



The challenge of a generation: A reflection on my past 20 years in the senior living sector

This viewpoint for the Housing LIN takes a look at the trends and challenges that have impacted the senior living and social housing sector over the last two decades as well as what we might expect to see over the next 20 years.

Written for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by
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Twenty years ago, I joined Pozzoni Architecture as a young and enthusiastic Project Architect. In August 1997, Tony Blair and New Labour were in government, the country was in shock over the death of Princess Diana, interest rates were 5.5% and it was relatively straightforward for first-time buyers to obtain a mortgage. My football team, Southampton, were relying again on Matt Le Tissier to maintain their Premiership status!

The architectural profession, meanwhile, was on a steady upward curve following the recession of the early-mid 1990s and Pozzoni was recruiting for staff to work on an ever-increasing workload. Over the course of the past two decades the profession has turned full circle: boom followed by recession followed by a slow but steady recovery. Pozzoni has progressed from a partnership, to an LLP to a limited company; and I have been a Director at Pozzoni for the past nine years.

For most of my time at Pozzoni, I've worked on projects in the social housing sector and designing for older people. During that time, many housing associations have merged, for assorted reasons. Government funding has also seen housing providers turn to new ways of subsidising their social housing developments; developing private housing with profits reinvested into the community is one example.

Extra care housing has also risen to the fore over the past two decades and at Pozzoni we have designed and delivered many extra care housing developments, of differing sizes, on a variety of straightforward, and challenging, sites for a wide range of clients, some of which have been written up as Housing LIN case studies.

One still unresolved issue is the title: extra care housing, housing with care, assisted living – they're all essentially the same product but to those not familiar with these terms, it can be confusing. I remember once explaining to a Local Authority Planning Officer that an extra care scheme was not a hospice.

At first extra care housing was seen as the alternative to residential care as some care homes closed and residents moved to the new extra care developments. For many, this provided freedom and independence, but anecdotally, individuals with higher dependency care needs seemed to struggle in extra care housing. There is a place for, and many benefits to, extra care housing but most would now agree that it is not a wholesale replacement for the high levels of care provided by nursing and dementia care homes. Interestingly, Pozzoni have housing clients who are now developing specialist care homes for people with advanced dementia.



Hare Hill, Rochdale: Extra Care following HAPPI principles (Also see Housing LIN case study no124: *Location, location, location! Hare Hill, Littleborough: The perfect location for an Extra Care Housing scheme*)

In 2005, I took a six-month sabbatical to research dementia design abroad. My findings were published the following year in the book *'Designing Homes for People with Dementia'* and the subject of dementia design and designing for older people continues to be my principal architectural design interest. The wider world now seems to be waking up to the so-called 'dementia time bomb' and consideration of dementia design is spreading beyond care homes and housing into other sectors too. It's encouraging to see that a major leisure centre operator recently joined the Dementia Action Alliance and that several planning departments are producing supplementary planning guidance on good design for older people.

I discovered during my travels, a fundamental aspect to dementia design was the drive to create a domestic scale environment within a regulated, and sometimes institutional, regime. To address this, care providers in Scandinavia, the Netherlands and Australia would design care homes for people with dementia to live together in self-contained, small group 'households'. With our clients we began to develop the 'household model' within the UK context of staffing ratios, CQC requirements, funding constraints, etc. The household model continues to evolve and there are now visitors from abroad coming to the UK to understand how dementia care is designed and delivered here.

Another key aspect gleaned from abroad is the open-plan living arrangements. Being able to see where one is going, where one has been, and the stimulation from sounds and smells of food can help to compensate for the impairments that dementia can bring. One challenge with this style of living is that fire officers have always been nervous of open-plan living areas, particularly in multi-storey buildings. Consequently, Pozzoni has worked closely with specialists to develop fire engineered solutions to address these concerns and create environments that are homely, yet stylish and sensitive to the needs of the residents.



Belong Atherton: Open plan household living

Another trend over the past few years, has also seen care and extra care schemes become community hubs, with communal facilities open to the wider neighbourhood. Location has always been key to the success of this concept and the nature of the facilities on offer. Working with the community, not competing, is also key to success. However, in recent years many providers are re-appraising the communal areas in their current and proposed developments. Multi-use of communal space and the ability to convert under-used communal spaces back to living accommodation is now a key design driver for architects to address.



Belong Didsbury: Care, Dementia Care, Independent Living and Community Hub

The past two decades has also seen the continuous rise of modern methods of construction. Pozzoni has designed and delivered many timber frame houses, apartments, structural insulated panel systems (SIPS) and schemes with bathroom pods over the years, but the challenge always seemed to be in achieving an economy of scale to be cost-effective. In recent times however, spurred on by the current housing crisis and an ever-increasing skills shortage, the need to build quality housing quickly and efficiently has risen to the fore again. With these two issues unlikely to disappear anytime soon, prefabrication and modular construction will become increasingly prominent in the architectural, property and construction world.



Showell Park, Wolverhampton (SIPS construction for Senior Living Housing)

So, what will the next twenty years bring to the profession? In the absence of a crystal ball... Prefabrication and modular construction are likely to increase in prominence. The need to procure new housing to address the housing crisis and the construction skills shortage (which will only be exacerbated by Brexit) will drive this further. At Pozzoni we are actively researching this area with our clients to remain ahead of the curve.

Senior living in town and city centres will surely become more popular in the future. Proximity to amenities, transport connections, and the life and activity of our town and city centres can make this an attractive offer. Overcoming the barriers of security, conflict with city centre night-time economies, and an often age un-friendly urban environment have to be addressed at all levels: from strategic planning to detail design.



Urban senior living: Village 135, Manchester

Related to this will be the trend for inter-generational communities. Older people have much to contribute in creating balanced communities, in urban, suburban and rural settings. In the Netherlands and Denmark, there are schemes where University students can live in low-rent accommodation in return for spending time with residents of a care or extra care scheme. Such initiatives are already taking off in the UK and the logical extension is for mixed-use developments to include senior living housing. Again, there are several developments in the UK which are already addressing this issue.

Finally, 'sustainability' in the wider sense of the word should continue to underpin building designs, i.e. 'the three pillars of sustainability': environment, social and economic. Without successfully addressing all three, we risk creating developments that have a long-term negative impact on our communities.

Note

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

About Pozzoni Architecture

With over thirty years' experience, Pozzoni has built up an impressive portfolio of public and private sector developments including commercial, education, healthcare, leisure, mixed-use, residential and senior living projects from its offices in Manchester and London.



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 the Housing LIN's comprehensive list of online resources on designing for dementia visit:

www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/housinganddementia/

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