

# Putting Inclusive Design into Practice

Prepared for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by  
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## 1. Introduction

In a society which has an ageing population and, for the first time, has more older people than younger people, there is a compelling need to do much more to improve the accessibility of older people's housing. But it's more than just accessibility design standards. It's also about moving away from traditional thinking which underpins what and how we design. This thinking is very much based upon a mindset of special needs, functional needs and "DDA". It's also about what we actually consider to be older people's housing, usually considered to mean sheltered and extra care housing.

So when doing its own strategic planning for an ageing population, Pennine Housing\* realised that it needed to change its thinking, from traditional design to **Inclusive Design (ID)**. Designing in a way that is functional without compromising on quality and appearance. **Easy-to-live in but nice to look at** or, put another way, **DDA with style!**

So we took the opportunity to use the development of Pennine's third extra care housing scheme as a pilot to having a go at putting inclusive design into practice.

Although we used the development of extra care housing (now regarded as specialist housing for older people), we also recognised that designing for an ageing population is not exclusive to sheltered or extra care housing. Given that most people want to continue living in ordinary housing as they get older, we need to consider the design of our mainstream stock i.e. **ordinary**, general needs housing through refurbishment, new build and in the provision of individual adaptations. Indeed, to achieve the biggest impact, it has to be about making our current homes more suitable.

However, we had to start somewhere and the opportunity of building our third extra care housing scheme was a great chance to make a start. The timing was right and it was a project that was within the direct control of the Supported Housing team who were keen to champion inclusive design. We took the approach of **better to have tried and failed rather than not to have tried at all!**

The development of the scheme began, on site, in April 2008 and the building work was completed in Nov 2009. However, the work doesn't stop there. It's now about rolling out our learning about inclusive design into normal Pennine business. It's also about sharing this learning with colleagues in social housing and those working in the field of adaptations.

*\* Pennine Housing 2000 is a Registered Social landlord, established in 2001 following the large scale voluntary transfer of stock from Calderdale Council. The Organisation is based in Halifax, West Yorkshire and is now part of the Trans-Pennine Housing Group, along with Green Vale Homes.*

Sharing this learning and demonstrating how it can be done in practice has been going on throughout the lifetime of the pilot, through a series of talks and presentations, nationally, regionally and locally.

Turning the theory into practice has not been easy. There have been many challenges, it's been a very steep learning curve but we have had fun along the way! Most importantly, our ID project has achieved what we set out to do. **We have put principles into practice. We have demonstrated that it is do'able, often at no extra cost and that inclusive design can be achieved through a change our thinking. Most importantly, we have shown that inclusive design works in practise!**

**"Stunning", "wow", "fabulous", "five star hotel", "contemporary"** are comments that have become synonymous with our completed pilot project.

On reflection, we would conclude that Inclusive Design is just "Good Design" and common sense, not something separate or special. But what we know is that, like common sense, ID isn't always applied. And to make that happen requires time, effort, commitment and sheer determination but it's worth it!

## 2. Background

Pennine prides itself on being a learning Organisation, and whilst the Supported Housing management team had learned a lot along the way about good design in extra care housing, they still believed that something more needed to be done. Not just to build a well designed scheme but an inclusively designed scheme. And so the Supported housing team set itself the ultimate challenge - to build a scheme that they themselves would want to live in, not a scheme for older people, based on the **"us and them"** way of thinking.

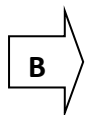
Underpinning this thinking, there were three main drivers for change:



### **Customers at the heart of what we do**

Pennine had already done a lot of consultation with older customers about what makes a good home. Customers gave very clear messages– whilst it is important to have homes that are easy to live in and easy to manage, small things matter too. It's about attention to detail and finishing touches. It's about a *home not hospital* look.

And as well as setting out expectations, Pennine also had a good understanding of its customers in terms of customer profile - 40% tenants are 60 years + and 60% with long-term illness/disability. And a huge and ever-increasing demand for adaptations (£1m +). Overall, reflecting the national picture. Yet most older tenants live in general needs housing. So improving the design of mainstream stock needed to be part of Pennine's strategic plans, as well as in sheltered and extra care housing.



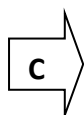
### **Understanding the Direction of National Policy**

In terms of equality for disabled people, it is traditional in housing to see disability as a *'special needs'* issue rather than as a mainstream customer issue.

*"Inclusive design can remove the barriers and build in equality from the start, rather than adding something on afterward to deal with the "problem". (Disability Equality Duty)*

In terms of housing for an ageing society, there are similar messages. As people get older, most still want to live in ordinary homes in ordinary communities. And although sheltered and extra care housing schemes both have a valuable role to play, these should be considered as *specialist housing for older people*, not *older peoples housing* per se. But wherever older people live, there needs to be a change of

mindset, from *special needs* and functional adaptations to designing homes more inclusively.



### **Learning**

Pennine was keen to learn lessons from its own previous schemes and from others too. A lot of time was spent looking at good design elsewhere, including a development by Habinteg Housing Association which included a Lifetime home and a property designed to full wheelchair standards. Both properties had been so thoughtfully and sensitively designed that the look and quality had not been comprised by accessibility and functionality features. This inspired us to do more.

## **3. The Starting Point**

Against this background, Pennine Housing was about to start building its third extra care housing scheme in May 2008. The specification had been written with Pennine's Supported Housing Management team, detailed plans had been drawn up, planning approval had been granted and a local contracting partner, Southdales had been appointed. The "normal" Project team had been established, comprising Pennine's Project Manager, Pennine's Technical Coordinator, Southdales Project Manager, Quantity Surveyor and Site Manager.

So whilst the extra care housing project was well established from a design point of view and was about to start on site, Pennine's Supported Housing team was determined to do more. At that point, Pennine managed to get in contact with Alison Wright, whose work is featured in the Government's first National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society: *Lifetime Homes: Lifetime Neighbourhoods*. Alison agreed to work with Pennine to help put the theory into practice.

And that's when it all began. In April 2008, **the Inclusive Design (ID) Team** was established, adding a new layer to the traditional project management arrangements. Normally, projects are led by our technical and development staff. This would mean that design samples would be considered at site meetings, in and amongst all the other discussions that need to be had to run projects. And whilst samples would be taken to site meetings for the Project team to approve, these would only be the bigger items. The vast majority of the very detailed design features would just be chosen by the contractor and their subcontractors who would use the things they always use. And why not? Why would they do anything differently? And the scope of the specification allowed this, through the "or similar" clause.

## **4. The Inclusive Design Team**

However, the creation of the Inclusive Design team changed all this. The ID team was established as the mechanism for sourcing, deciding and approving every single design detail, fixture and fitting for the scheme. The team comprised:

- **Pennine's Head of Supported Housing Services** - who was the Champion for ID and was determined to have a go at putting the inclusive design theory into practice. She set up and led the team, and acted as the main customer representative
- **Pennine's Extra Care Service Manager** – who was able to bring valuable operational experience thus ensuring the design would work in practical terms. She also set up the Customer Involvement Group (CIG) which ran in parallel with the ID team, and led the CIG in a way that the members felt fully involved and had a thoroughly enjoyable experience.
- **Pennine's Project Manager** – who was responsible for overseeing all aspects of the project including the ID aspects and kept a track on all things decided as well as controlling costs, given that the ID aspects of the project had to be delivered within existing budget.

- **Pennine’s lead Technical Coordinator** – who ensured that designs complied with technical requirements but with a very open and positive attitude. And throughout has successfully challenged colleagues who tend to have a more traditional “*maintenance first*” approach and which our experience has shown, can, if not challenged with confidence, be a big barrier to change
- **The Architect (Langtry Langton)** – who had already put a great deal of time and effort into designing an excellent scheme but was prepared to do more and get involved in all the detailed design, albeit this was over and above the normal architect’s brief. And as an experienced designer, was able to bring many ideas and suggestions to a lot of the detailed design
- **The Contractor’s Project Manager (Southdale)** – who led the whole of the contractor team, including the many subcontractors, and managed the barriers which arose at times throughout the chain, as well as ensuring the ID team’s learning curve didn’t hold up the programme by making sure key decisions were made within timescale. And who also ended up sourcing some alternative products directly since the contractors supply chain found this difficult at times.
- **And the Inclusive Design Consultant (Easy Living Home)** - who inspired the team about Inclusive Design and helped us challenge ourselves and our thinking to improve our understanding of principles and products.

The Team’s focus was always about the customer and inclusive design. **Stylish whilst usable. Suitable for most but not “DDA”. Quality not comprised by functionality.** And as a Team, we moved away from the traditional way of thinking. From the traditional adaptation-look of *older peoples housing* to designing sensitively and thoughtfully. Every single sample and feature that the ID Team sourced and considered for approval had to pass their crucial test of “**would I want that in my home**”? Just in the same way that if you were employing a contractor to fit e.g. a new bathroom in your home, you wouldn’t leave it up to the contractor to choose all the detailed fittings. It was the change of thinking together with the establishment of the ID team, from technical to customer, from accessible design to inclusive design that has enabled Pennine to turn the theory into practice.

Towards the latter stages of the project, the ID Team compiled an inclusive interior decoration brief to find an Interior Decoration Company who also worked to the principles of inclusive design in their furniture and décor. Following a procurement process (which was, in itself, another example of doing it differently), the team appointed, **Stanbridge Interiors** to do the interior decoration of the scheme. Stanbridge were the last but very crucial piece of the whole inclusive design jigsaw and the results speak for themselves.

## 5. Framework of the Inclusive Design Team

At the team’s first meeting in April 2008, the group set out the framework within which it would operate.

### Aim

- To use the development of Pennine’s third extra care housing scheme (Willow Court) as an opportunity to put the theory of inclusive design into practice.

### Principles

- To change our thinking – from functionality and DDA to inclusiveness
- From the ‘medical to the social model’ of disability
- Balance quality and style with functional and accessible
- From ‘*older peoples housing*’, ‘*special needs*’ and ‘*designing for the disabled*’ to suitable for most, ‘*us not them*’ and ‘*Designing for our Future Selves*’

- To challenge the manufacturers /contractors throughout the supply chain to think and design more inclusively
- Move from the usual products and suppliers and avoid the *or similar* syndrome by sourcing better products

### **Outcomes we were aiming for**

- A scheme we would want to live in – through sensitive and careful design, with attention to detail, high quality and a non-institutional look
- A learning opportunity – to develop our own knowledge of inclusive design, what products are on the market and how to *make it real*
- To come up with a set of Pennine Design standards, covering the spectrum from extra care housing to things we can include within mainstream refurbishment and adaptations and compile a directory of products to illustrate
- To develop a robust set of client requirements which mean we don't start from scratch each time we work on a new project (often with a different project team) by capturing lessons learned from this and other projects
- Give us something real and tangible to help improve awareness and understanding throughout our own organisations (mainstreaming it) and within the supply chain
- A commercial edge – doing something a bit innovative and dynamic
- To champion Inclusive Design within the wider social housing sector by sharing our learning, nationally, regionally and locally.

### **Requirements of those involved**

- Extra time and commitment at the initial stage i.e. the learning curve – to work together as part of the ID Team
- Open minds and willingness to challenge ourselves and each other
- Enthusiasm and an “up for it” attitude
- To take responsibility for sourcing and approving all samples rather than this being done via the usual arrangements

### **The Givens**

- to comply with the (then) Housing Corporation's Scheme Development Standards
- not to incur any extra costs – must be done within budget
- not to cause any delay to the programme

### **Practicalities to making it happen**

- change the normal project arrangements – ALL samples to be approved by Inclusive Design team, not via site meetings
- ID meetings to run alongside site meetings (monthly)
- Involve customers throughout via the Customer Involvement Group. This ran in parallel to the Inclusive Design Team, and was tasked to product-check and approve all design samples proposed by the ID Team and help make specific choices, where necessary.

## 6. What Difference has it Made?

Following a self assessment of the pilot, the main conclusions of the ID team are listed below:

- We plugged a gap - it's about the right team with the right approach.
- It wouldn't have happened without the ID Team
- We have broken away from "DDA" and a building regulations approach. We have changed our thinking
- We have been customer-driven not technical driven.
- We have accepted we can't design to suit everyone – it's about suitable for most not all
- There wasn't any guess work or assumptions – we knew what our customers wanted and the Customer Involvement Group kept us on track
- We weren't afraid to involve older people but we did the ground work so they could also challenge themselves and raised their expectations
- Having customers directly involved is a must. They bring a fresh and real perspective and make sure we get it absolutely right. It also extends the learning and understanding and they are the real champions of the cause because it is customers who are best at convincing others, not professionals
- We asked ourselves the questions e.g. do we really need Braille signage or could we rather put the money into making the kitchens higher quality?
- We weren't risk averse. We made bolder decisions (e.g. slip resistant flooring in kitchens instead of total non-slip to get a better look at same price)
- We had a team who together brought a mix of skills, knowledge and experience but weren't afraid to learn or challenge or change.
- We challenged and pushed the supply chain
- We found better products, most of which didn't cost more
- We kept within budget
- Attention to every detail makes a huge difference
- We avoided the "*or similar*" clause
- We put in the extra time to get it right
- We can improve quality at no extra cost
- This hasn't been achieved on any other projects that members of the team have been involved with
- Inclusive design = good design
- It worked, we have put it into practice and the extra effort was worth it!
- We have designed a scheme that we would want to live in.
- We had designed for our future selves

## **7. Inclusive Design in Practice**

All the detailed design features that were incorporated into the scheme, both inclusive design and good design have been captured into a design schedule which will be used to inform future projects. Some highlights are listed below;

- Chrome handrails
- Light over mirror in shower room
- Higher specification lights in kitchen and bathroom
- Higher quality shower seats
- L-shaped toilet roll holder
- Warden call pull cords that can be hooked off
- Signage design that is non-institutional but colour-coded for coordination and non-glaze finish
- Careful language and keeping signage to a minimum
- Telescopic spy holes in flat doors
- Concertina letter box cages
- Higher quality door handles and thumb locks
- Task lighting under wall cupboards in kitchens
- Higher quality look shower seats
- Laminate look slip resistant flooring in kitchens
- Contemporary and bold interior design with bespoke furniture
- Interior decoration included all finishing touches – vases, pictures etc.
- Contemporary choices for kitchen cupboards, work surfaces and handles

And things we didn't have:

- Braille signage
- No Pennine Housing signs or "official opening" plaque
- Standard non slip vinyl in kitchens
- Strip lights in kitchen
- No standard sanitary ware fitted in the public WCs (soap dispensers, hand driers)
- Flashing smoke alarm "beacon"!

## **8. The Main Learning Points**

- It needs to be customer led
- It will only ever work if the main players involved are up for it
- Although we had a separate Customer Involvement Group rather than customer representatives on the ID Team, this was felt to be a more meaningful way to involve customers. The Customer Group could go at a pace and pitch that was right for them but the group ran alongside the ID team, so it was intrinsically linked. It would have been far too onerous being sat round the ID table. And it also meant that involvement wasn't restricted to design only as other aspects of the project were discussed with

the Customer Involvement Group e.g. development and appointment of the Care Providers.

- Subcontractors struggled to source products that we were satisfied with. They weren't clear on what we were looking for when we said we don't want the usual standard products. It often wasn't because they were reluctant to give choice. Just a case of not understanding what we were looking for. Changing the thinking is a big ship to turn! This led to a lot of to'ing and fro'ing. Would suggest that the Inclusive Design team takes responsibility for sourcing alternatives not via subcontractors. It is time-consuming but manageable.
- Beware that the specification doesn't always state choice for client – so need to build into specifications to avoid contractors sticking to letter of the contract and possibly ordering early without getting into choice discussions
- A good Architect is a vital member of the team (obviously to get a good building in the first place!) but can bring such a lot to the detailed design which does link back to the bigger design and can help the team work through the details e.g. by producing detailed drawings and can bring ideas on the details too (we had this!)
- Accept that it won't be easy at the beginning – not everyone will automatically be keen and eager and the team will take time to gel together (forming, storming, norming and performing!)
- We should have walked round site more to check the actuals and had flat mock ups
- Ploughing through details takes a lot of time but if learning is captured and good products catalogued then this would be easier for future projects (although would need to be kept fresh and current)
- This will happen purely through a specification. A good specification is a great starting point but will never be the total answer.
- The earlier the team gets going the more time to get things sorted
- Having a show-flat proved really invaluable for a design check point of view (not done for that reason but picked up a lot from the show-flat)
- The ID Team did get, at times, bogged down with costs. Not strictly the role of the team whose focus was to source and approve quality products.
- However, whilst you do need to have aspirations, it does need to be delivered within budget so will always need a careful balance between aspiration and reality when sourcing products and setting out wish lists
- Smarten up – a tighter timetable and design schedule of items to be sourced, purchased and approved
- Paying for samples might be a problem although we managed on the whole
- Buying things from non-wholesale could be a problem if buying in bulk e.g. towel rails
- Don't ever approve without seeing a sample – what you see in catalogues or on the internet is not always what you think!
- Hard to determine elemental costs for products within a bigger project e.g. couldn't disaggregate the individual costs for grab rails as this was subsumed into overall sum for bathrooms so have to treat each project differently for cost and approach. And there will inevitably be more flexibility the bigger the project.



- Would be better to ask contractor, at spec/tendering stage, for a provisional sum for “accessories” rather than having things like grab rails in with bathroom costs – would give greater flexibility and more clarity on where and how to juggle.
- It is worth including any interior decoration in the contract as this links the finishing schedules into the construction schedules and the Team can then control/monitor proposals rather than this being done separately but need to appoint as early as possible.
- Should have paid more attention to making sure that the landscaping contractor understands the ID brief / spec– what we think and how they are interpreted are not always the same!
- It will get harder to achieve Inclusive design, given pressure to comply with Code for Sustainable Homes as it means range of products is likely to be more restricted.
- Would all partners do this?? Possibly not as it might be over and above their contracted roles
- Whatever the framework and contractual arrangements, it’s the personalities that make it work!

## 9. Feedback from Customers, Visitors and Partners

The scheme opened in November 2008 and the feedback we have had so far, from residents and visitors has been marvellous. Some comments are listed below.

*“We knew as soon as we walked in that this was the place for Dad. He still has his independence and we have peace of mind, knowing that he is safe. And we can have lunch here with Dad and even stay the night in the guest room or in Dad’s spare room. It’s just fantastic.”*

Relative

*“I was very very impressed. I particularly liked the interior design of the place. In terms of the design and the layout downstairs I have never seen anything better in sheltered housing and not surprised that you were oversubscribed three times over. In fact, it is the first scheme I have seen that I would actually consider moving into”.*

Housing Association colleague

*“Certainly challenges the stereotype of sheltered housing”*

Government Office for Y&H

*“I have seen many extra care schemes but this is way above. Well done!”*

Funder

*“We were blown away by the quality of the scheme....we want to book our place! And we are now talking to our Board as we are hoping to do something similar”*

Housing Association colleague

*“Pennine’s lead in making their Willow Court project a pilot for Inclusive Design is a valuable demonstration for the whole sector. The drive and dedication shown by Sue Lewis and her Team throughout this ‘learning curve’, and the design guidance disseminated in this document will save valuable time and costs for other housing providers wishing to follow their example.*

*A lot has been written and spoken about inclusive design, but design is a visual and tactile medium and there are still very few good examples of completed inclusively design schemes available as exemplars to the industry. Willow Court demonstrates so well the sensitive balance between look, feel and functionality which can potentially transform peoples' lives".*

Alison Wright - Easy Living Home

*"To be involved with this from the 'lines on paper' stage to something 'physical' has been a complete eye opener. As well as feeling proud, I also feel very privileged to have been involved in a Group that was given such opportunities to have a say in so many aspects of this project. The Customer Involvement Group have met many times and we have had laughs, agreements, disagreements, discussions, debates and more discussions. We have learned, challenged, grown, been able to voice disappointment and been educated.*

*The way the Group developed, felt valued, and was allowed time and space to make decisions. And we would love to continue to be involved again, should the opportunity arise and would look forward to it.*

*Thank You Pennine for not being afraid of asking people to be involved from such an early stage. Don't let anyone say team work doesn't work! The only guarantees are: A - it won't be easy and B - it will be worth it."*

Member of the Willow Court  
Customer Involvement Group

### **Comments from the Visitors Book**

*Fantastic*

*Like a five star hotel*

*Excellent finish – spot on*

*Looks fab*

*Wow, stunning, breathtaking*

*Absolutely took my breath away*

*Amazing*

*Congratulations – looks nothing like a scheme for older people*

*What a fabulous place to live. I'll bear it in mind when I need it!*

*Love the whole place – its WOW, amazing*

*Gobsmacked – credit to Pennine and Southdales*

*Wonderful*

*Impressive, glorious, when can I move in?!*

*Beautiful*

*Fantastic, designed for 21st century, modern living but with a real quality, homely feel*

*Frankly breathtaking. Never seen anything like it*

*Top notch design*

*Brilliant – I know my Dad will be happy here*

*Can't wait to move in. See you in 30 years!*

*Great place to live, very innovative. I would certainly live here – well done*

*Much better than anything I have seen before*

*Wow – this place is unbelievable*

*A great concept*

*It was a pleasure to be involved in this scheme (mechanical contractor)*

*I am at a loss for words to express my delight. You have put the 'smile' into Willow Court*

## 10. Rolling Out the Learning

To date, the Head of Supported Housing, together with the inclusive design consultant from Easy Living Home have done a series of presentations to a variety of audiences, including:

- National Housing Federations – Lifetime Homes conference (Nov 08)
- Northern Housing Consortium’s Adaptations Conference (May 09)
- Synergy Solutions Development Consortium (with other Housing Association partners) – Feb 09
- Trans Pennine Housing Asset Management team – July 09
- Calderdale’s Accessible Homes Agency – Nov 09
- Housing for an Ageing Society Conference – Northern Housing Consortium (Jan 2010)

The Head of Supported Housing has also met with other Housing Association colleagues on a more informal basis following their attendance at conferences. Information about the project has also been provided as a good practice case study to the National Housing Federation, Northern Housing Consortium and Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

A full evaluation of the scheme will be done with residents by the Customer Involvement Group in twelve months time as it continues to be about learning and continuous improvement.

## 11. The Bigger Challenges

Whilst inclusive design is moving up the agenda, there is still a way to go and there are other pressing priorities, sustainability being at the top of the agenda. This doesn’t always sit neatly alongside inclusive design so compromises are and will inevitably have to be made. But whatever the challenges, the housing sector needs to be wakening up and facing the future.

***“It (the ageing society) is not something to be left to the Habintegs or the Housing 21s. This is for each and every RSL .....”***

David Orr, CE, NHF 2008

Whilst Pennine’s project did demonstrate that inclusive design doesn’t necessarily cost more but is about a change of thinking, it may be more difficult to achieve when doing this on a smaller scale e.g. an adaptation to an individual customer’s home where there is not such a big pot to play with. On the other hand, a project on the scale of an extra care scheme is arguably harder to do within costs because of the multiples which wouldn’t apply to much smaller projects. Whatever, the nature of the job, it is achievable. And of course we should be moving to giving choices which customers may want to fund themselves rather than basing everything upon what the public purse is funding.

Cost will be an issue as some ID products are seen as “specialist” for which there is a cartel-type market e.g. grab rails, shower seats. Yet the sector could drive down better pricing with its collective buying power. However this would require a commitment throughout sector to Inclusive Design and at this stage, that commitment is nowhere near there. The statement below about Tesco’s illustrates this principle:

***“Tesco is no longer positioning itself as a supplier, as 99.5% of Organisations do, but as a buyer on behalf of its customers. Power comes from the customer. Is not a supply chain any more. It is a demand chain.”***

Of course, some ID products are mainstream and can be purchased from high street stores so do not command such premiums e.g. long lever taps.

And lastly, every cause needs its Champions, including inclusive design.

***“For any change to happen... the initiative must come from individuals”***

## **12. Contact Details**

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The Housing LIN welcomes contributions on a range of issues pertinent to Extra Care housing. If there is a subject that you feel should be addressed, please contact us.

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