



Housing LIN

Connecting people, ideas and resources

Case Study 161

Why city living for people in later life chimes

APRIL 2021

Written for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by Mæ principal **Alex Ely** and the practice's in-house editor **Peter Smisek**



Background

There is currently no private provision for high quality, independent living accommodation in Westminster and this residential project in the heart of central London by the Lifestory Group (formerly PegasusLife) offers a great opportunity to cater for this sector. Centrally located close to local amenities, **Chimes** offers a safer, sustainable development; supporting older people to live active, independent lives for longer.

Shortlisted for the 2021 Housing Design Awards, **Chimes** is a stylish collection of 39 one- and two-bedroom apartments, designed in the form of a mansion block with four quarters and positioned to reflect Big Ben's chime every quarter of an hour. It is also within walking distance of amenities such as grocery stores, pubs and restaurants as well as St James Park Underground and Victoria mainline and Underground stations. Buses stop outside the development and take approximately 10 minutes to Waterloo and Victoria.

Design philosophy

Mansion blocks first became popular in the early 19th century London in areas such as Westminster, Chelsea and Mayfair. They are typically 5 to 8 storeys to allow adequate light and air while maximising development. Wealthy Victorians favoured these locations, but when demand outstripped supply in the late 19th century, the stage was set for mansion blocks to be expanded into other fashionable areas. Well-known examples are Albert Hall Mansions in Kensington Gore and Prince of Wales Drives Battersea. Unlike conversions, mansions blocks are purpose built and offer a more carefully tailored set of spaces. Apartments in mansion blocks are usually spread over a single story and are accessed through a central core with a lift, making them a natural fit for people with reduced mobility. Mansion blocks would sometimes include communal outdoor spaces such as courtyards and gardens, provide residents with a more sheltered space away from the street.

Chimes is a contemporary take on a traditional mansion block with generous ceiling and window heights, shared amenities and architectural detailing. Like the traditional model, **Chimes** has repeated main architectural elements including: a large dedicated entrance for each group of apartments; lift cores that serve two to four flats per floor; street elevations that feature a base, middle and top, bay windows, some linked with sheltered balconies; and dual-aspect apartments with windows at the front and back of the block.



Unlike the majority of housing stock, (including age restricted housing), **Chimes** also contains all the modern elements of design necessary to allow occupants to age in their homes. This includes: no-step entrances, single-floor living, wide halls and doorways to allow a wheelchair, lever-style handles on taps and doors, level thresholds, kitchen cabinets suitable for people with arthritis, and adjustable wardrobe rail heights.



The [HAPPI \(Housing our Ageing Population: Plan for Implementation\)](#) report outlines that specialised retirement housing, including assisted living facilities, typically has lower densities than mainstream housing. This is because the residential units tend to be larger to accommodate residents' changing needs and there is more amenity and circulation space. **Chimes** is proof of this as the units are larger than normal for similar units in a city centre location. 38 of the 39 units have a spacious second bedroom to allow for guests or live-in carers.

Accommodation and services

The accommodation includes 1 single and 38 2 bedroom self-contained units with the following services for residents:

- Twenty four hour reception
- 38 car parking spaces in an automatic car stacking system with 24 hours access
- Guest Accommodation
- Storage cages that can be purchased upon request
- Additional storage at ground level for mobility aids and wheelchairs
- Communal kitchen cafe for social events
- Residents Lounge which can be subdivided into two distinct spaces
- Communal Courtyard
- Skyline Rooftop Terrace



In addition, there is a Wellness Centre/Spa comprising:

- Gym and stretch studio
- Steam shower
- Multi-purpose physiotherapy room that can be used for massages or discreet doctor's screening room
- Steam room
- Foot Spa
- Jacuzzi



Customer Journey

Chimes is about giving people the space they need whether in their own apartment or the communal facilities. This thoughtfulness starts with the entrance lobby, which is generously proportioned to welcome residents and guests. Off the lobby are separate entries for the apartments and the residents' lounge, which ensure residents' privacy. All entrance ways and thresholds are level and designed with ease of mobility in mind.

There are 2 lounges. The largest lounge is street facing and open plan, but can be divided into 2 smaller spaces. It can be used for private parties or general social activities. A smaller garden lounge faces the centrepiece of the development, namely a glazed cloister garden. Sliding doors open onto the courtyard which is filled with birch trees. This shaded space is designed to be a peaceful and restorative space for residents. The glazing means the garden can be viewed without obstruction on the ground floor, giving a wonderful sense of the outdoors in a city environment. There is also a rooftop terrace giving panoramic views of Westminster and providing additional outdoor space.



Apartments and Building Design

Each lift core only serves 2 apartments per floor. This makes it easy for residents to find their apartment as there are no long corridors. All homes benefit from a double-aspect orientation, ensuring plenty of natural light throughout the day.

The apartments all benefit from natural light and have good ventilation. The 2 bedroom apartments are dual aspect with 2.4m high ceilings in bedrooms, which rise to 2.6m in living areas.



COVID-19 and Future Lockdowns

The pandemic has presented a conundrum in retirement living from, the traditional dangers of social isolation and an environment where self-isolation is promoted.

Isolation is known to create loneliness and feeds depression and anxiety, and therefore retirement living will need to provide a home that will allow residents to self-isolate and socialise. According to research from Forbes and the MIT University Age Lab, it is stated that older adults, particularly older women, are more likely to live, or spend time, alone. The design and management of **Chimes** has the ability to support the needs of vulnerable residents, while facilitating social distancing. **Chimes** has a thoughtful and transparent approach to design that focuses on visual connectivity rather than overloading the development with amenities that do not promote community.

Architecturally, the design standards and mansion block layout of the building create a place where social distancing will not diminish the quality of community. The primary and secondary entrances allow residents the ability to come and go without feeling corralled in one central point. The two entrances flank the main residence lounge, but the high levels of glazing allows passive connections between residents. The circulation space is generous with 2.2m wide corridors.

The four cores, which serve two apartments per floor, and each penthouse individually, limits the level of repeated traffic between residents, but allows intimacy and community by allowing the residents to get to know their neighbours. With only 9 households per lift and cores and alternatives

for vertical circulation, residents can be shielded but have opportunities to get to know their neighbours. The building's design and use of glass allow passive interactions and areas for residents to connect if they wish to as well as cultivate and maintain connections.

The manager's office glazed walls, allow visibility and engagements with the residents and aid in managing deliveries and required services such as NHS prescriptions. Additional needs can be serviced by the 24 hour staff.



In terms of the amenities, the residents lounge has ample space and numerous zones for seating where residents can safely sit 2m apart from one another and have productive conversations. The lounge furniture uses antimicrobial surfaces and allows for easy cleaning. In the Wellness area, the multi-purpose physiotherapy room can be used for doctor's visits and examinations, thus shielding vulnerable residents from going to local surgeries.

The building's flexibility with its connection to nature and the outdoors will make self-isolating more palatable. The mansion block limit in height for 6 storeys of the 2 blocks will allow daylighting in all the apartments. 14 of the 39 apartments have terraces or balconies. The front elevations have full height bay windows, with openable side panels for fresh air, and the rear block apartments all have Juliet balconies that face the tree filled rear gardens of neighbouring properties. Two units on



the ground floor have winter gardens that connect directly to the glazed courtyard. In addition, communal outdoor spaces, such as the ground floor garden and a large roof terrace, ensuring that residents can continue socialise outdoors to minimise their risk of COVID-19 infection.

Design flexibility continues with the dual aspect apartment layouts designed to HAPPI principles and beyond Lifetime Homes' design requirements. Generous size and flexible layouts allow a care

worker or family member to stay if required. Combined with the numerous staircases and lifts and generous corridors, carers can minimise contact when required. The guest suite is available for family members to stay and support residents, and a staff suite is available for staff to co-locate with residents if there is another lockdown.

From a management perspective, numerous strategies can be put in place by the 24 hour staff to safeguard against future waves of COVID-19.

1. A standard operating procedure for individual residents with suspected and confirmed COVID-19 infection, including appropriate infection control precautions to protect staff and residents.
2. Staff should be trained to check the temperature of residents displaying possible signs of COVID-19 infection, using a tympanic thermometer.
3. Staff can be trained to measure other vital signs including blood pressure, heart rate, pulse oximetry and respiratory rate. This will enable external healthcare practitioners to triage and prioritise support of residents according to need.
4. Medical data must be recorded in a way that is useful for healthcare professionals called in an emergency situation.
5. Staff should work with GPs and local pharmacists to assist care requirements and coordinate prescription deliveries and doctors' appointments within the multipurpose physiotherapy room.
6. PPE can be made available onsite to protect vulnerable residents and staff.
7. Each apartment room has an emergency pullcord and residents have access to specialist telecare facilities in communal areas.

In conclusion, downsizing into an independent living development does not equate to having less amenity and space. The scheme promotes quality of space over elaborate specification. The mansion block typology, which the **Chimes** is modelled on, creates an atmosphere where downsizing is not at a loss, but creates opportunity for city living housing for a lifetime.

Key learning points/lessons learned

When the project got underway in 2015, the client expected more demand for luxury shared amenities, which is why the project included a larger range of more extensive amenities, such as a pool, a much larger spa and wellness area, as well as an externally accessible café and bar. However, the demand for these facilities turned out to be less than expected – the staffing costs would turn out to be too large and the publicly accessible café would operate at a loss. Original plans would increase the current service charge costs by a factor of 3.

However, Mæ were able to rationalise the space given to these amenities by downsizing the wellness area and adding three additional flats on the ground floor. These feature a winter garden and access to the planted courtyard, adding to the diversity of apartment types within the scheme. The café has been reimagined as a more modestly equipped communal lounge, while offering more social space for the residents. The downsized wellness area also allowed us to reduce the MEP bulkhead, and raise the floor to ceiling height to create a taller, lighter space.

Internal space throughout the scheme was further maximised by rationalising the wall thickness and shape of the building envelope facing Horseferry Road, safeguarding the project's viability.

In hindsight, parking provision could have been rationalised by negotiating a long-term lease of parking spaces at the nearby Channel 4 headquarters, which would result in a more affordable provision without needing to invest in an underground car stacking system.

Due to COVID-19 pandemic, we expect residents to increase their usage of delivery services for groceries and other goods. In the future, we will look to integrate a more specialised space to accommodate delivery unloading and distribution throughout the building.



Note

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

Image Credits

Permission given by Tim Crocker.

About Mæ

We are architects, urban designers and researchers. Led by Alex Ely, former Head of Sustainable Communities at CABE, Mæ design buildings that seek to address today's urban, social and environmental challenges. Our aim is always to create buildings and places that enrich culture and society. We thrive on collaboration. Working on regeneration projects for public and private sector clients, we talk – and listen – to colleagues and communities. Our design solutions match the client's brief with the varied day-to-day needs of the building's users. With a generalist approach we understand specialist needs. Whether it's health centres or care homes we design to meet specific requirements. Through creativity we plan delightful healthcare environments, avoiding an institutional feel, convinced that everything benefits from good design and that good design has a positive impact on our health.

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 25,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist/supported housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people to live independently in a home of their choice
- provide insight and intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice to support sector learning and improvement
- showcase what's best in specialist/supported housing and feature innovative projects and services that demonstrate how lives of people have been transformed, and
- support commissioners and providers to review their existing provision and develop, test out and deliver solutions so that they are best placed to respond to their customers' changing needs and aspirations

To access a selection of related resources on intergenerational living, visit our dedicated pages at: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Housing/HousingforOlderPeople/>

And for more information about how the Housing LIN can advise and support your organisation on community-led approaches to shaping your 'offer' for an ageing population, go to: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/consultancy/consultancy-services/>

Published by

Housing Learning and Improvement Network
c/o PRP, The Ideas Store
10 Lindsey Street, Clerkenwell
London EC1A 9HP

Email: info@housinglin.org.uk

Web: www.housinglin.org.uk

Twitter: [@HousingLIN](https://twitter.com/HousingLIN), [@HousingLINNews](https://twitter.com/HousingLINNews) & [@HLINConsult](https://twitter.com/HLINConsult)