

Lingham Court Lambeth, London

Extra care housing for older people alongside general needs housing for sale.

The 30 affordable housing flats for older people, designed by Pollard Thomas Edwards Architects, are owned and managed by public sector provider Metropolitan Housing Partnership. The scheme also includes 40 flats for outright sale. The total cost was £10 million and the outright sale flats subsidised the affordable housing.



Lingham Court, London © Alys Tomlinson

Key features

- A prefabricated construction with factory-assembled wall and floor panels. All flats are on the upper floors for security. Thermal insulation far exceeds building regulations levels.
- Although many of the residents have regained their independence, the building still has an institutional feel. An issue for managing the building is to foster a sense of community both within the building and in the surrounding area.

Concept

The basic concept is straightforward: people have a home of their own, with their own front door, and everything else spins off this. The care and service provided is never imposed, but always tailored to individual needs. Above all, the goal is to enhance and promote independence. For example, this is the reason why the lunch club operates only four days a week, to ensure that residents do not lose basic cooking skills. People are encouraged to attend weekly planning meetings, facilitated by staff, to participate in and make decisions about the running of the building.

Background

There has been considerable investment in new affordable extra care housing, which is regarded as a priority in Lambeth, where there are high levels of deprivation.

The council is committed to reducing dependence on institutional models of care by supporting carers, and through education, advice and support to manage long-term physical and mental health conditions.

Design and planning

This scheme is designed to be different from an old-style care institution. Its modern, appealing appearance is vital to attracting outside community groups to use the building. It is not hidden away in a cul-de-sac, but placed on a main road, highly visible and well connected by bus, tube and private transport routes.

Lingham Court has a clean, modern aesthetic. It is a prefabricated construction comprising a lightweight steel frame, installed on site with minimal foundations,



and factory-assembled wall and floor panels. The construction method, and the form of the building, was dictated in part by its location over a tube tunnel, which meant that weight limits had to be observed.

Development and building

There is no car parking, as the scheme is near good public transport links and there are ample secure cycle parking spaces. This assumes that older people will not be drivers¹⁸ or that their friends and relatives will not need to park when visiting or providing lifts.

Security is an issue, and for that reason no flats are located at ground floor level. There is a private garden on the south-west side, shielded from the street by a high wall. There is also a small roof garden.

The flats are arranged on the upper three floors, along the perimeters of the building. All have a good view over the local area, the use of a balcony, and a compact layout of bedroom (two bedrooms in only two cases), living room, fully accessible bathroom and kitchen. Large metal-framed windows provide plenty of daylight, although the flats are all single aspect.

Technology and sustainability

The development achieved an eco homes rating of very good. Thermal insulation far exceeds the levels specified by building regulations. Each flat's distinctive steel balcony helps to shade the interior from solar glare. There is no air conditioning, just low-energy

fans to improve ventilation. Staff would prefer to have windows that open to the central circulation space, because it can get very hot.

Feedback

Many people have moved into Lingham Court from residential care homes, and they have regained a huge amount of independence as tenants in their own homes. An on-site care team provides physical assistance, and support team staff help in other areas, such as day-to-day administration and resolution of family conflicts.

Diversity and inclusion

The tenants at Lingham Court are from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds with correspondingly diverse expectations. Some sheltered schemes in the 1980s and 1990s were designed for residents from specific ethnic backgrounds¹⁹ and for some older people this provided a familiar, comfortable and safe environment.

Discrete projects for particular ethnic, cultural and religious groups, or for women, or lesbian and gay elders, are sometimes described as isolationist. However, home care is not exempt from the discrimination that exists in wider society and separate provision can provide an environment safe from intolerance.

Apart from a few exceptions the extra care model has generally shifted the focus away from discrete

provision for specific groups. It is not clear if this shift is due to the expressed wishes of local minority communities or a change of policy towards 'integration'. Each situation will vary and each location and the communities within it will differ.

Lingham Court, however, was always intended to be an ethnically and religiously mixed community.

The clean, modern look of the scheme, tempered by timber-clad façades, was probably led by the need to cater for the affluent, young professionals buying the sale flats. The expansive central circulation areas of the extra care building have a somewhat empty and impersonal feel to them. In most cases, there is no evidence of residents' presence or individuality around their front doors, and the absence of internal windows opening from flats onto the common space produces a very clear sense of separation between the private life behind the front doors, and the common life of the building. Even the roof terrace is empty of plants, because of staff concerns about potential trip hazards, especially when grandchildren are visiting.

Despite the use of primary colours to distinguish one floor from another, the overriding impression veers towards the institutional rather than the homely. Even though the central elliptical spaces formed by the back-to-back arrangement of the two bow-shaped blocks are pleasant, the core of the building has little daylight and a heavy dependence on artificial overhead lighting.

The success of inclusive housing depends on how effectively managers can build a sense of community by encouraging residents to attend planning meetings and participate in decision making. Staff at Lingham Court hope that residents will eventually sit on the recruitment panels for new staff. This may pose challenges in light of the physical and mental impairment experienced by many residents.

Frequently, the circumstances surrounding an older person's arrival at the scheme will be characterised by a significant family breakdown, resulting in a stand-off that may persist for some time. There is a tendency to see an initial tapering off of family visits, followed by a slow increase over time, as a new relationship gradually evolves. At the same time, service users begin to forge new friendships and are less isolated than they were in their former homes.

Learning points

There was a lack of community engagement in the early stages of procurement and development of Lingham Court. Many residents on the local estates had no idea what the building was until it opened. As a result, it has taken time to make local families and older people aware of the resource on their doorsteps, and to develop social networks and strong links with local groups for older people whose engagement is crucial to the scheme's integration into the wider community.

Design and architectural features

- Prefabricated construction with factory-assembled wall and floor panels
- All flats on upper floors for security.

Points for residents

- Thermal insulation far exceeds building regulations levels but ventilation is not felt to be adequate
- Many residents have regained independence
- Building has institutional feel.

Management issues

- Further need to create a sense of community both within the building and in the surrounding area.



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18 There are over 2 million people over 70 in the UK with driving licences and this is estimated to rise to 4.5 million by 2015 (Source DVLC reported by Department of Transport)

19 see work by Penoyre and Prasad, *Accommodating Diversity*, NFHA 1993