

Prices Yard Islington, London

A small private development, which has been selected by Habinteg Housing Association as an exemplar of the Lifetime Homes standard.

The conversion of a stable block into accessible housing, designed by Papa Architects. The units open on to shared outdoor space. The development shows that old buildings can be successfully redeveloped to accessible standards, and that formal arrangements are not always necessary to create spaces that people want to use. The building is designed to enable further adaptation, if required.

However, even if the buildings themselves are accessible, the inaccessibility of the surrounding area can negate these achievements.



Prices Yard © Michele Parzeri

Design and planning

The architect had already worked with the London Borough of Islington and was familiar with the Lifetime Homes criteria. The firm established a fruitful and co-operative relationship with Islington's access officer early on.

One of the biggest problems for the development was the planning restrictions imposed for conservation reasons. And the new insulation standards introduced by the planning authority had big cost implications. The development is on a small scale and it has a charming, intimate feel. The linear layout of the units which are two storeys in height, opening onto a shared outdoor space, provides a sense of community, without any formal arrangement. This space is used by the residents, who sometimes hold ad hoc meetings here. Each unit has a different window design as well as a different layout, giving a feel of individuality. One is occupied by a young family, while the other residents are single people living alone or couples – but so far no older or disabled people.

Development and building

The site was formerly occupied by a row of dilapidated stables, which were listed by Islington when developer Richard Chamberlain bought the property. Chamberlain, who now occupies one of the units, worked with Papa Architects to satisfy the conservation officers that the original character of the buildings would be retained. The cobbled road needed to be re-laid to enable wheelchair access. The camber of the road was changed and the cobbles were re-laid with flat pavers inset like tram-lines down the length of the road, to accommodate wheelchair wheels.

The scheme's chief downside is the steep gradient of the road into the site, which would be impassable to wheelchair users without the assistance of a strong carer. This could potentially negate all the effort that has been put into ensuring level access through the yard and within the units.

A feature of the building is the retention of the large stable-door openings at ground-level, and hayloft window openings above, with external wooden shutters.

Lifetime Homes standards provided an opportunity to design more generous spaces, amounting to 80 square metres per unit. The entrances are all level access, opening into wide entrance halls, with direct



access to a bathroom, and two bedrooms located on the ground floor. The open plan kitchen/living-rooms are on the first floor, which does not conform to Lifetime Homes standards. However, reversing the arrangement would have entailed providing a second toilet on the first floor, an option that was quickly discounted because of the loss of space. Instead, a 'soft spot' is provided in the structure to ensure that a wheelchair lift could be installed at relatively low cost.

The upper-level living room, which opens into the roof space, enjoys bright daylight and the low-level windows enable wheelchair users to have a good view of surrounding gardens and parks.

The kitchen and bathroom fittings are standard and are designed for adaptability. The finishes are good quality and, despite being small, the homes are fresh, airy and uncluttered, with light timber flooring, white plastered walls, large built-in cupboards and bright coloured kitchen units. For someone unable to get out of the house good daylight levels, views out, and a sense of space and airiness inside become increasingly important.

Learning points

Prices Yard combines contemporary, urban styling with design characteristics and adaptability that will allow the homes to evolve as residents age. A resident with poor health and mobility, and who may need a wheelchair, could continue to live at Prices Yard, depending on the availability of support services.

The insulation was expensive and residents complain that the houses are stuffy. However, the houses scarcely need heating, a benefit for an older or disabled person.

Local authority planning requirements meant that this was, in principle, a car-free scheme. However, one disabled parking place is provided just inside the entrance to the development. This is secured by an electronic, video-access gate.

Design and architectural features

- Renovation of stable and stable accommodation to accessible housing meeting Lifetime Homes standards
- Linear layout of units opening on to shared outdoor space
- Old buildings can be successfully redeveloped to accessible standards
- Formal arrangements are not always necessary to create spaces that people want to use.

Points for residents

- Even if the buildings themselves are accessible, the inaccessibility of the surrounding area can negate these achievements.

Management issues

- Design for further adaptability if required.