



## A HAPPI partnership – delivering quality housing for older people in Hackney

This case study looks at Buccleuch House, a purpose-built 41 apartment scheme for older Hackney residents which is integrated within a larger mixed apartment block. Located in a prominent position overlooking Clapton Common, the overall building is being developed by Hill Residential in partnership with Hanover and Agudas Israel Housing Associations.

The Hanover flats for older people are targeted at tenants for affordable rent, and although not an extra care housing scheme, also provide communal facilities at ground level. Designed by Levitt Bernstein architects, the scheme won the HAPPI award at this year's Housing Design Awards in addition to a Project Award.

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## Introduction

To describe the brief for the new Buccleuch House as an ‘interesting challenge’ would be something of an understatement, but it proved to be both a worthy ambition and a HAPPY experience.

Following a short competition, Levitt Bernstein Architects, as part of Hill Partnership’s team, were appointed by Hanover Housing Association to unlock a scheme which had already suffered a long and difficult planning history with unsuccessful applications and appeals from a previous development team. Financial viability was also challenging and budget cuts at London Borough of Hackney suggested a likely squeeze on future revenue funding. Ultimately, the ‘Extra Care’ element of this mixed housing scheme became ‘Retirement Housing Plus’, but the will to overcome numerous challenges and the need for pragmatism have arguably produced a better, more sustainable outcome.

## About the site

In physical terms, the site offered a similar blend of challenge and opportunity - a constrained brownfield plot in an attractive setting next to the Clapton Common Conservation Area in the London borough of Hackney. A six storey, 1940’s block of studio flats previously occupied the long, narrow site. Disused and derelict for some years, it had become an eyesore in a prominent location facing a protected ‘London Square’ on one edge of Clapton Common. The square, which includes a row of tall, mature trees acts as a useful transition space between the wide, open space of Clapton Common and the confines of the site itself.



For financial viability reasons, the development needed to provide in excess of 100 homes. The physical constraints of the site meant that this requirement could only be met by a long, narrow building with a central circulation spine. The greater challenge lay in satisfying the three different briefs from three different clients; each requiring distinct types of housing with self-contained access and management arrangements. Ultimately, resolving this functional and cultural complexity within a simple building form and a limited budget is what led to the success of the project.

The final design provides a cocktail of 107 new homes. Of this total, 41 are for Hanover, designed for older people for affordable rent and with associated communal facilities, 28 are affordable rent and shared ownership apartments for Agudas Israel Housing Association (AIHA), designed to meet the needs of larger families in the local Orthodox Jewish community, and 38 are private sale apartments for Hill Residential. The new homes vary from 1 bedroom flats of 50m<sup>2</sup> to 4 bedroom homes of 116m<sup>2</sup>. Cross funding from Hill Residential and AIHA provided essential subsidy for the Hanover accommodation for older people, together with substantial grant funding from the GLA.



## On the drawing board

Despite the three sets of client requirements, Levitt Bernstein’s approach has been to design one building with a strong and singular identity. It is articulated with a clear base, middle and top to reflect the proportions of the previous Georgian terrace of houses which sat on the site until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet detailed and interpreted in a crisp contemporary way.

### Site layout – exterior features

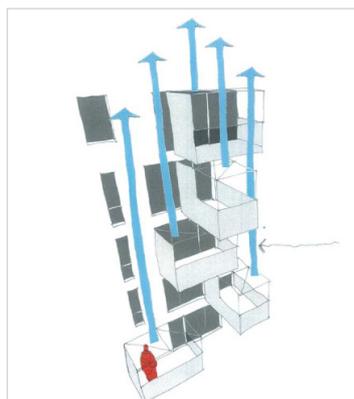
Levitt Bernstein felt it was important that the building should not immediately or obviously differentiate between the three distinct tenures of its residents. The brick façade is animated with its variety of tones and textures but the elevation has a consistent character.



Closer inspection reveals subtle changes along the length of the facade, particularly in the treatment of the private outdoor space. These variations are a direct response to the practical and cultural requirements of the different client briefs. Simply stacked balconies to the private sale flats give way to a staggered arrangement to the AIHA homes in the middle of the block. This is a deliberate shift designed to ensure that each of these balconies will have a view of the open sky allowing the Jewish Orthodox residents to observe and celebrate the festival of Sukkot.



Hill balcony concept



AIHA balcony concept



Hanover balcony concept



Hanover wintergardens to front elevation



Hanover wintergardens to rear elevation

At the far end of the building, balconies become enclosed winter gardens to allow the older Hanover residents to benefit from year round enjoyment, extra living space and lower fuel bills. These can be completely closed, providing a protected conservatory-like space in colder weather, or opened up with sliding glass panels providing more of an open balcony on warmer days.

The new homes are arranged around three separate entrances and circulation cores. Despite the site constraints, all the family homes are dual aspect. All

upper storey homes enjoy long views across the Lea Valley and the Common and all homes meet or exceed London Housing Design Guide standards, including Lifetime Homes.<sup>1</sup> Limited parking is provided to the front and rear of the building – where it is dropped below the level of the ground floor flats so that views out are not blocked by cars.

### Layout – communal areas

Although the Hanover communal space had to be significantly reduced in the wake of budget cuts, and the final brief does not anticipate on-site catering, this is still exemplary accommodation. Design follows the HAPPI recommendations<sup>2</sup> from overarching principles through to detailed design. A lively reception area fronts on to the square and offers a warm welcome with space for outdoor seating. Hanover also have office space here, giving more activity to the ‘front of house’. Residents, visitors and staff pass through a prominent entrance into a light, double-height reception space with glimpses through into the clubroom and gardens beyond. The clubroom has direct access to two different semi-private outdoor spaces. The first is a tranquil, sunken, garden courtyard with sensory planting and pergolas and the second, a kitchen garden with raised beds for residents to grow fruit and vegetables.



1 [www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/data/files/Reports/londonhousingdesignguidepdf1.pdf](http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/data/files/Reports/londonhousingdesignguidepdf1.pdf)

2 [www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design\\_building/HAPPI2/](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design_building/HAPPI2/)

### Layout – private facilities

Design for progressive privacy gives residents the choice to be alone or socialise with others. A secondary entrance bypasses the ‘public’ areas and leads directly up to the residential floors. The general character becomes more private as you move deeper and higher into the building.

Moving up to individual flats, the circulation is naturally lit, with spaces to pause and opportunities to personalise front doors. A proportion of the apartments are designed to a more spacious and flexible ‘HAPPI’ layout, giving opportunities to open up bedroom and living areas with sliding partitions and create a more open and airy feel to the spaces. Hanover is particularly keen to trial these layouts.



### Sustainable design

The building is designed to meet Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4<sup>3</sup>, with a highly efficient building envelope, PV panels, green roofs and MVHR systems. Plans to upgrade the square in front of the building which will include new ‘doorstep play facilities’ will increase its appeal to the wider community and provide new opportunities for active and passive enjoyment by all three sets of residents. All in all, the new building and improved open space will give the area a significant lift as well as much needed accommodation.

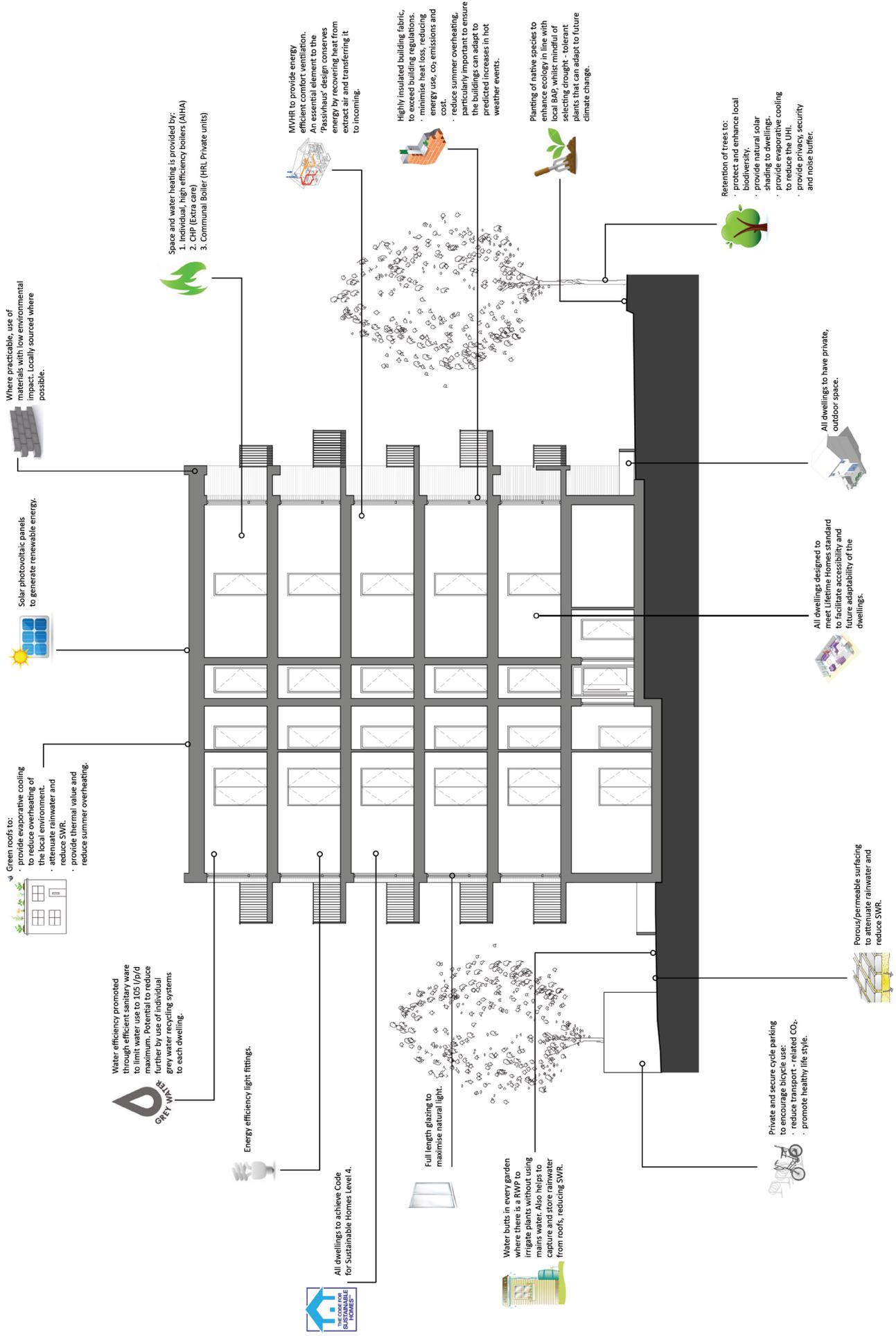
### **An award winning design**

To Levitt Bernstein’s delight, the hard work of all those involved in the project was rewarded earlier in the year by a double win at the Housing Design Awards<sup>4</sup> - one in the HAPPI category for housing for older people and another in the general housing projects section.

Both sets of jurors’ comments suggest that they felt that the strengths of the project lay not just in the design and architecture, but also in its social message. This chimes strongly with Levitt Bernstein’s view that it is often appropriate for housing for older people to be physically and socially integrated with other types of housing, designed to be ‘of its time’ and placed in prominent locations.

<sup>3</sup> [www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/code\\_for\\_sust\\_homes.pdf](http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/code_for_sust_homes.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [www.hdawards.org/winning\\_schemes/](http://www.hdawards.org/winning_schemes/)



Where practicable, use of materials with low environmental impact. Locally sourced where possible.

Solar photovoltaic panels to generate renewable energy.

Green roofs to:  
 - provide evaporative cooling to reduce overheating of the local environment.  
 - attenuate rainwater and reduce SWR.  
 - provide thermal value and reduce summer overheating.

Water efficiency promoted through efficient sanitary ware to limit water use to 105 l/p/d maximum. Potential to reduce further by use of individual grey water recycling systems to each dwelling.

Energy efficiency light fittings.

All dwellings to achieve Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4.

Full length glazing to maximise natural light.

Water butts in every garden where there is a RWP to irrigate plants without using mains water. Also help to capture and store rainwater from roofs, reducing SWR.

Private and secure cycle parking to encourage bicycle use:  
 - reduce transport-related CO<sub>2</sub>.  
 - promote healthy life style.

Porous/permeable surfacing to attenuate rainwater and reduce SWR.

All dwellings designed to meet Lifetime Homes standard to facilitate accessibility and future adaptability of the dwellings.

All dwellings to have private outdoor space.

Space and water heating is provided by:  
 1. Individual high efficiency boilers (A1/A) 2. CHP (Extra cost) 3. Communal Boiler (HRL Private units)

MVHR to provide energy efficient comfort ventilation. An essential element to the 'Passivhaus' design conserves energy by recovering heat from extract air and transferring it to incoming.

Highly insulated building fabric, to exceed building regulations.  
 - minimise heat loss, reducing energy use, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and cost.  
 - reduce summer overheating, particularly important to ensure the buildings can adapt to predicted increases in hot weather events.

Planting of native species to enhance ecology in line with local BAP whilst mindful of selecting drought-tolerant plants that can adapt to future climate change.

Retention of trees to:  
 - protect and enhance local biodiversity  
 - provide natural solar shading to dwellings.  
 - provide evaporative cooling to reduce the UHI.  
 - provide privacy, security and noise buffer.

As a contemporary, high density, mixed residential building on the edge of a common in one of London's poorest and most densely populated boroughs, the new Buccleuch House exemplifies these principles. Designed for local people, it reflects and accommodates Hackney's diverse population in a dignified, practical and equitable way. Yet, even a few years ago, it would probably not have happened.

Much of the change to the way in which housing for older people is now being conceived, designed and delivered is attributable to the HAPPI project. As co-authors of the original 2009 report, Levitt Bernstein welcome the positive impact that it has had. Four years on, they feel much more able to follow their instincts to design in ways which will make older people feel valued and have taken the opportunity to combine the HAPPI design criteria with their own cherished principles about good housing.

They have always supported the general principles of inclusive (or at least 'age-friendly') design and struggled with the market's preoccupation with young, first time buyers, important though they are. Levitt Bernstein believe that heterogeneous communities are the most sustainable, and they know that older people want to remain socially integrated, active and fulfilled - many of them in the place they know. All of this points to the need for better quality housing and more diversity at local level.

## A sustainable approach

Levitt Bernstein's hope, as expressed in this HAPPI partnership, is that every major new housing development will soon, as a matter of course, include some homes designed, built and marketed with older people in mind. For those who want to remain fully independent and arrange care at home as and when they need it, this often means new types of easy to manage, spacious, accessible, two bedroom houses, or flats with lift access. For those who prefer to live in a managed, group setting or have higher care needs, it means extra care housing and residential care facilities that welcome those with dementia. And for the growing 'middle ground' - those who value their independence but would like to know they can always find company when they seek it - it means new forms of 'care ready' retirement homes. It also means more local shops, community and health facilities and better public transport.

Opportunities to provide all of this in a single development, as well as much needed new housing for young singles, couples and families, are rare, but the principle holds good. When smaller development opportunities arise within an established community, Local Authorities should



carefully consider the sort of new housing that would best complement their existing stock in light of current and future need. This duty is clearly set out in the National Planning Policy Framework<sup>5</sup> and, if followed through proactively, will give older and disabled people much greater housing choice.

From an unlikely beginning, Buccleuch House has allowed Levitt Bernstein to put many of these principles into practice in a specific context and in challenging circumstances. They hope to build on this and to be involved with many more projects which find imaginative ways to house an increasingly diverse and ageing population.

5 [www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design\\_building/Planning/?parent=8582&child=8444](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design_building/Planning/?parent=8582&child=8444)

## Learning points

### Funding cuts

More extensive communal facilities, as originally designed, had to be re-thought when local authority funding cuts bit, after planning consent had been obtained. The café, catering kitchen, shop and hair salon were no longer viable. The building design and structure allowed internal design changes to be implemented at a relatively late stage without major additional cost implications and has allowed Hanover to make use of some of the space as flexible office accommodation. This could also be used at a later date as community or rentable space. In spite of the budget cuts, Hanover have been very pleased with the level of support for the scheme given by Hackney Council.

### Flexible flat layouts

It will be interesting to see whether the more flexible 'HAPPI' flat layouts (about a quarter of the total) are more attractive to future tenants than the traditional, more cellular, flats provided. This will be monitored by Hanover and fed into the design of future developments.

### Community consultation

Despite the difficult planning history of previous schemes on the site, this carefully designed development achieved a relatively smooth planning consent. The development team worked hard to engage with local neighbours and interest groups and also ensured that the planners were consulted early and then consistently throughout the design process.

## Summary of scheme details

**Clients:** Hanover Housing Association, Agudas Israel Housing Association, Hill Residential

**Local Authority:** London Borough of Hackney

**Design Team:** Levitt Bernstein (Architects), Area (Landscape Architects), Conisbee (Structural Engineer).

**Number of new homes:** 107

**Site area:** 0.50 ha

**Density:** 214 dwellings per hectare (dph)

**Overall Accommodation mix:** 49 x1b2p, 13 x 2b3p, 23 x 2b4p, 2 x 3b4p, 9 x 3b5p, 1 x 3b6p, 10 x 4b6p

**Hanover apartments:** 33 x1b2p, 8 x 2b3p

**Dwelling size range:** 50m<sup>2</sup> - 116m<sup>2</sup>

**Tenure mix:** 38% social rent, 14% affordable rent, 12% shared ownership, 36% private sale

**Parking:** 31 car parking spaces within the site boundary

## Note

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

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Hanover Housing Association, Agudas Israel Housing Association, Hill Homes for allowing us to feature Buccleuch House.

## 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 involved in planning, commissioning, designing, funding, building and managing housing, care and support services for older people and vulnerable adults with long term conditions, including dementia.

The Housing LIN welcomes contributions on a range of issues pertinent to housing with care for older and vulnerable adults. If there is a subject that you feel should be addressed, please do contact us.

For further information about the Housing LIN's comprehensive list of online resources, including our 'design hub' with all the latest on designing and planning housing for older people, and opportunities for shared learning and service improvement, such as site visits and network meetings in your region, visit [www.housinglin.org.uk](http://www.housinglin.org.uk)

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