



Quality designs for later life housing: Highs and lows – cottage HAPPIness

With an emphasis on the best housing development for an ageing population, the HAPPI award focuses on improving design for the over 55s. Since its 2010 inception, this category has furnished a remarkable selection of award-winning designs.

2016 was no exception and this Housing LIN case study report captures the key ingredients that saw a record number of “Completed” purpose-built housing developments for older people and “Projects” still on the drawing board being shortlisted for the HAPPI category at the 2016 Housing Design Awards. Some of the very best described in this paper showed how to organise apartments with their benefit of interdependent living into familiar domestic forms that sit comfortably in suburban streets.



Bungalows with better daylighting commissioned by Royal Borough of Greenwich in London.

This paper is published to coincide with the launch of a Communities and Local Government Committee [Housing for Older People inquiry](#) into whether the housing on offer in England for older people is sufficiently available and suitable for their needs.

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Introduction

2016's Housing Design Awards winners were announced shortly after the publication of HAPPI 3 or 'Housing our Ageing Population: Positive Ideas'.¹ This called for the sector to have more dialogue with its user group, greater use of assisted technologies and healthier lifestyles to alleviate chronic conditions and the need to strengthen communities within communities. Schemes shortlisted for the Awards showed skilful examples of HAPPI 3's recommendations, as well as models for how the sector can respond in a changing market environment.

For instance, among 2016's applicants were a number of low-rise, higher density schemes in urban areas. While bungalows remain a popular first choice for retirement, the industry view is that single-storey homes are far too inefficient with land and socially isolating to be sustainably justified. However, design teams have been exploring how to marry the preference for a modest and private form of home with higher density. These homes balance autonomous independent living and a layout supporting an interdependent community with a mix of sheltered and private outdoor space, good levels of daylighting, and level accommodation that can flexibly welcome guests and store belongings like cars and mobility scooters. Some designs inventively position bungalows or courtyard homes back to back or side by side to raise densities, while providing opportunities for social interaction with neighbours over the garden walls and in common community spaces and landscaped streets.

In previous years, few of the shortlisted bids were single storey though and perhaps the key aspect of 2016's crop was the skill with which apartments have been designed to have the massing and elevations of the 2 and 3 storey houses alongside which they are located. These do not present as 'blocks' but connected houses almost indistinguishable from their neighbours, through the skilful matching of roof heights, set backs and the hiding of access decks behind the building line so that buildings have a modest domestic form, in keeping with the preference for the cosy retirement home.

In keeping with HAPPI 3's focus on dialogue with the user group, they have been designed with input from future residents or local councils. A selection of case studies follows.



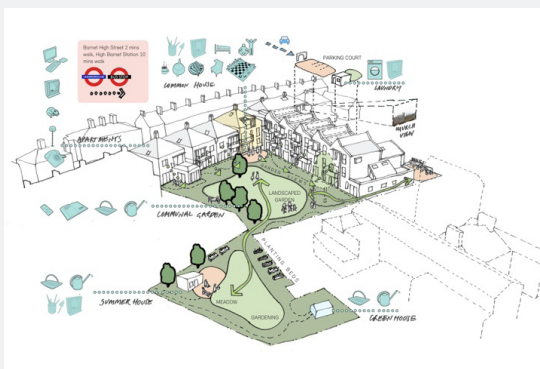
¹ www.housinglin.org.uk/library/Resources/Housing/Support_materials/Other_reports_and_guidance/HAPPI3_Report_2016.pdf

Case Studies – The 2016 winners

Older Women's Co-housing, Barnet

HAPPI Project Winner

After almost 2 decades of gestation, the Older Womens' Co-Housing (OWCH) group is the UK's first senior Co-housing scheme. In a north London borough where 75% of older people live in 3 or 4 bedroom homes, and 31% of older people live alone, with few alternative housing options, OWCH offers older residents purpose-built and mutually supportive care and company.



These light, well-insulated and high quality self-contained smaller homes facilitate downsizing, yet retain accessibility and flexibility for longer term needs and for guests or children to stay. The site's well-connected location close to Barnet High Street's bus routes, shops, health facilities, restaurants and green spaces exemplifies OWCH's commitment to preventing physical or social isolation.

21 of its 24 homes face onto a public garden square, as does a common room and guest flat cum quiet meeting room. The women chose to access the garden wing of flats via open galleries with prominent window openings and balconies, allowing cross ventilation of their homes and forming sheltered, sociable outdoor spaces. Other flats are reached from a dramatic cathedral ceiling corridor with generous windows overlooking the street. Most flats also open onto a private courtyard with parking, planting and laundry drying space.



Since inception in 1998, the resident group has overcome several hurdles including 15 years of site acquisition, and 5 years of design development - convincing the council that cohousing could potentially reduce its adult social care burden, responded to local demand better than a proposed free school on the site (which used to be a school), and that the design responded to conservation area precedents.



Most of the women who will be moving into the new homes have been involved in collaborative design process, and some have been active in the group for eighteen years. Neighbours recruited through leaflet campaigns over several years, were also invited to regular meetings at a local cafe, and to a public exhibition day in 2012 during which 57 people visited and 46 left signatures in support of the scheme. At

these public consultations, the future residents could communicate their aspirations and the principles of cohousing directly to the neighbours and allay their concerns, preventing many objections and potentially recruiting future members for OWCH.

The site was purchased and the development funded by Hanover (a not for profit retirement housing provider), with a £1m co-production pathfinder grant from the Tudor Trust, and has recently been handed over on completion to OWCH and RSL partner Housing for Women.



Windmill Court Extra-care, Chingford

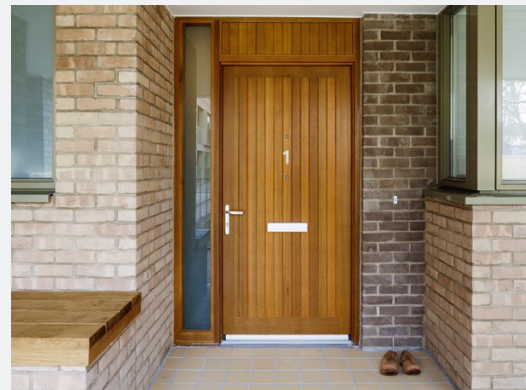
HAPPI Completed Winner

Another London winner, Circle Housing Group's Windmill Court. This extra care development is an L-shaped terrace of 44 1 and 2-bed apartments developed on a hilltop street, as part of the local authority Waltham Forest's estate regeneration programme.

At the centre is a new garden dominated by retained mature trees, which help shelter from northern winds. Making the most of the views, all apartments have both an exposed balcony and an enclosed winter garden, and are dual aspect due to deck access arrangements.



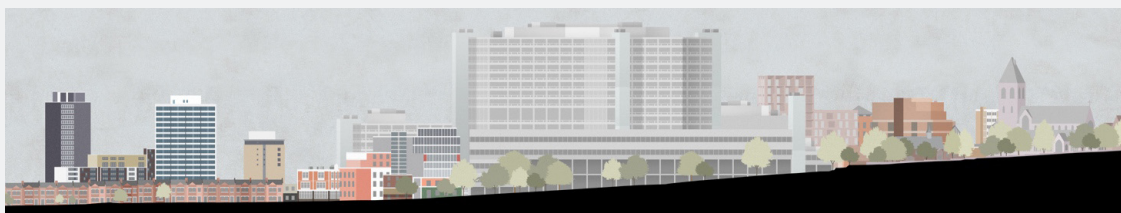
Each apartment has its own front door, recessed to allow personalisation, and a bench outside. The stock bricks, hard wood joinery and powder-coated windows dignify the threshold to each home, while the layout's skill in exploiting access and exposure to panoramic views make the units inside feel like penthouses.



More about Windmill Court can be found on on the Housing LIN's #Inspirational Achievements page at: www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/Inspirational-Achievements/prp/

Hampstead Green

HAPPI Project Winner



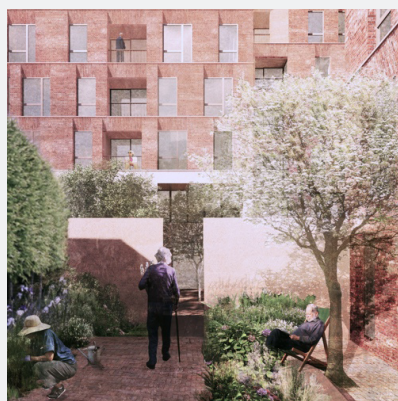
The high-rise exception, Hampstead Green is a development of 60 extra care 1 and 2 bed apartments adjoining the Royal Free Hospital near the Hampstead Heath hilltop.



The scheme for PegasusLife is laid out as 4 staggered towers ranging from 10 to 4 storeys, with around 3 apartments per floor, which maximises the number of dual aspect units with external loggias and views across London.

At ground floor level the towers envelop a chain of landscaped courtyards, some with reflecting pools, designed to enliven the communal areas.

While satisfying the servicing needs of the hospital and an adjacent primary school, the slim interlocking towers with textured tonal brick facades also create a setting for the Grade 1 listed St Stephen's Church, that English Heritage describes as the 'finest brickwork in the land'.



While the hospital offers a degree of comfort to those worried about a medical crisis, the scheme also provides wellbeing amenities like a library, swimming pool, spa, gym and juice bar, signalling an aspirational lifestyle in the heart of London.

Other Shortlisted Schemes

Reinventing almshouses, Streatham



Thrale Almshouses, Streatham

A clever combination of loft conversions, storey addition, new build and internal refurbishment has upgraded these 1930s-built locally listed almshouses to Lifetime Homes standards, improved daylighting and wheelchair accessibility, and added 2-bedroom units. In line with residents' wishes, a new walled quadrangle secures all dwellings; and historic almshouse characteristics, such as a gables, laurel-clad porches, articulated brickwork, and kitchen gardens, have been reinforced.

To view the Housing LIN report, 'Transforming Almshouses for the 21st Century', visit: www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Housing/HousingforOlderPeople/Almshouses/

Council-built community, Barking

Local authorities building for their own community are experimenting with some of the most inventive and economic prototypes around for independent senior living.

These L-shaped single-storey bungalows for LB Barking and Dagenham are fully wheelchair accessible and enclose a private south-facing courtyard with integrated photovoltaic panels. Distinctly sloping roofs, large bay windows, and planting around the courtyard's timber railings and trellises connect visually to intimate green spaces that the homes are set around, facilitating a sense of connection in an otherwise humdrum location.



Courtyard Housing, Barking

Custom fit downsizing, Manchester



house, New Islington

'house' is a new concept of prefabricated home by Urban Splash, pioneers of loft living, for young-at-heart urbanites who outgrow their city-centre apartments, but aren't ready to move to a traditional home in the suburbs. Their flexibility makes it a compelling alternative for 'downsizers' redefining the family home on a budget, while remaining in city centre's close to loved ones, activities and amenities.

Buyers can fine-tune their house plan from amongst 72 different variations, deciding between 1, 2 or 3 bedrooms, which floors they are on, whether kitchens are in north-facing or south facing elevations, etc (not that you'd know the variety within if you saw the uniform terrace from the outside), and then have it custom-manufactured in Derbyshire. Modular construction also ensures affordable prices around £100/sqft.

Third age heritage, Kent

A new retirement village from PegasusLife on the Grade II listed Wildernesse Estate converts the country house into flats and adds 8 new mews houses, 39 apartments within 5 free-standing Villas, and a contemporary orangery restaurant open to all. Staggered and carefully oriented homes have double or even triple aspect picture windows, and semi-private weather-protected outdoor amenity spaces, to make the most of the estate's rolling landscape, woodland pathways and formal gardens with fountains, sun dials and even an ice house folly. This careful balance of privacy and sociability, heritage and future-mindedness, developed from extensive site mappings, village meetings, a consultation exhibition and 4 workshop sessions with council officers.



Wildernesse, Sevenoaks

Reinventing the rural idyll, Somerset



Fortescue Fields, Norton St Phillip

Gone are the days when exclusive retirement homes were located as far as possible from other uses. 8 miles from Bath and a stone's throw from the pubs and village amenities of Norton St Phillip, this 54 home scheme for over 55s in the Mendips places its civic heart - a colonnaded Marketplace, shop, doctors' surgery and office space - at its entrance. To attract new residents to the village, individually designed homes have 2-6 bedrooms at different price points,

including 16 affordable units, some sheltered accommodation, and 14 live-work units with a study above the garage.

They combine picturesque classical architecture, unspoilt hilltop views, and low-maintenance high-tech country living features like multi-fuel stoves in stone hearths, serviced part-paved rear gardens, walk-in showers, and telecare wiring.

Sea sojourn, Devon

Teetering on a coastal cliff, PegasusLife's Shell Cove has unrivalled borrowed landscape to fulfil the classic retirement dream of a beach-facing cottage. Landscaped forecourts and carefully chosen surface materials apply to apartment buildings, the original character of Regency Villas and an existing formal walled garden and apple orchard. Homes sold quick, whetting appetite for a Phase 2 despite the challenge of structurally stabilising the cliff and securing the agreement of Network Rail.



Shell Cove, Dawlish

Some final observations/lessons learned

It is not just the HAPPI client group that warm to the best of suburbia within denser urban groupings. The overall winner of the 2016's Housing Design Awards was a scheme in Newcastle called The Malings which cleverly stacked 76 single-storey and duplex apartments so that each had its own front door. This gave the developer Igloo Carillion an apartment-like coverage but their residents were not saddled with the costs of management charges arising from shared parts, notably expensive to maintain lifts.

Maintenance bills have always been a major factor in housing choices for the HAPPI resident group because the unbudgeted cost arising from repairs to shared parts are especially challenging to those on fixed incomes. Changes to the benefit system are also set to restrict support for some charges. The Housing Design Awards, always first to document emerging patterns of design, championed a number of different building forms designed to minimize the financial burden of apartment living for residents. Hopefully their replication will see many more people having their own front door, but in arrangements better suited for neighbourly interaction and the building of community.

Note

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

For more information on the schemes highlighted in this paper and previous HAPPI winners, visit the Housing Design Awards website: www.hdawards.org. Here you will also find details for entering this year's Awards and, in particular, the housing an ageing population category. Please note, entries close on Tuesday, 28 February 2017.

Acknowledgements

Images courtesy of the Housing Design Awards

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.

To access further information and resources on HAPPI and designing housing for an ageing population, visit the Housing LIN's dedicated 'design hub' at:

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

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