

Barton Mews

Barton-under-Needwood

Staffordshire

A private development of 29 extra care apartments for sale, aimed at affluent, older local buyers, or buyers with local family connections.

Built, sold and managed by private sector provider Shaw Homes. The scheme, designed by Pentan architects, was completed in 2008.

Key features

The housing, which extends round a courtyard, is above a doctor's surgery and cottage hospital, with separate entry for each. The scheme offers a broad range of services, aspirational design features and accessible and adaptable flats and corridors. Some flats bought by children stand empty because parents do not want to move in.

Background

Shaw Healthcare decided to expand the original brief replacing an ageing GP's surgery and cottage hospital to include an extra care component. This was done to make the scheme work financially although it meant increasing the size of the development by two-thirds. Shaw now runs the ground-floor surgery and hospital on behalf of the primary care trust, along with the extra care apartments located on the first and second floors.

Design and planning

The architect was inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement and this can be traced in the project, although its scale has inevitably compromised its architectural qualities.

Development and building

This is Shaw's second extra care development and the company sees the private sale market as a profitable development niche. In normal market conditions, this type of scheme is a good investment for older people and can help to alleviate the pressure on diminishing public sector residential care resources.

The design had to ensure separation between the surgery, the hospital and the housing, so each component has its own separate entrance. The accommodation is arranged in four arms around a central courtyard used by the hospital and surgery located at ground-floor level.

The residential entrance is curiously understated, almost hidden away. It opens into a small ground floor lobby, stairwell and lift which take you straight up to a bright first-floor corridor, opening onto a large residents' balcony along the front of the building. The main dining room is at the end of this, and the apartments open off both sides of the corridors which extend around the four arms of the building.



Barton Mews, Staffordshire © Shaw healthcare (Barton) Ltd



The layout of the residential floors and the linear plan of the flats were determined by the premises on the ground floor. The corridors are reasonably well lit, with windows at each end and, on the second floor, big round skylights. The finishes are of a reasonable quality, including high-quality front doors.

None of the one- and two-bedroom flats (the latter measuring 80 square metres) were allocated for wheelchair use from the outset. Barton Mews has individual bathrooms that are mainly accessible and ergonomically designed wet rooms. There is also an assisted bathroom on each floor, equipped with the latest lifting equipment. Adaptations can easily be made to individual flats, including the installation of assistive technology beyond the basic alarm system provided.

There is a glass panel beside each front door and a colour-coded strip to aid visual orientation and enable people with dementia to recognise their own homes. There are also details like letter-cages, to catch the post from the floor, and spy holes, to check on visitors. Doors and corridors inside and outside the flats can accommodate mobility scooters, and charging-points and a central store are provided.

The building is a well-insulated timber-frame construction made by Taylor and Lane. It is clad in a mixture of green oak shingles and clay brick. Pentan

actively promotes sustainable construction methods, although there was a concern about the lack of thermal mass, particularly from a noise point of view, which meant there was careful thought about heating and carpeting. Heating is provided via a wet system, with cool-touch radiators and individual controls in each flat. Floating floors are covered in a waterproofed carpet with a special pile suitable for wheeled vehicles. In addition, the party walls between the flats and the circulation spaces had to be the same width as the double-skin external walls, owing to the classification of the accommodation as dwellings, rather than rooms, which gives extra privacy.

Feedback

Eleven people had moved in and they were all very satisfied. One woman, who is deaf, says she was surprised at how easily she settled in. Another woman brought everything she could from her old house, to make it feel like home, and has had an electric fireplace installed. Certainly, there is a real sense of cohesion and burgeoning friendship among residents, even without any formally organised social activities.

Other problems were raised by relatives. Some family members cited a number of details that were not working properly: the inadequate drain-away in the bathrooms; over-powerful showers; spy holes and

extractor fan switches set too high in the doors and walls; restrictor catches to the top-hung windows too strong, so residents need assistance with closing them each night.

The relative inaccessibility of the under-developed rear garden was disappointing, although this appears to be a work in progress. There is a nice sense of connection via the public footpath through the garden towards the churchyard and village centre. The external areas of the building do not seem to offer the same scope for residents' enjoyment as the internal spaces, such as the popular balcony area, or 'roof terrace'.

Learning points

As visitors approach the scheme, they are met by a large, empty car park around the building, creating a barren no-man's-land between it and the neighbouring houses. Although the car park was built for the surgery and hospital as well as the extra care housing, demand seems to have been over-estimated, to the detriment of the building. So far, only two of the 11 residents own a car.

Design and architectural features

- Extra care scheme above doctor's surgery and cottage hospital with separate entry for each
- Accommodation extends round a courtyard.

Points for residents

- Broad range of services
- Aspirational design features
- Accessible and adaptable flats and corridors.

Management issues

- Some flats bought by children stand empty because parents do not want to move in.



Barton Mews, Staffordshire © Shaw healthcare (Barton) Ltd

There is a nice sense of connection via the public footpath through the garden towards the churchyard and village centre, but it seems unlikely that this could be used by residents with walking frames or even scooters