



How Extra Care Living helped in the Regeneration of Longbridge

This case study describes how a common goal can bring renewed life into a struggling community. Hit by the collapse of MG Rover in 2005, Longbridge suffered from significant job losses and the inevitable challenges that this brings.



Through the regeneration incentive implemented by St. Modwins, Birmingham City Council, Bromsgrove District Council, and the Homes and Communities Agency, social and economic investments are now transforming the area.

Longbridge Retirement Village, developed by The ExtraCare Charitable Trust plays an intrinsic part in this rebirth process. Responding to the Government's Agenda to provide appropriately designed much need homes for older people, the Retirement Village has become a community asset providing 260 extra care homes and a Hub that offers opportunity to stay safe, secure and healthy.

Written by **Wendy Griffin RIBA**, Director, Nicol Thomas Ltd, for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network

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Introduction

Longbridge Village is the fifth extra care retirement facility delivered to date by The ExtraCare Charitable Trust in partnership with Birmingham City Council in and around the City of Birmingham. Situated to the south, it forms part of the wider St Modwins regeneration master plan for the Longbridge area, which is the largest and most active private sector-led brownfield regeneration project in the Midlands. It is particularly characterised by the collapse of MG Rover in 2005.

Designed by Nicol Thomas Ltd, the development delivers 260 one and two bedroom extra care apartments over five stories with extensive communal facilities providing homes for circa 350 older people. Following close consultation with the Local Authority, the planning application was submitted in June 2014 with planning approval granted in September 2014. Building works started February 2015, with completion and handover early 2017. In July 2017 the first residents moved in, with the official opening taking place in September 2017.

Background

In 1906, Herbert Austin invested in his first motor car manufacturing factory at the Longbridge site which quickly grew, providing thousands of jobs for local people. In response to this, Austin built accommodation for employees who had trouble traveling to the plant and so this was to be the start of the vibrant community of Longbridge where people worked and socialized close to home. Unfortunately, after many years following the death of Herbert Austin and various mergers and takeovers, the Company went in to administration in 2005. Various attempts to reinvigorate the facility failed, and so car parts are now no longer manufactured at Longbridge.



The Longbridge car plant at its peak

The effect on the Longbridge community was devastating and so St. Modwins, along with Birmingham City Council, Bromsgrove Council and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), now Homes England, subsequently came together to deliver a high quality sustainable regeneration of the area. The vision was to bring the community back together again and create a distinctive place where people could once again work, socialize and shop close to home.

The issue around our ageing population, social care, and lack of housing is well publicised and so all Local Authorities are encouraged to include some provision for older peoples' housing in their Local Plans.¹ Alongside this, the Longbridge Area Action Plan calls for regeneration that will deliver sustainable development, housing and employment opportunities and so there is an obvious correlation with the principle of retirement housing. Furthermore, we know that providing accessible, well designed and age appropriate homes for older people within their own community, close to family, friends and local amenities is widely accepted as appropriate sustainable development.

¹ <https://www.local.gov.uk/housing-our-ageing-population>

The ExtraCare Charitable Trust (ECCT) has a unique model of creating vibrant Retirement Villages, delivering accessible, mixed tenure, supportive, care ready environments for people over the age of 55. They have a proven track record of partnering with Birmingham City Council and the HCA, delivering on time, cost and quality through the design and construction process, and maintaining a sustainable model for the delivery of extra care homes, and so this, along with local demographics made the site an ideal location for the Trusts' fifth Village in Birmingham. The Longbridge Retirement Village, in this context, sits at the transition of the old and the new, the commercial and the residential, the healthy and enabling, and delivers homes and local jobs with a community focus.

Following a Design Competition in early 2014, Nicol Thomas were appointed as Architects, taking the design process through Planning, Tender, and novated across to the main contract.



A resident of the Shenley Wood Village volunteers & helps behind the Bar (bottom)

The Site

The brownfield site consists of five acres falling 6.5m diagonally from the SE corner at its highest point to the NW corner. It fronts on to the Lickey Road, at the edge of the master plan demolition area and so there was very little urban/architectural context to draw from at the early design analysis stage.



The site edged in red

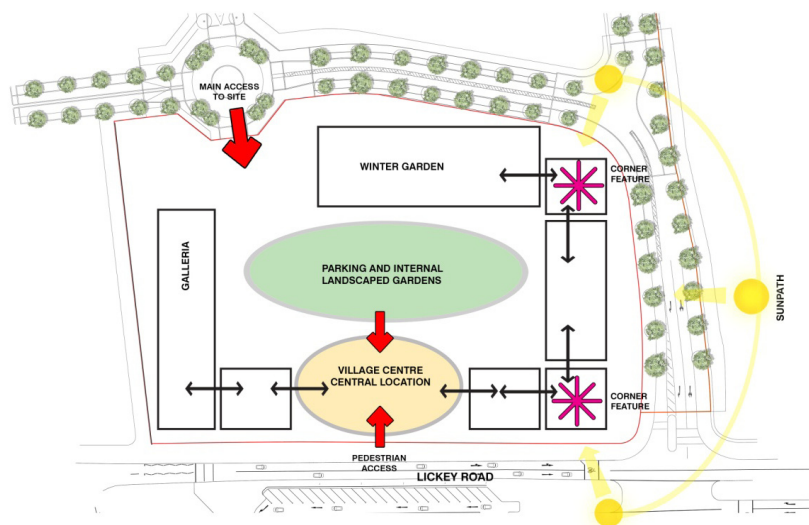
Existing nearby dwellings were predictably characterized by domestic scale brick and pitch roof features, but other than this, and due to the scale of the demolition, the site was effectively positioned in a 'desert of nothingness'. This unique situation opened up the opportunity to create a new (architectural) identity responding to the already established regeneration Design Code. This, along with the site's historic manufacturing 'cues' became our reference point for the retirement village design process.

Located between existing housing and the new shopping hub, the site takes on a new meaning and so it was agreed that an 'informal' connection between the two could deliver a commercial benefit that could be fed back into the scheme through activity programs. Connectivity to the wider community as well as building social networks became key; this set the scene for the building arrangement.

Site Layout

Positioned across the road from existing housing and a local school, the Retirement Village presents a commercial front where facilities are open and available to the wider community. This is the public face of the building and allows it to become 'self publicizing'. The main public entrance is conveniently located close to a pedestrian crossing, a bus stop, a taxi rank, and a short stay parking facility. Along this frontage we intentionally located the Gym, Hairdresser, Beautician, a small Shop, and a Bistro Bar with outdoor terrace for summer alfresco dining. All are independently accessible directly off the street and also from within the building's internal communal hub. This responds to the aspirations of both ECCT and BCC who were keen to deliver an 'outward facing' development which in turn contributes towards maintaining a sustainable community asset where residents can exchange and interact with the 'wider world'.

Vehicular access is discreetly positioned away from the public face of the building off Austin Avenue to discourage inappropriate use. Conveniently located off the car park is the resident only entrance. Internally situated between the two entrances is the warm and welcoming Reception Desk, providing unobtrusive supervision of both. These two points link to create the Village Street, off which the communal facilities radiate. They, in turn connect to the apartments that are distributed around the perimeter of the site creating both inward and outward facing activity. The principle defining character for this arrangement is progressive privacy.



Strategic site arrangement diagram

Design/Brief

The ExtraCare Charitable Trust's model is built around accessibility, support, opportunity, continued learning, dignity and independence. The key to achieving this are the extensive communal facilities arranged so that the provision to socialise, make new friends, learn new skills, or just sit quietly and watch the world go by are seamless and easy. Added to this model, the Brief required an imaginative response that created a 'wow' factor; that created identity and memory; a desire to return and engage.

Building Layout

At Longbridge the Village Centre is arranged around a naturally lit 'village square' where activities are easily accessible and where the void is traversed across via a glazed bridge link at first and second floor levels – people can literally choose how much they want to interact with this space. Facilities off the square include the following, which when combined, equate to circa 2000sq.m in area:

- Bistro
- Bar
- Village Hall
- Shop
- IT Suite & Library
- Games/Snooker Room
- Beauty Therapy
- Hairdresser
- Gym
- Hobby room
- Craft Room
- Greenhouse
- Manshed
- Launderette
- Wellbeing
- Enriched opportunities suite (to support people who live with dementia)
- Staff room and administration offices



Deliberately designed to be a 'place of destination', the architecture of space and scale of the Village Centre contrasts with the quieter more private areas containing living accommodation. Visual connections make it easier to belong to the spaces and activities become more accessible. It is well documented that social interaction and learning new skills bring social benefits for older people and so the design intention is that a sense of arrival and purpose encourage the use of these spaces.



Through this use of scale not just in the spacial experience but also in elements such as the Village Hall stage, the Bar, glazed screens etc the architecture delivers a legible environment that focuses on maximising both residents' and visitors' enjoyment and well being. The interior design is unobtrusive, led by the architectural approach. The result is a calm and contemporary environment.

The Village Hall

As Architects we are aware that the challenge is to design a space that is vibrant and enjoyable, and so its success could arguably be measured by its use. Up to 50 different activities are on offer per week within the Village Centre, including choir singing, IT, wheelchair aerobics, painting, yoga and gardening (to name but a few!), all of which are enthusiastically attended.

The layout adopts a progressive privacy approach with the Village Centre being at the heart of the public place. The 109 one bedroom apartments and 151 two bedroom apartments are distributed around the perimeter of the site connected to the Village Centre via secure controlled doors, and are distributed over five floors. To aid orientation, each level has subtle variations in colour and wall treatment so that residents can immediately recognise where they are. Corridors are roomy and varied and contain distinct features including winter gardens, a galleria, views out, and access to activities and to the roof terrace, all providing further opportunity to sit and chat with new and old friends.



The Bar

Apartments



Designed to be unobtrusively ‘care ready’, all apartments are fully accessible, self-contained with their own kitchen and walk-in shower room, and with their own individual front door. They are designed to allow flexibility of use, where, for example, the two bedroom apartments have the option to adapt the second bedroom to an office, guest bedroom, a dining room, or to simply allow couples to sleep separately if required.

Each apartment has its own outside private amenity space either in the form of a patio or a fully accessible balcony, all large enough to accommodate a small table and chairs. The smallest apartment is 54sq.m and the largest is 97sq.m. They are available on a mixed tenure basis as outlined below:

Total number of homes for Outright Purchase:	89
One bedroom -	28
Two bed -	61
Total number of homes for Shared Ownership:	119
One bedroom -	60
Two bed -	59
Total number of homes for Rent:	52
One bedroom -	21
Two bed -	31

Purchase and shared ownership homes are offered on a 120 year leasehold basis. Where a purchase forms part of a shared ownership, a rental fee will be due on the un-purchased portion.

One bedroom purchase and shared ownership guide prices are as follows:

40% shared-ownership (12 apartments available)	from £79,980
50% shared-ownership (18 apartments available)	from £99,975
75% shared-ownership (30 apartments available)	from £149,963
Outright ownership (28 apartments available)	from £199,950

Two bedroom purchase and shared ownership guide prices are as follows:

50% shared-ownership (15 apartments available)	from £122,475
75% shared-ownership (44 apartments available)	from £183,713
Outright ownership (61 apartments available)	from £244,950 - £359,950

One and two bedroom rental guidance prices are as follows:

One bedroom	£118.71 p.w.
Two bedroom	£140.71 p.w.

Additional weekly costs

Around £130 - £132 subject to type of tenure.

ExtraCare's benefits advisors ensure all residents are offered free, confidential advice and the Charity is committed to providing guidance and support for those with limited financial means. For residents renting a home and claiming full housing and council tax benefit, the weekly housing costs start from £46 per week for a one bedroom apartment.

Car Parking

The building is arranged over five floors around a central court containing safe and secure parking for up to 160 cars, and external amenity space. There's a lot to fit on to the site and the result is a squeeze on communal amenity space. We have subsequently introduced a raised terrace deck which not only shields a third of the car parking from view, but also allows opportunity for gardening, summer bar-b-q gatherings, and other such social events.



Design Standards



Residents' Entrance

The scheme is fully accessible and has been designed to meet all the HCADesign and Quality Standards requirement, is Lifetime Homes compliant, achieves BREEAM very good (public spaces), Secured by Design compliant, and Approved Doc and NHBC compliant. Elements of the wheelchair housing design guide have been incorporated as much as possible, the main exception being apartment kitchens. These are adapted on an individual need basis. Where practically possible, all ten

recommendations within the HAPPI Reports² have been incorporated; however, with a critical mass of 260 apartments it was not possible to maintain single aspect corridors/walkways. We have instead introduced a combination of features including variety in corridor width and articulation, regular views out with meaningful seating opportunities, a winter garden, a galleria, and mini winter garden all of which help to introduce natural lighting, ventilation, and assist with way finding.

Employment

The delivery of jobs for local people was an important target in the delivery of this project. During the construction period, the main contractor employed around 2,350 staff with circa 42% sourced locally. In addition, currently the completed occupied scheme has recruited around 40 village staff from the locality to provide care, hospitality, housekeeping and activity services. This includes full time and part time staff.

² <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design-building/HAPPI/>

Lessons Learned

Balancing the broad and diverse demands of designing, delivering and managing an ExtraCare Retirement Village is not easy. We quickly learned that early communication and collaboration was an intrinsic ingredient as we endeavoured to balance the wide ranging needs of stake holders:

- The Client (The ExtraCare Charitable Trust) including Development, Sales, and Operations – focused on delivering services, costs, programme, quality, and commerciality.
- The regeneration developer (St. Modwins) – focused on maintaining the overall wider regeneration aspiration of delivering a vibrant well designed and sustainable community; also wanting an involvement in the detailed planning process to ensure that the outline framework was maintained
- The Local Authority (Birmingham City Council) – focused on the strategic delivery of appropriate older people's housing and ensuring the development had a community benefit; Planning, including Urban Design played a key role in supporting and guiding the design, scale, mass, and finer detail of the proposals
- The Homes and Communities Agency (now Homes England) – focused on the appropriate delivery of services, investment opportunity, value for money, design standards and community benefit
- The wider community and general public (Longbridge residents) – focused on appropriateness and impact on the community; access to services and facilities; job opportunities; scheme entry criteria
- The main contractor (Galliford Try Partnerships) – focused on the practicalities of the construction; design, build and safety standards; availability of labour and materials; co-ordination of key elements; contract obligations and completion date

Workshops, consultations and engagement became the vehicles for collaboration which ensured that the development proposals were supported, whilst continuity of the Architect and Client representative from early sketches to building completion protected the design intent.

The successful delivery of this building and the service and value it provides its residents today is undoubtedly testament to the quality and commitment to the sharing of ideas; of listening; and of collaboration. What began three years ago as an aspiration to make a contribution to society and a hope that it would improve and enrich the lives of those who reside or work within it, has transpired into the reality that has not disappointed. Never-the-less, to create a building that delivers a service of excellence to its customer, in a time scale often dictated by finance and funding streams, at a cost dictated by viability, in a manner that satisfies Planning Authorities, in a convenient and safe environment very often appears deceptively simple!

Development Details

Partners: Birmingham City Council, Homes and Community Agency

Regeneration Partner: St. Modwins

Architects: Nicol Thomas Limited. Design, Planning and Novated across to the main contract

Employer's Agent and Quantity Surveyor: Arcadis

CDM/Principle Designer: Arcadis

Landscape Architect: Jackie Nightingale

Main Contractor: Galliford Try Partnerships

Structural Engineers: Couch Consulting

Construction costs including fit out and furniture: £48million

Form of Contract: Design & Build

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

Additional Information

Nicol Thomas are a multi-disciplinary architects practice delivering consultancy services nationally, including the design and build of extra care housing/retirement living from their offices at Fort Dunlop, Birmingham and Oldham, Manchester. For further information please visit: www.nicolthomas.co.uk



About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 40,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England and Wales to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population.

Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'knowledge hub' on specialist housing, our online and regional networked activities:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing choices that enable older and disabled people to live independently
- provide intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice developments, and
- raise the profile of specialist housing with developers, commissioners and providers to plan, design and deliver aspirational housing for an ageing population.

For more information about extra care housing, visit our dedicated pages at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingExtraCare>

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