm.

'The HAPPI report has been a fantastic catalyst for good design,' said Caroline Byram, bid director of BUPA Care Services, at the NLA conference. 'It's the first time a report focused on design, not standards.' But what struck her about the European (non-UK) designs was that they are all 'modern, contextual, integrational design. They don't look like they have been designed for specific communities. They design them as if they [customers] are just making different decisions because of the point they

have reached in their lives'. The apartments have elegant proportions, quality detailing and materials such as parquet floors and floor-to-ceiling glazing. There is thoughtful landscaping. 'Balconies are everywhere,' she says, 'but it's the first thing that disappears from our schemes.'

Design for Homes' Birkbeck agrees: 'Essentially the things that work really well for senior housing are details that were written out of the picture in the Eighties and Nineties due to government guidelines and rising land values.' Following various crime-focused reports that claimed deck access was the cause of high burglary rates, deck access was practically eliminated from senior and social housing. Birkbeck says that the HAPPI investigations' tours of other European countries provided a much-needed reality check on this front: 'We realised that half the countries of Europe prioritise [balcony and] deck access. We worry now that older people spend too much time indoors. They are not getting the necessary >

Below Creating an active programme for residents and locals is the plan for almshouses for the charity United St Saviour's

CASE STUDY

Almshouses for United St Saviour's

Stirling Prize-winning practice Witherford Watson Mann has been working closely with the venerable 500-year-old Southwark charity United St Saviour's, to create an inspirational modern version of the almshouse (clusters of modest but decent cottages for the elderly, once offered by charitable organisations frequently allied to specific trades). After 10 months of consultation with the charity and its members, WWM has devised a scheme that brings as much animation and activity into the building as possible. The two-storey cloistered design has an enclosed courtyard garden at its centre, with a street-front that will actively engage the wider community through a cafe, and a community centre where activities could range from hands-on workshops for making to theatre groups. There will also be opportunities for gardening and food growing on the upper level terraces. The idea is to create an active programme for residents and locals. Says architect Stephen Witherford: 'There are so many benefits when old people and young people come together.' He wanted to eliminate the torpor of the 'residents' lounge' – otherwise known as 'God's waiting room'. WWM's research was inspired by the drawings of Goya (whose sketches of the elderly fully engaged in life were shown at the Courthauld Gallery in January) as well as the Age Friendly Handbook, produced by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Client United St Saviour's

Architecture Witherford Watson Mann

Schedule In planning



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levels of vitamin D, they are not getting exercise or fresh air. The Swiss will congregate on their decks; they colonise them with tables and chairs. We realised that this is important. Now it's almost become a standard detail in the new schemes. We don't have double-loaded corridors. If you have to have an internal corridor, give it daylighting, an atrium. Give them protection from the weather, and daylight and views.'

And give customers space. Says Birkbeck: 'The reality is that in the Eighties and Nineties Britain produced tiny, bedsit-type accommodation that is now being pulled down because they know that it's completely the wrong typology... In the past decade [the average apartment size] has gone up from 20 sq m to 30 sq m to 45 sq m and never anything more. But now it's a case of [realising] these people have money. If they want 125 sq m, then that's what we should give them.'

Another mechanism being deployed more

cleverly to encourage engagement and activity is a variety of internal and external communal spaces. It's not enough to have a dreary common room where people sit aimlessly watching a TV that will usually be on far too loud, drowning conversation. People need choices of space for themselves, their friends and family visitors, and facilities good enough to attract the local community. Good-quality shops, restaurants, hairdressers, beauticians and even nurseries have been inserted into senior-living communities to draw people in from the wider neighbourhood. This is typical >

Medical bills and the need for care homes is reduced by maximising quality of life...with space design and programming

Below A diverse range of external spaces encourages engagement, from going to the cafe to gardening, at the PegasusLife Later Living development

CASE STUDY

PegasusLife Later Living Accommodation, Harpenden

When retirement property developer PegasusLife brought RCKa on board to design a retirement living scheme in Harpenden, the emphasis was both on choice and quality of accommodation and engagement within and beyond the resident population. Says RCKa co-director Tim Riley: 'The principle behind this is to combat loneliness. A lot of what we do is community-centric. The thing we focused on was how to get people to engage with the world around; how do you encourage incidental meetings and design for serendipity?' RCKa's scheme offers 38 'later living' apartments designed for people at all stages of physical ability, over 60 years of age.

The omission of corridors leads to generous open-plan arrangements of interconnecting adaptable rooms, improving legibility and offering flexibility to suit changing needs of residents. Safe access to gardens, terraces, patios or balconies is also provided. Each unit has its own front door on to an atrium, with sufficient space to encourage residents to linger with their neighbours.

A diverse range of external spaces encourages engagement, from going to the cafe to playing cards to gardening. Shared facilities include communal lounges, a hobby and function room, a communal dining room and kitchen, and a wellbeing suite, that includes hairdressing and physiotherapy. 'Everywhere possible we provide opportunities to connect with nature,' says Riley. An external terrace along the entrance, for example, can be used for promenading, or colonised by residents to provide a sociable patio for watching the world go by. Landscaping takes advantage



of the site's mature trees and vistas on to a local park.

The three buildings are arranged as staggered pavilions in the wider landscape setting to create a diverse range of external spaces between them. They borrow heavily from the adjacent Arts & Crafts buildings, which establish a strong identity for the town. They have been interpreted in a more contemporary fashion however, with gables arranged to pick up on key views at an angle to the plan, resulting

in playful eaves' lines that introduce a hierarchy to the elevations.

The palette of materials is traditional also, with various patterns of painted brick used to break up facades, inspired by the exposed timber-frame details found nearby. A colonnade of dark, sawdust-fired brick connects the three pavilions at ground floor and introduces a civic quality in response to the communal facilities behind. Its coarse brick texture encourages climbers, including rose and

jasmine, with the aim of turning the colonnade into a landscape feature that connects the pavilions to the attractive park setting.

Client PegasusLife

Architecture RCKa

Landscaping Camlins

Area 4,800 sq m

Cost Undisclosed

practice in the USA and Europe, in schemes both private and public.

Public interaction is one form of entertainment and engagement, but the programming and animation of social spaces is also vital. Here, the Humanitas project, based in Rotterdam, is streets ahead of the competition. Now with 33 homes around Rotterdam, the Humanitas ethos has been consolidated under Dr Hans Becker, a former professor of the Erasmus School of Economics in Rotterdam. Becker has become a champion of a different kind of economics – one that

minimises medical bills and the need for care homes by maximising quality of life – providing ‘homes for life’, with care when required but harnessing engagement and support through the design and programming of its spaces. Though the buildings are inexpensive and unremarkable, they are filled with colourful and extrovert elements such as murals, indoor forests and fishponds, in order to trigger conversation and congregation. Each residential block has its own high-quality food and bar offer and a rich schedule of events and activities.

‘It’s like Butlins,’ says Birkbeck, who is a huge fan of Becker’s schemes. ‘The basic precept is that the care bill for elder people is what everyone focuses on and the medical attention, which is too intensive. As people get older and their bodies hurt and they’re lonely, there’s this idea that the correct way to deal with it is to throw medicine at it. All these people want is companionship and a better quality of life, which you can buy relatively cheaply. >

In the UK the picture compared to five years ago is changing, with mainstream developers joining the specialists

Below On the site of a small, existing nursing home, the new horseshoe-shaped block creates a cloister formation

CASE STUDY

Pilgrim Gardens, Evington



The idea for Pilgrim Gardens – a scheme of 31 independent living apartments – is to provide a ‘home for life’, with access to greater care and support as residents need it. Built on the site of a small, existing residential nursing home, also run by the client, a Christian charity called the Pilgrims’ Friend Society, the new horseshoe-shaped block creates a cloister formation in conjunction with the existing building: sealing off a road that used to run into the site (and which

therefore made it unsafe for nursing-home residents to go walking there) and turning it into a delightful and calm enclosed garden with a mature tree at its centre. The two storeys of flats are completely dual aspect, with inward views on to the tree and outward vistas on to a pastoral landscape. Sheltered colonnades on the ground floor and sheltered galley access at the first floor provide fresh air while facilitating movement around the interior of the block. Sliding glazed

doors allow residents to seal off their balconies in the winter, creating winter gardens with ample interior glazing to allow daylight to flood indoors. The flats are generously proportioned: 54 sq m for a one-bed and 73 sq m for two-bed homes. The materials used are brick and wood, creating a timeless quality to these generously glazed, modern apartments. The landscape design for the scheme, also by PRP, is inspired by oriental planting, and offers a sequence of distinctive,

calm and sensory spaces to aid interaction and orientation.

Client Pilgrims’ Friend Society

LPA Leicester City Council

Architecture and Landscaping PRP

Value £4.5m

Awards HAPPI Completed Housing Design Award 2014; Housing Project of the Year, Building Awards 2014

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Becker's developments have proper restaurants – its company owns 22 of the most successful bistros in Rotterdam. The bars take huge amounts of money. The place is arranged in such a way that people come in off the street. They become the cornerstone of the community – anyone over 35 feels comfortable there. It's good food at a reduced price. His model cuts the cost of medical attention by 38 per cent.'

For the UK, the picture now compared with five years ago is thankfully changing, with mainstream developers joining the specialists. Berkeley Homes is 'piling into the sector', says Birkbeck. But PegasusLife is at the more progressive edge: not only has it appointed excellent practices such as Glenn Howells Architects, RCKa and Proctor and Matthews to address the quality of accommodation, but is also addressing the quality of engagement and ownership likely to prevail in these buildings, by setting up management companies that are co-owned and run by the residents. Says

Birkbeck: 'It is based on it being a cooperative entity so no one gets ripped off. They plan to be the John Lewis of senior housing.'

Cohousing, of course, takes this co-operative spirit a step further. The collective funding and organisation of accommodation around a shared social space, usually funded through the sale of individual assets, or facilitated by a housing association or enlightened developer, is one very exciting solution gaining traction for this market. Housing association Hanover has three such schemes being developed around London – one in Muswell Hill, one in Forest Hill and one in Barnet (see Union Street case study).

Local councils are also – albeit very slowly – starting to raise their game. Becker has now retired from Humanitas after 20 years, and is working as an adviser to Newcastle City Council as well as to PegasusLife. Clearly, third-age architecture, senior housing, or whatever you want to call it, is about to get a whole lot more interesting. **FX**

Below At the Pilgrim Gardens development, run by a Christian charity, each apartment has sliding glazed doors to seal off the balcony from the patio in winter

