



## Converting to HAPPI at St. Bede's, Bedford

This case study showcases the Independent Living Scheme for people over the age of 55, at St. Bede's in the heart of Bedford. It highlights the features of the scheme that make it such an attractive prospect for older people.



Unlike traditional developments for the over-55 customer, there is a focus on independent living in a community environment, with state of the art facilities.

The development consists of 104 one and two bedroom luxury apartments, with an exceptional range of communal facilities including a restaurant, cafe, hair salon and shop, all set amongst landscaped gardens. With 51 apartments available at affordable rent and 53 available as shared ownership, the scheme aims to make independent living affordable for all.

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## Introduction

St. Bede's is a specialist scheme where customers are able to live independently in their own self-contained, luxury apartments, whilst enjoying the use of extensive communal facilities. For customers who need it, extra care and support is available on site 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The scheme was recently awarded CIH Best Development of the Year (East Midlands) for 2014.

St. Bede's provides high quality mixed tenure accommodation in a Conservation Area, on the site of the former St. Bede's school. Orbit's aim was for the scheme to become a centre of excellence with well-trained specialist staff, working in a beautiful and functional environment. This vision was realised through the award-winning design from PRP Architects and the scheme also won the HAPPI (Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation) Project Award at the Housing Design Awards in 2011. Sensitively integrated into the surrounding area and community, generous space and private amenities have been combined with beautiful gardens and vibrant communal spaces.

The buildings have three different street frontages, each with a different architectural style, which work together to create a cohesive overall scheme. The building appears to be a series of domestic scaled blocks, but it is in fact all under one roof, which allows customers to access communal areas without having to go outside.

## Details of Community Consultation

As part of the design development process, two full-day public consultations were carried out in an accessible location close to the site. Information flyers and announcements in the local press added to the public interest in this sensitive site. During the consultations, feedback sheets were provided and returned with an unprecedented 97% of attendees in support of Orbit's proposals. A number of comments were specifically addressed by the design team prior to planning submission, to allay any concerns that might arise. The local Bedford Historic Society and Italian Elders were also consulted throughout the course of the design development and were supportive of the scheme. The openness with which Orbit and the PRP design team engaged with the local community created a general feeling of inclusion and ultimately one of excitement for the new scheme. The development received unanimous Planning Approval and Conservation Area consent in January 2011.

## Entrance to the building



Entrance court of St. Bede's showing secure entrance and car park area

Design and planning of the Entrance Court was important, as it was felt that environmental factors should be considered, as well as parking allocation, landscaping, accessibility and security. To form an attractive approach to the building, areas of hard landscaping comprise permeable paving to pathways and parking bays, with contrasting block colour to mark parking spaces. The landscape design is also pedestrian friendly and includes 'shared' surfaces.

## Communal spaces

Extensive communal facilities have been provided at St Bede's and are primarily located at ground floor level. These spaces encourage interaction between customers and support group activities. Members of the wider community are also welcome to get involved, albeit in a managed way, to respect customer privacy and potential vulnerability. Other areas of the building are secure from the communal space.

### *Communal spaces include:-*

- Restaurant – open 7 days a week, offering a waitress service, with a varied menu which changes weekly. Meal service to apartments is also available
- Bar
- Lounge
- Fitness suite
- Wellbeing suite
- Cinema lounge
- Activity room – offering painting classes
- Atrium seating areas
- Assisted spa bathroom
- Gym – with a Sports Therapist on site
- Games room – with a pool table, cards and dominoes
- Rehab therapy suite
- Guest suite - space for family and friends to visit and stay overnight. The inclusion of this reflects many recommendations from the HAPPI Report.

The nature of these communal spaces mean that future changes can be made easily, as customer needs alter and technology improves over time. This ensures that everyone has a home which can meet their needs for life.

## Apartments

The one and two bed apartments offer mixed tenure options - 53 as shared ownership and 51 at affordable rent, so there is a real choice for the people of Bedford, meeting the needs of a diverse community.

Generous internal space exceeds standards normally found in Extra Care housing. The majority of apartments will have two bedrooms, with three habitable rooms for greater flexibility. The third habitable room can be used either as a carer's bedroom, study, or larger dining room with sliding partitions, which creates easy access between rooms.



Spacious apartment balcony overlooking the communal garden

Windows and balcony doors are generously proportioned and include floor to ceiling glazing, maximizing the level of natural light. The majority of apartments, a high number of which are dual aspect, have a sizeable private balcony or terrace which can accommodate tables, chairs and plants. This provides a pleasant outlook, merging the private space with the communal garden areas. Where apartments face the communal courtyard gardens at ground floor level, private terraces with low level screen planting create a subtle public/private threshold.

## **Circulation spaces**

Circulation areas have been designed to encourage interaction amongst customers, through the use of informal seating bays and atria. Bays provide views of the outside space and are beneficial in reducing the perceived length of corridors, also assisting people with orientation. A large atrium is located close to the lounge, which creates a vibrant and naturally lit communal space at the heart of the building.

## **Code and sustainability**

St Bede's is designed to be energy efficient and achieved Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, incorporating renewable technology to provide a sustainable energy source. The building fabric is well insulated, exceeding minimum standards, and Passive Stack Ventilation is in the main circulation areas.

## **Refurbishment of the villas**

The oldest buildings on site were part of a convent built around 1900, later converted into the Catholic School of St Bede's. Over the years these buildings were extended and adapted until the decision was made to relocate the school in 2006. The buildings were then left unoccupied, with only the small two-storey Victorian villa – known as Elmstone Lodge – being utilised by Sight Concern, a local agency supporting people with visual impairments. Sight Concern now provides this service from within the refurbished building.



New buildings were designed to harmonise with the existing red brick villas

As impressive detached red brick villas, the retained buildings have given the site a strong identity. It was recognised that these villas and the spaces between them were an important design feature. The refurbishment sought to retain the integrity of the existing houses through careful architectural detailing. An example of such detailing is the use of tiles that are exact replicas of those used during the build of the old school. This principle and acknowledgement of the history of the site was extended throughout the scheme.

## **Innovation and design**

Accommodation within the old school buildings includes a small section of open deck access, arranged around a beautiful cloister garden. Designing the build in this way provided greater opportunity for dual aspect apartments that have an attractive outlook over the garden. The

design also sought to integrate new and existing design features so that the character of the old school buildings was retained. Service areas such as the catering kitchen and staff accommodation are located in a separate wing, which means discreet service access away from the main front door.

## Landscape design and outdoor spaces

The landscape design evolved simultaneously with the building plan, which began to shape a series of external areas. The intention was to give each space a distinct character and function, to provide greater variety for customers. This approach led to the creation of four separate communal garden areas:

- **An intimate cloister garden** is to the north east of the site, to the rear of the existing villas. Open deck access allows the circulation areas to lead into this garden space at ground floor level. This area can be used by customers for social gatherings or quiet moments of contemplation. It has a passive level of security, through the use of railings and screen planting. This creates a feeling of enclosure whilst also allowing the green space to be part of the main entrance.
- **The primary communal garden** is located directly adjacent to the main communal facilities and is visible upon entrance to the scheme. This animated area can be enjoyed by both customers and visitors. The design of this main space includes formal terraces, planting, seating areas and carefully considered water features, that have been created using tiles from the old school.
- **A sensory garden** is provided in a relatively central position and can be accessed from the quiet lounge, or through the main circulation areas. It provides naturally occurring shady areas, adjacent to the main communal lounge, due to the orientation of the building. Garden features and materials were also chosen carefully, with consideration given to the effect they would have on the senses. Informal pathways and seating areas create a calming atmosphere in which to enjoy the sounds of water features and the sights and smells of thoughtfully chosen planting. A timber pergola to the north end completes the garden, which aims to provide a peaceful, informal and elegant green space in which to relax.
- **A horticultural garden** is provided at the southern end of the site. This has given customers the opportunity to pursue gardening and a range of horticultural projects.

There were a large number of mature trees with preservation orders (TPOs) on site. The scheme was developed with consideration to their location and protection. All trees with TPOs were retained and it is recognised that these are an integral characteristic contributing to the site's overall high quality.



Customers enjoying one of the communal gardens at St. Bede's

## Care and support

Care and support at St Bede's is currently provided by Servacare, who are on site 24/7. They work in partnership with the Orbit extra care housing management team to deliver a seamless service to customers. The care team do not wear uniforms, but all staff members wear the same colour shirts, making them identifiable to customers. This means that customers are able to maintain their independence, with a care package designed around individual requirements, as and when needed.

## Shared ownership

St Bede's is the first extra care scheme in Bedford to offer customers a choice of tenure. Customers can buy a share of up to 75% and no rent is payable on the remaining share. Marketing began with the sales team holding seminars in a local hotel before transferring into a sales cabin, which was open three days per week. Interest was high from the outset and some of the customers who attended the initial open days are now living at St Bede's. The scheme has allowed customers to downsize to more manageable properties and has taken away the worry of repairs, or having to look after a large garden.

## Allocations

St Bede's scheme manager arranges all assessments and meets prospective customers. They work closely with Bedford Borough council, Servacare and the sales team to achieve a balanced profile across tenures and the St Bede's model is a balanced profile of customers requiring different care levels.

## Pet Policy

Orbit introduced a pet policy which allows customers to bring their pets to St Bede's, or to find a new pet if they wish. This proved popular with customers, making their move to St Bede's more enjoyable and an easier transition.

## Customer Involvement

Customers are very involved in the use of the building and active in organising activities to include everyone. A choir has been formed by some St Bede's customers and meets each Thursday to practice. A Knit and Natter group also recently welcomed a number of delegates from China to one of their sessions, during a visit by housing experts.



Customers at St. Bede's welcome visitors from China to their Knit and Natter session

## Technologies in the building

Technology at the scheme incorporates the latest in Warden Call digital facilities.

Customers and scheme staff are able to make use of sophisticated equipment from Tyne Tec, with extensive features including:

- Telecare & telehealth compatibility
- Pendant location monitoring (zoning)
- “I’m ok facility”
- Digital speech
- Pa function
- Recordable messaging service.
- Pull cord test facility
- Combined door entry

## Employer’s requirements & design quality

calfordseadon were appointed to prepare an enhanced set of Employer Requirements for tender. This made the design intentions clear for all key aspects of the build, so that tendering contractors were able to reflect these within their submissions. calfordseadon were not asked to prepare working drawings, so the role of the enhanced Employer’s Requirement was crucial in achieving the design quality that is so evident in the finished building.

## Funding

The scheme was supported by a £4.585m grant from the Homes and Communities Agency. This grant support was critical in maintaining the viability of the scheme, which had an overall development value of circa £17.2m.

## Customer comments

*“I would have been housebound had I not moved to St Bede’s. My former home had steps to get in and out and I was finding it increasingly difficult to manage. The move came at the right time for me and I am now very happy. I was also able to bring my cat which helped to make my mind up. I can now sit out on my balcony and enjoy the smell of the flowers and the fresh air. I feel very content here, this is my home and moving here has changed my life.”*

*“Moving here has given my husband peace of mind. If he has to go out I am not on my own, I can just push a button to call for help.”*

*“The care team are very friendly and nothing is too much trouble. It’s not obvious that there is a care team on site, but it gives you peace of mind knowing that should you need help, someone will come to assist.”*

## Lessons Learnt

- Appoint Interior Designers earlier. Their input is vital to the success of the scheme when it opens.
- Try to keep the programme on track to ensure that delivery of the scheme comes in on time.
- Set up the sales office 9 months before completion as selling can take a lot longer than it would normally.
- Make sure that you have in your Employers Requirements what you want in the finished scheme.
- Develop a Design and Technical brief that relays your vision for the scheme.
- Take constructive feedback from customer living at other schemes, to help inform the schemes that you build in the future.

## Note

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

## About the Housing LIN

Previously responsible for managing the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund, the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) is the leading 'learning lab' for a growing network of housing, health and social care professionals in England and Wales involved in planning, commissioning, designing, funding, building and managing housing, care and support services for older people and vulnerable adults with long term conditions.

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