



# Learning from the HAPPI Report

Housing for Older People

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**“Half of all babies born today  
will live to be 100”**

*(The Lancet, 2009)*

## Introduction

The influential HAPPI report has been instrumental in highlighting both the need and the opportunity to re-think the way in which housing and care for older people are designed and delivered.

To date, this sector has concentrated too much on getting grab rails in the right places and not enough on getting the buildings themselves in good locations. Communal entrances and lounges are usually huge, and flats are often small. More often than not, the desire to enjoy a convivial atmosphere with access to help if needed has been interpreted as institutional environments which are functional but not inspiring, and which keep us safe but not fulfilled. In many cases, we move into them because we have to, rather than because we want to. As an unintended consequence, they can make us feel older.

HAPPI has sought to turn this on its head. Whether for sale or rent, housing for older people should reach a standard which makes it a positive choice. Just like everybody else, older people want great homes in great places where they can lead active and purposeful lives.

As researchers and co-authors of the report, Levitt Bernstein wants to build on its findings and recommendations. Notwithstanding the need to respond thoughtfully to each set of circumstances, we feel that there are design and sustainability priorities which stand out as pre-requisites for good practice. These are relevant across the full range of older persons housing and, in many instances, are no different from mainstream housing priorities. In this short publication, we draw on examples of our mainstream and specialised housing projects to explore what good practice might look like and how better design can lead to a better quality of life.



**We'd like to see older person's housing become a mainstream consideration and a viable component of all sizable new developments and regeneration projects**

A 'mini 'Lifetime Neighbourhood - the iconic Brunswick Centre, situated in in the heart of Bloomsbury, now has more than 100 'sheltered residents', supported by Camden Social Services. Many have lived here since it was built in the 60s and others have been attracted by the accessible location and doorstep facilities

## 1. Getting the location right

The HAPPI report sent out a strong message about the importance of location. Many of the most successful schemes we visited were in lively, town centre locations; echoing the findings of the Governments 'Lifetime Homes; Lifetime Neighbourhoods' in challenging the preconception that older people want to retire to quiet, remote places.

In practice, safe, easy access to amenities and services can be the key to remaining active and independent. Many older people fear boredom and isolation as much they worry about deteriorating health or mobility, so well-connected sites have much to offer.

The challenge, going forward, lies not only in finding the right sites but also in finding the right development model.



Above: Here in Bermondsey, 10 elderly residents were re-housed in the first phase of redevelopment. We respected their wish to live close to the church and have provided a new doctors surgery and shops in later phases.

### Key points:

- prime sites in desirable places
- good access to shops and services
- safe and accessible neighbourhood
- good local care network
- integration with the wider community



Left: Urban and rural settings offer very different advantages and limitations. The project brief should be based on an understanding of the services and facilities which already exist in the immediate neighbourhood - seeking to complement rather than duplicate.



**As the 'baby boomers' of the 60s become today's older people, it is clear that they expect their housing to reflect the positive image they have of themselves**

**Bold, confident buildings remind us that not all older people are shy and retiring (Aylesbury Resource Centre, Southwark)**

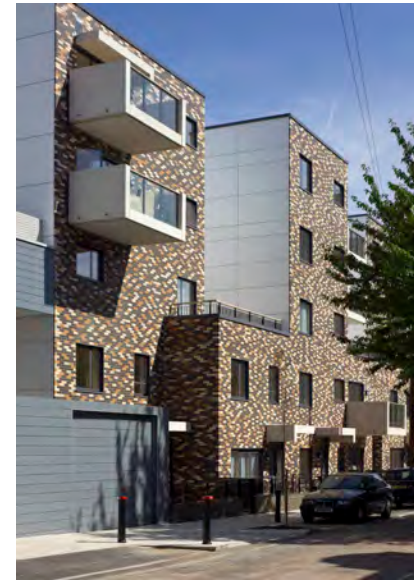
## 2. Being bold with the design

Many sheltered housing developments from the 80s onwards have been notable only for being ordinary.

But like all new housing, developments for older people should make a positive physical and social contribution to the neighbourhood. Each building should present a confident image, assume a strong presence in the public realm and be of its time and particular to its place – as interesting and stylish as contemporary developments aimed at younger markets.



Above: One of the more eye-catching HAPPI developments in the Netherlands – gives no visual clue that these are homes for older people.



Above right: At Granville New Homes, consultation with residents resulted in the use of striking materials and bold forms to create a strong street presence.



Left: Distinctive balconies and solar shading at Greengate House, Plaistow.

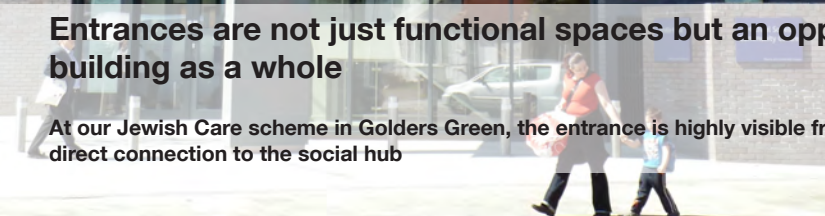
### Key points:

- strong street presence with active frontages
- bespoke design approach
- responding to local style and character
- appropriate scale and massing
- building and landscape working together



**Entrances are not just functional spaces but an opportunity to express the character of the building as a whole**

**At our Jewish Care scheme in Golders Green, the entrance is highly visible from the public realm. Once inside it has a lively feel because of its direct connection to the social hub**





### 3. First impressions

First impressions often become lasting impressions and entrances can say more about a building than any other single feature.

Large canopies with vehicle drop-off have their merits but they instantly 'medicalise' the appearance and are more ambulance friendly than people friendly. Convenience needs to be balanced with domesticity if we are to feel 'at home' rather than 'in a home'.

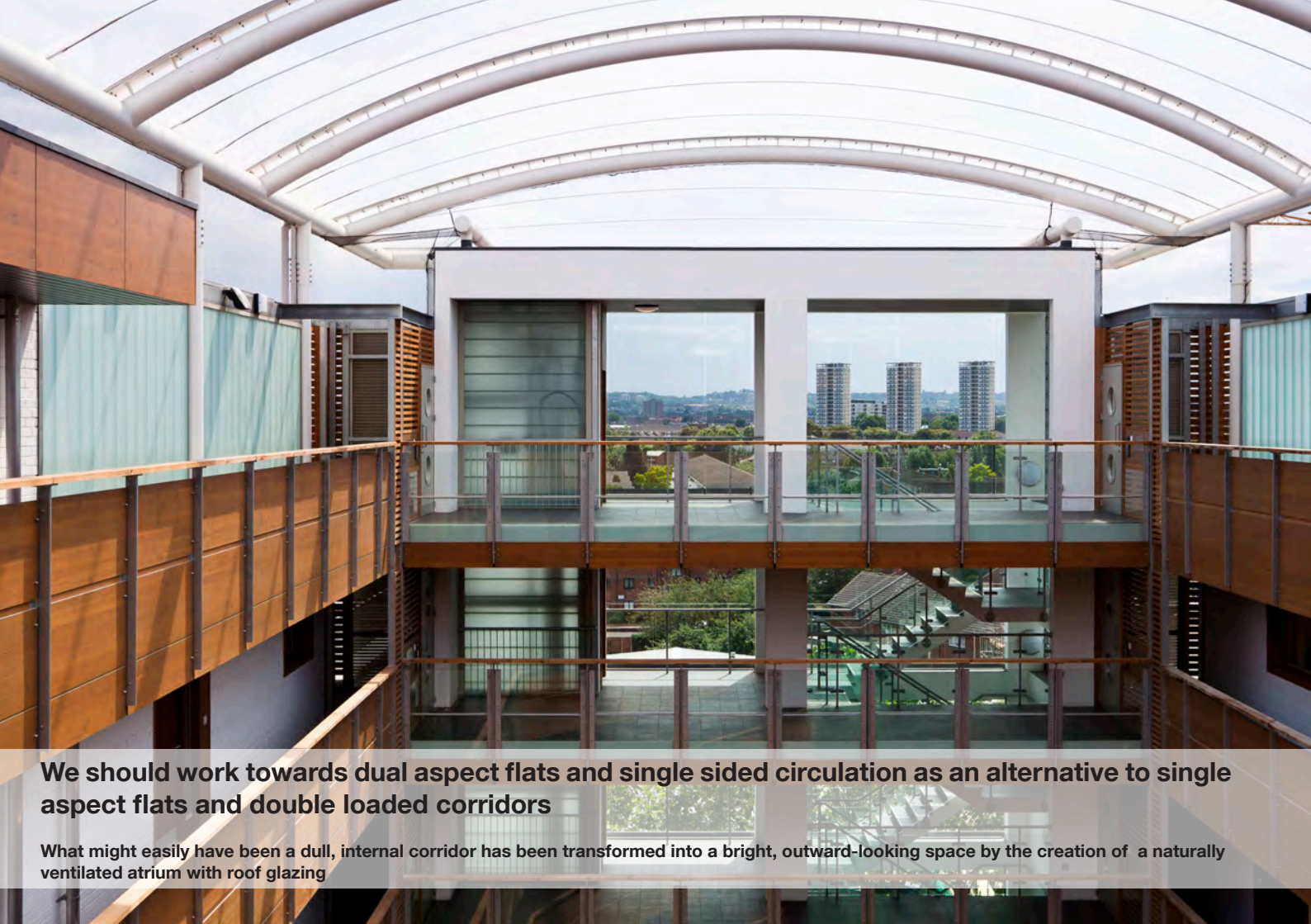
Where large developments have facilities which are open to the wider community, it will therefore often be appropriate to have small scale residential entrances to groups of flats in addition to the main public entrance. Private entrances to homes at street level can also work well and promote independence.



Above and left: the naturally lit main entrance of our Bermondsey project gives the building its strong street presence and is as welcoming by night as it is by day.

#### Key points:

- prominent but friendly entrance
- feeling instantly at home
- light and airy spaces
- connected to the social hub
- secondary residential entrances where appropriate



**We should work towards dual aspect flats and single sided circulation as an alternative to single aspect flats and double loaded corridors**

What might easily have been a dull, internal corridor has been transformed into a bright, outward-looking space by the creation of a naturally ventilated atrium with roof glazing

## 4. Re-thinking circulation

The form and layout of housing for older people has often been driven by the desire to put everything into a single building and connect all parts together as efficiently as possible under one roof. This may be appropriate when caring for people with very high care needs, but for those living independently with no, low or medium care needs, it can be off-putting.

There are many more inspiring alternatives to the dull double-loaded corridors and under-ventilated, single aspect flats which have been typical of many sheltered and Extra Care schemes.

Better solutions include naturally lit galleries and atria – models which maintain a legible, efficient layout while providing more convivial, outward looking circulation spaces and lighter, healthier homes.



Above: Personalised entrances and wide, sunny circulation spaces encourage social interaction.

Above right: This light-filled lift and stair core at Bermondsey makes even a simple routine like going down to collect the post, a daily pleasure.



### Key points:

- rational underlying diagram
- dual aspect flats
- daylight, ventilation and views out
- use of galleries and atria
- sunny spaces to meet and chat



Left: Even a narrow light well can bring natural light and ventilation to all levels.



**Providing well-designed spaces for people to come together means they don't need to be alone**

In our project for Jewish Care, most of the social spaces open onto the shared courtyard - making this sheltered outdoor space the heart of the scheme

## 5. The heart of the building

The most successful schemes usually provide indoor and outdoor spaces for residents to cook, eat or just talk together. These social hubs are instrumental in creating a sense of community; some sort of bond between residents, however loose and informal.

In the past we have tended to 'work to a formula' rather than look at a scheme in context. As a result, many developments have provided more lounges and activity areas than residents want or need. Much tighter funding brings an added reason to scale down provision particularly where good facilities already exist nearby.

Sometimes a large, friendly kitchen/dining/meeting space will be all that is needed but where ambitious new facilities are appropriate, opening them up to the wider community has social and revenue advantages.



Above: A large public space forms the hub of the Maartenshof care community Holland - the huge indoor cafe and outdoor eating area are used by the general public as well as by residents

Above right: Lively cafe and activity space at Darwin Court, Southwark



### Key points:

- a lively social hub
- new facilities to complement existing
- flexible spaces; adaptable over time
- plenty to see and do
- interaction with the wider community



**The close integration of landscape and architecture breaks down barriers between inside and outside**

**The theme of bringing the outside in, to prolong seasonal enjoyment of the natural world is relevant to both shared and private spaces**

## 6. Bringing the outside in

Getting older often means more time to use and appreciate the natural environment. Opportunities for gardening, growing food and flowers, outdoor exercise, partying and recreation are increasingly valued.

Even when active participation becomes difficult, full wheelchair access to all outdoor areas ensures ongoing enjoyment of spaces which can be designed to provide seasonal colour and texture and encourage wildlife.

At the same time, the design should take every opportunity to bring the outdoors in. Well-placed windows allow views to become familiar markers in our daily lives; keeping us in touch with seasonal change and feeling connected to the wider world. Conservatories and sun-spaces bridge the gap between inside and outside and make the most of spring and autumn sun – examples of small touches which make a big difference.



Right: Outdoor rooms designed for year-round enjoyment

### Key points:

- connecting with the outside world
- sheltered sunny spaces
- easy access from inside to outside
- conservatories and winter gardens for year round use
- opportunities for growing food and flowers



**‘Normal homes’ which are discreetly ‘care ready’ to accept the easy fitting of assistive technology at any stage, allow us to enjoy the present, and feel secure about the future**

Space for hobbies - one end of this living room has a ‘home office’ and wall-to-wall shelving for books, music and photography equipment



## 7. Accommodating need and lifestyle choice

At any stage in our lives, home should be a place which allows us to express ourselves freely, do the things we enjoy and spend time with those we are close to.

For older people private space often becomes more important rather than less. In later life we may spend more time at home and whilst we may have had to come to terms with downsizing we don't want spaces which feel small and limiting.

On the whole, interconnected spaces which can be opened up or separated to varying degrees offer the greatest flexibility. Good design gives us choice; allowing us to configure our home in a way which supports our preferred lifestyle as well as providing us with opportunities to shift things around as the mood takes us, or the family descend.

Right: Home matters just as much as we get older – we want flexible spaces which we can adapt and furnish to suit our needs and make our own

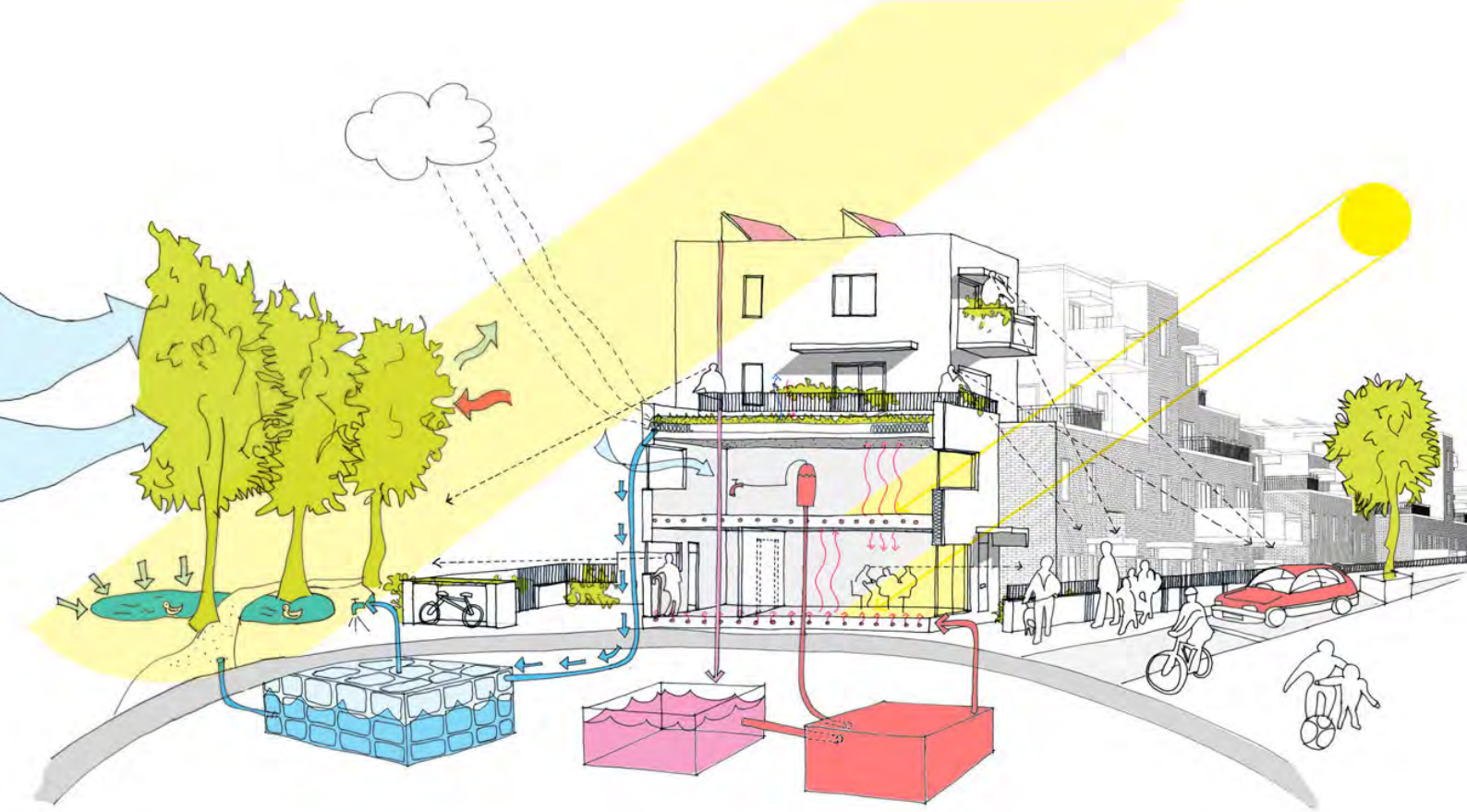


'Traditional' cellular layout (above left) contrasts with a more flexible open plan layout with interconnected spaces (above right)



### Key points:

- level access and unobtrusive wheelchair friendly design
- mostly two beds with flexible open plan living
- stylish and practical kitchens and bathrooms
- large private balconies or roof terraces
- 'care ready' homes to support independent healthy living



**We feel that older persons housing should be as environmentally friendly as other forms of housing – arguably more so**

**A model of contemporary sustainable living employing highly insulated external walls, concrete structure with high thermal mass, solar roof panels, surface water attenuation and rainwater harvesting, extensive planting and cycle storage**

## 8. Responding to climate change

Over the last 15 years, environmental sustainability and the need for development to adapt to, and mitigate, climate change is changing the way we design and build.

Housing for older people needs to respond to this challenge and in doing so, will reduce outgoings. Starting with a highly insulated external envelope, it will often lend itself to a range of sustainable technologies including communal boilers, photo-voltaic panels, ground sourced heat pumps, rain-water harvesting, grey water recycling and green and brown roofs. The need to keep cool in summer as well as keep warm in winter makes cross ventilation and solar shading just as relevant.

Increasingly, the responsibility to use resources wisely also fits with the priorities of older people. We now mind about not only the financial legacy which we leave our children and grandchildren but also the extent to which we can safeguard their ability to enjoy the natural world.



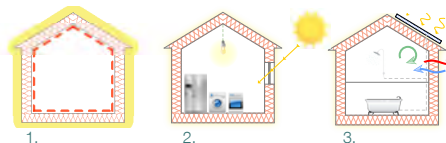
Above: Natural planting to attract butterflies and insects



Above right: Moveable screens for shading or privacy

Below: 3 step approach to energy saving -

1. Reduce heat loss - highly insulated airtight envelope
2. Reduce consumption - efficient appliances and passive solar gain
3. Reduce environmental damage - energy from renewable sources



### Key points:

- fuel efficient, double-glazed, super-insulated homes
- mechanical ventilation with heat recovery in winter
- solar shading and natural ventilation in summer
- efficient and controllable heating systems
- bio-diversity and habitat protection

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