

Developing a Design Guide for Accommodation with Support / Care at Sunderland City Council

This case study explores design solutions for models of accommodation including extra care and similar provision of housing with care and support for adults of all ages, with examples provided from other schemes and contributions from other commissioners and providers.

Prepared for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by **Anne Prentice**, Commissioning Manager – Accommodation at Sunderland City Council.

Introduction

Sunderland City Council embarked on a programme involving the development of three extra care housing schemes in the City during 2008 – 2010. This programme was developed in partnership with Housing 21 and their construction partners Frank Haslam Milan.

The first scheme opened to residents in March 2009 and within the partnership we agreed to constantly learn and improve future buildings by drawing upon good practice and by looking innovatively towards good quality design. We knew that this approach would support the operation of the building for the residents and maintain a safe and comfortable environment for residents, visitors and for the operational staff.





Beckwith mews extra care housing scheme – Silksworth, Sunderland

Sunderland City Council is also working with Gentoo Housing Group, the stock transfer association, in Sunderland to develop a fourth extra care housing scheme. Due to the timing of the programme, it proved advantageous that some of the design good practice identified from Beckwith Mews, could be shared. During this process, research was undertaken to establish different design requirements and improvements from various sources to support the design discussions within the Gentoo/Council partnership.

A number of approaches from other developer partners were being made to the Council to provide supported accommodation to meet our strategic priorities. This specifically included the development of accommodation for people with learning disabilities and a planned core and cluster development for people with long term conditions.

It became apparent that to have any form of control over the design and development process across a number of different partners that a design guide would need to be compiled. This would provide the Council with consistency in its approach to developer partners; and provide a clear steer regarding our expectations and aspirations in relation to design and development.

The Approach

As design information was collated, it was appropriate to commence discussions with Planning colleagues relating to the 'expected' design requirements of future accommodation with support developments. A working group was developed involving Officers from Sunderland City Council's Housing Strategy; Planning Policy; Urban Design and Development Control service areas.

The principles of developing a Design Guide for Accommodation with Support was discussed and it was agreed that such a document would be a sensible way forward to help inform potential and existing developer partners; along with providing guidance to Planners regarding the expectation of the council in relation to design of the accommodation, and enable them to rule out poor design.

We agreed to consider the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) – Residential Design Guide, which had already been through consultation and had been approved as an SPG by the Council's Cabinet. Initially it was agreed that if we aligned the Design Guide for Accommodation with Support to the SPG that it would make the process easier for Architects to refer to the two documents side by side.

The Framework

The working group referred to the collated guidance for supported accommodation and provided a framework for the Guide to follow which would align itself to the Residential Design Guide SPG. Key areas we wanted to concentrate on included:-

- Place Shaping
- Maximising the Use of Outside Space
- Energy and Resources Efficiency
- Accommodation Requirements, and
- Use of internal space.

With so much research available, including case studies from the Housing LIN, CABE and the recent report from the Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation (HAPPI), it was important to extract the main points in relation to the key areas we had already identified as our priorities.

However, much of the information was specifically in relation to design for extra care accommodation, and we wanted to provide further guidance to meet the needs of people with other support needs. It was clarified, however, that much of the design advice relating to extra care could be used for other supported accommodation. However, we did incorporate some key additional information and agreed to keep the design guide as a 'live' document, to enable us to add to it as and when new good practice emerges.

The Design Guide Content

Introduction

It was important within the guide that the Council was clear about its expectation in relation to accommodation being designed for people with a support need. We also wanted to ensure that the document was easy to reference for Architects enabling them to design good quality and innovative accommodation. The guide provides the general levels of design quality we would expect to be provided, however, would encourage developer partners to exceed this minimum standard and demonstrate how they can be innovative in terms of design in both public spaces and within accommodation space.

A summary of each section within the design guide has been provided below to give a very general overview of the content:-

Complete and Thorough Design

We want to encourage regular dialogue with local planners; the wider local community and local businesses to support community 'ownership' and pride in the proposed development, even before it is built. Within the design we want to encourage as appropriate, easy access for people with disabilities and emergency services; clear definition of spaces; and deterring crime.

Putting the Customer First

By putting the customer first, we felt it to be crucial that the needs of the wider community were met within the development. We aim to encourage access to good quality, well designed homes enabling vulnerable households to live independently with support tailored to meet the needs of their household. We want to ensure that people have access to shared and public spaces, local amenities and facilities which will enhance their quality of life.



Silksworth Community Library in Beckwith mews Extra Care Scheme, Sunderland

It is essential that the physical environment is enabling in terms of the likely impairments that residents may experience in their lives due to increasing age, frailty, disability or impairment.

Co-ordinating design and development with long term management and maintenance

We recognise that best use of the internal and external spaces is important within the development ensuring it is designed around the life issues for the people living in the accommodation. Getting

this right, will enable the management and maintenance of those areas to be understood, particularly in relation to service charges.

High Quality with Low Costs

Getting good quality in design does not necessarily mean that costs need to be high. Consideration must be given to any operational services being provided from the building and whether there is opportunity to utilise existing local services, rather than provide them within the scheme. There is opportunity to consider services which can be provided in the building maximising use by local residents, medical practitioners etc., by supporting the principles of a community hub as appropriate.

Local Context

The requirement for the layout and appearance of buildings should be based on an appraisal of the character of the site including buildings and land in the surrounding local area. The design must meet and raise the general aspirations and expectations of local residents.

Hairdressers



Hairdressers at Winton Court extra care scheme, Gateshead

Place Shaping

Place shaping is key to the success of a housing scheme, regardless of its purpose. As such, it was crucial that developer partners are encouraged to consider the wider locality; the community living within it and the services already in operation while considering how the new housing development will fit and become an integral part of that local community, rather than sitting in isolation.

This needs to be considered alongside the type of accommodation and client group it is being built for, and the type of communal provision which is intended to be made available. This information can be sought from the local community and also from the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment.

Maximising the use of Outside Space

Outside space must be maximised to enable people to undertake indoor activities outside during warmer weather and provide a natural extension to the fabric of the main building. Tactile planting, raised planter beds and opportunities for the scheme/building to grow some of its own food should all be considered. Seating areas should be designed to meet the requirements of all residents of all abilities and be in the most appropriate places. Secure wandering circuits need careful consideration around surface materials and ensuring that dead ends do not confuse the pedestrian. Garden areas must be functional, useful and safe providing areas for relaxation, socialising, activities and private space to enhance physical and mental wellbeing.

Appropriate play provision, dependent upon the age groups for whom the accommodation has been designed must be considered and factored into the design.



Seating areas giving private but attractive space – The Staiths at Gateshead



Outdoor table tennis provision - The Staiths at Gateshead

Maximising the Natural Environment

Biodiversity should be incorporated into designs to encourage wildlife into garden spaces and maximise the potential of plants used. Environmental features including intelligent sprinkler systems, rain water harvesting linked to wc facilities and allotments/ garden areas should be considered.

***Llys Eleanor Extra Care
Flintshire County Council***



Energy and Resources Efficiency

The Design Guide is very clear about building homes for people which are safe, warm, relaxing and comfortable. We emphasised the key area of 'Energy and Resources Efficiency' to encourage developers to achieve sustainability in design and future proof the properties, while improving health, keeping heating costs low and acknowledging the need to reduce carbon emissions and plan for climate change. We want to encourage Modern Methods of Construction, and encourage innovations around sustainable designs. It was also important to recognise the requirement for assistive technology and the need to develop property which can adapt to changes over time, as new technology emerges.



BedZed and Peabody Trust

The Council acknowledges that supported accommodation can be costly to develop and maintain, alongside the requirement to keep service charges affordable for residents. As such, the design guide is intended to support developer partners to achieve a cost effective scheme, which will provide the quality and innovation we are looking for, alongside longer term cost saving benefits to the scheme and residents by utilising for example, solar gain, natural ventilation methods, water

efficiency measures and rain water collection arrangements.

It is important that we provide accommodation which meets the needs of the people for whom it was built. However, we must also consider the needs of other family members living in the accommodation, particularly in relation to the provision in the living area and in any communal areas.

Building Operations

We want to encourage innovative and adaptable designs to meet the increasing demands for effective recycling and refuse collection.

We also want to ensure that the working environment is pleasant and practical to enable staff to work within it effectively. The building must be easily accessible to staff with conveniently located ancillary accommodation with comfortable and functional facilities.

Accommodation Requirements

Within this section of the design guide we have concentrated specifically upon extra care as the main lead in to accommodation design. Much of the design requirements for extra care can be replicated into other forms of supported accommodation. Issues such as access, security, privacy; communal spaces, interior decoration, signage, facilities, circulation, acoustics emergency call and CCTV, Lifts and bariatric care (obesity) have all been widely explored within the document.

Space Inside the Home

It is important that a resident must be able to express their own personality and style within their own home regardless of their diverse requirements. We want to promote pleasurable places to live in which will adapt to, rather than constrain the changing needs of a household. As a baseline we want to ensure that people receive in their home a sense of safety; good natural light; warm comfortable rooms; space to manoeuvre comfortably; adequate storage and a pleasant outlook. A well designed

home should meet the physical and social needs of all residents and be receptive to the needs of specific vulnerable residents.

Living, Playing, Working and Studying

We acknowledge that a home must provide different areas to fulfil different needs of those living there. We expect the design to provide individual rooms and spaces which can accommodate different furniture layouts; provide



Example living area at Barton Mews, Staffordshire

adequate storage areas; provide adequate sockets for TV aerials; telephone; electric and make sure they are in accessible and logical locations.

Designing for Dementia

We acknowledge that there are different design requirements which must be considered for different client groups. Within this section we have outlined how the environment can affect those with dementia and how it may be possible to make their lives less stressful and less confusing by considering how the design of the accommodation would affect them as individuals. It is important that sensory disabilities are considered alongside dementia and a number of people with dementia may also have impaired sight or hearing which can lead to further stress and frustration. Issues around colour, contrast, way finding, signage, personalisation of space have all been considered. It must also be considered that some people with dementia will be living in the family home with their spouse / family. It is expected that new accommodation will be provided to respond to the 'household' requirement as we would expect them to move as a family unit to enable them to stay together and receive the support they require to live at home independently.



Beckwith Mews, Sunderland

Designing for Visual Impairment

Consideration must be given within scheme design to the natural light provision; colour schemes and tonal contrast. Shadows must be reduced so as not to cause confusion as this could be considered as a barrier or a step. Shiny surfaces should be avoided and non-reflective materials used. Patterns should be minimised and natural materials maximised to support way finding. The requirements of guide dogs within the accommodation and within public spaces must also be considered.

Designing for Other Disabilities

We acknowledge that this is an area that requires additional information as good practice emerges, although some information has been outlined relating to learning disabilities; hearing impairment; mobility; long term illnesses / conditions. Much of this information is to be read in conjunction with the extra care accommodation section.

To assist developer partners and their architects to navigate their way through the Guide, a checklist has been provided in each section to clarify key points expected within their designs. Photographs representing good practice have been utilised throughout the document to break up the text, but also to give the architect a visual image alongside the content.

Consultation

The Design Guide was circulated to developer partners for comment, our existing partners, and also to members of the regional Housing LIN in the North-East. Consideration was given to all feedback received and the document amended as appropriate to take feedback into account. As a result, we hope to have achieved an effective prototype document which is fit for purpose, yet can be updated and made available on our website for reference purposes as new good practice information emerges.

Key Learning Points

- Be clear about the expectation of your organisation in relation to design, while acknowledging development costs and the impact your expectations may have on service charges;
- Maintain good communication with Planning Colleagues throughout; this is as much their document as it is a housing and care and support document;
- Be open to comments and feedback on the document, but have mechanisms in place to enable the document to be quickly updated and made available to its intended audience.
- Consult your colleagues, they can provide you with information based upon their client's requirements / experiences which can be vital to design.
- Consult with residents once they have moved into new supported accommodation. Incorporate their comments into the Design Guide.

End Note

It is anticipated that the Design Guide will provide clear guidance to partners which will aid robust financial planning; support planning discussions; provide a smoother transition through the development control process; support partnership working; encourage good relationships within the partnership and emphasise the joint aim to achieve good quality outcomes for our customers. It is aided by Anne's commissioning post. Her role sits within the health, housing and adult social services directorate and Anne is responsible for planning and enabling the provision of supported accommodation across the City.

Sunderland City Council's Design Guide for Accommodation with Support can be requested from:

Anne.Prentice@sunderland.gov.uk or by telephone 0191 5661730.

Other related Housing LIN Fact sheets

- Factsheet no. 6: [Design Principles for Extra Care](#)
- Factsheet no: 3: [New Provision for Older People with Learning Disabilities](#)
- Factsheet no. 4 [Models of extra care and retirement communities](#)
- Factsheet no.10 [Refurbishing or remodelling sheltered housing – a checklist for developing extra care](#)
- Factsheet no.13 [Eco housing – taking extra care with environmentally friendly design](#)
- Factsheet no. 26 [Housing for people with sight loss](#)

Other Housing LIN reference documents include:

[Extra Care Housing – Development planning, control and management RTPI Good Practice Note 8](#)

[Homes for Old Age: Independent Living by Design CABE/Housing Lin case study report](#)

[Lifetime Homes, Lifetime neighbourhoods: a Users Guide – Housing LIN information pack](#)

[New initiatives for people with learning disabilities: extra care housing models and similar provision – Housing LIN report](#)

[Suffolk Very Sheltered Housing – design and management guide, Housing LIN and Suffolk County Council](#)

[More Choice, Greater Voice: a toolkit for producing a strategy for accommodation with care for older people, Housing LIN and CLG](#)

[Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation report, HCA, CLG and DH](#)

The full list of Housing LIN Case Studies can be seen and downloaded at our website: www.dhcarenetworks.org.uk/housing

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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