



The Orangery extra care scheme one year on – a case study from Optivo

The Orangery is an extra care scheme for older people in the Sidley neighbourhood of Bexhill on the South coast. It was developed by AmicusHorizon housing association (now Optivo) in partnership with East Sussex County Council and Rother District Council, and opened in April 2016.

Key features of the scheme are:

- Fully-accessible apartments and communal areas
- High-quality design and spec
- Care team based on site
- Close to a local high street
- Important role in the local community
- Sustainable restaurant provision



This briefing reflects on The Orangery's first year of operation, giving lots of practical information. It reflects on the successes we've enjoyed and challenges we've overcome. We've included 'learning points' we hope are useful to other providers.

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Meeting local needs

Bexhill has the oldest population in East Sussex and the highest proportion of residents aged over-85 in England and Wales. Rother District's population over the age of 65 is expected to increase by 48% by 2033. So the area faces a challenge in meeting future health, housing and care needs.

Sidley is a suburb of Bexhill with its own local high street. It's relatively deprived with some of the poorest health indicators in East Sussex. Obesity, substance misuse, high levels of A&E attendance, death rates, social care provision, mental health issues and unpaid caring are all high.

Extra care offers apartment-living to enable people to live independently for longer. Research by East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has shown 64% of extra care residents would otherwise need residential care.¹ But a 2017 housing needs survey of older people – also carried out by ESCC - shows only 6% of people considering a move to specialist accommodation are planning to move into extra care. This suggests not enough people know what extra care is – or how it represents a great 'ender home'.

Case Study – Mr B's story

After a stroke, Mr B was virtually housebound in his second-floor flat and reliant on support from his daughter-in-law. The flat was in a real state. Two weeks after being referred to the allocations panel, Optivo had visited and arranged for him to move into The Orangery. We supported him throughout, helping him to declutter and providing him with white goods using Optivo's 'helping hands' budget.

When he moved in Mr B said he felt like he was in a hotel. He immediately benefitted from having a full daily care package from the onsite care provider. Although at first he found it difficult to mix, as time went by he gained confidence to eat his lunch in the restaurant and build friendships.

Our Extra Care Officer reads Mr B's post to him and helps deal with issues he doesn't understand. She realised he was being financially exploited by a family member. Optivo, ESCC and the police worked together to safeguard him from further abuse. Optivo also involved the charity, Christians Against Poverty, who helped him manage his debts.

Mr B now takes pride in his appearance, has given up smoking, his flat is immaculate and he has built strong friendships with some of his neighbours. He says he couldn't be happier and is so very grateful to be living in extra care. He feels it's prolonged his life.

Planning & design

Optivo was the successful tenderer when ESCC selected a delivery partner to redevelop a redundant school site. PRP were chosen as planning architect, Rydon as contractor and Gibberd as design & build architect. It was one of the first schemes to receive support from the Department of Health Care and Support Specialist Housing Fund.²

¹ <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/finder.cfm?i=8988>

² <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/ECHScheme/search/>

The Orangery comprises:

- 58-unit one- and two-bed apartments providing affordable housing (42 affordable rent, 16 shared ownership)
- specially-adapted accommodation to enable independent living: apartments and communal areas are fully wheelchair-accessible with walk-in shower rooms
- private outside gardens or balconies on upper floors
- low-rise design and quality materials, reflecting the local vernacular
- accommodation for 24/7 onsite care team and landlord staff
- six additional open market houses, fully wheelchair accessible, the sale income helping fund the scheme

Communal areas for residents and the local community include:

- communal lounge, hair salon, beauty treatment room, mobility vehicle recharging store and off-street parking
- spa room/assisted bathroom
- guest apartment
- flexible meeting spaces for residents activities, training and use by local community groups
- stylish restaurant
- Wi-Fi in communal areas
- landscaped gardens with resident activity spaces and retained mature trees

Residents put a high value on space and light. But there is a connection between spacious and extensive communal facilities and running costs. More space means higher service charges, and the two need to be balanced.



Sustainability

The Orangery was designed to meet the requirements of Lifetime Homes and achieved BREEAM 'Good' accreditation. The building makes use of renewable energy sources and provides photovoltaic panels which feed into the landlord supply to the communal areas of the scheme. The residents directly benefit as the feed-in tariff reduces their service charges. The highly insulated building fabric also makes for an efficient design limiting the use of energy to power the scheme.

Residents and community

From the start, The Orangery has had strong support from the local community. At planning stage, we didn't receive a single objection. We partnered with a local school who designed the hoarding put up around the site during development and planted a time capsule.

Over a year before the scheme opened we also formed an older people's reference group. This was made up of local residents, councillors and members of voluntary/community groups. They made many decisions such as choice of soft furnishings for communal areas, colour schemes and naming the communal rooms.



Just before the scheme opened, this group morphed into the Friends of The Orangery (FoTO). Members organise activities and ensure there's a strong connection between the scheme and the Sidley community.

A year on, residents have also formed their own social committee – the 'Amigos'. They're now able to fundraise for events, outings and activities.



Residents are allowed pets. But we didn't bargain for ducks and lambs!

The location of the scheme close to Sidley High Street benefits residents and the community. It means residents can get to the shops. It also makes the community space at The Orangery handy for local people. For example, the scheme's hairdresser also has a shop in the High Street – The Orangery offered him fully-accessible space to expand his business.

So the scheme has boosted the local economy providing up to 30 jobs in managerial roles, catering, care, hairdressing, maintenance, gardening and support staff, the majority filled by people from the local area.

Learning point: the work put into involving the community has paid off throughout the development and life of the scheme.

Partnership and oversight

An operational management group is made up of the following partners: Optivo, Mears Care Ltd, ESCC, Caterplus and resident representatives. It meets quarterly with a formal agenda and written reports on care provision, housing support, food provision and resident feedback.

Learning point: the operational management group is critical in allowing the key partners to work together to provide the best results for residents.

Staffing

In addition to the 24/7 care team commissioned by ESCC, Optivo have two staff based at The Orangery. They work office hours, with out-of-hours managers available in case of emergency:

- the full-time Extra Care Project Manager is responsible for the building as a whole, identifying and resolving issues when they arise. She also oversees another smaller extra care scheme. We appointed her around a year before the scheme opened and this was critical in ensuring a smooth launch in close partnership with development colleagues.
- the part-time Extra Care Officer works directly with residents in an intensive housing management and support role. She also supports residents in running activities and developing the social life of the scheme.

Because of the complexity of the residents living in Extra Care, staff have training to deal with things such as hoarding; anti-social behaviour; safeguarding; learning disabilities; dementia; identification of the need for mobility equipment; bereavement support and much more.

These scheme-based staff roles are supported 80% by rental income, 20% by service charges.

Optivo also have specialist teams who provide services to all residents, including those at The Orangery. They include anti-social behaviour; money matters (financial inclusion), lettings, tenancy sustainment, housing management and home ownership.

Learning point: it's helpful to have a manager in place as early as possible. In addition to overseeing construction, it's easy to underestimate the amount of work required to successfully launch a scheme.

Letting and care needs

Rented apartments are let to residents who have care needs and meet RDC eligibility criteria, with a local connection. The aim is to maintain a balance of those with low, medium and high needs.

Learning point: care needs tend to drop once people have moved into the fully-accessible, socially-active environment of the scheme.

Nominations and allocations

All nominations to the scheme come through ESCC and are approved by a multi-agency allocations panel. Monthly meetings are chaired by ESCC and attended by RDC, Optivo and the care provider. Once an allocation has been approved, the care team and Optivo will visit the prospective resident to assess their care needs, carry out a financial assessment and support them through the process.

By the first anniversary of the opening of the scheme all but two rented apartments were let and sales had been agreed for the majority of the shared ownership apartments.

Shared owners don't have to meet local eligibility criteria or have a care need – although many do or will. It may not have been possible to sell apartments if there had been restrictions on eligibility.

Learning point: we want to create a balanced community, so a range of care needs – even including a small number of residents with no care needs - is a good thing.

Service charges and funding support

Residents pay in their service charges towards a range of costs including:

- Communal costs of the scheme – eg cleaning, gardening
- Maintenance of scheme installations such as lifts, intercom and community alarm system
- Personal heating costs
- 260 meals a year (see The restaurant)
- 20% of the cost of scheme staff

They also pay a 'wellbeing charge' direct to ESCC. This reflects the availability of the care team to all residents, regardless of their care package.

The distinction between housing benefit-eligible and ineligible charges is not straightforward. Different local authorities interpret regulations differently. We've been lucky to work with a very supportive local authority – Rother District Council who have accepted The Orangery is 'exempt accommodation' and have worked with us to ensure our service charges are reasonable and – where appropriate – able to be supported by housing benefit.

Learning point: excellent working relationships are needed with local authority partners to ensure service charges are sustainable.

The restaurant

Every resident pays in their service charge to receive 260 three-course meals per year. This equates to five meals per week. The cost is equivalent to £5.11 per meal (2017/18). If a resident chooses to buy extra meals, they 'pay as you go' direct to the caterer.

We reviewed the arrangement in preparation for retendering the catering provision. Residents generally like this model as it guarantees them a daily, freshly-cooked meal. It also has a social benefit, encouraging residents to get out of their apartments and socialise. Friendships have been formed amongst people who were reclusive in their previous home. Residents also have flexibility – they're not charged for 105 days a year. This allows for situations such as long-term hospital admissions, holidays, and days out with family or friends.

Non-meal costs of providing the restaurant are met through service charges with some elements subsidised by Optivo. We had to rethink our approach after the initial apportionment created Housing Benefit-eligibility issues.

Learning point: ensure your restaurant provision is sustainable and charged appropriately, or it will compromise the scheme.

Fire safety

On advice from the fire service (ESFRS), we have a 'Stay Put/delayed evacuation' policy for our residents.

Residents' annual needs and risk assessment includes discussion of a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP). This information is documented and kept in the fire box at the main entrance. It's available to the fire service in the event of an emergency.

The scheme was initially designed without a sprinkler system. During the build, we rethought this – and Optivo, ESCC and East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service jointly-funded a sprinkler system.

Learning point: check out the National Fire Chiefs Council specialised housing guidance.³

Cars and mobility vehicles

Optivo have a mobility vehicle policy which requires residents to sign an agreement. The mobility vehicle store provides space for up to 20 machines.

The scheme has a 20-space car park. As The Orangery is round the corner from a local high street, the car park began to be used by lazy shoppers. So we arranged for an external company to manage it. They issue permits to every resident. It's working well and has reduced unauthorised parking.

Conclusion

Launching a new extra care scheme is complicated:

- the building and its many installations is complex to build, commission and get to know
- ensuring rents and charges are affordable and will be supported through the benefits system – or any future funding system – is a minefield

³ <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/Fire-Safety-in-Specialised-Housing-Extra-Care-Housing/>

- it's a complex job nurturing a new community of residents, and creating links with the surrounding neighbourhood

All this requires a shared vision and creativity amongst a group of partner organisations. It's important to invest staff time in building and maintaining these relationships in the run-up to completion, and through the first year of operation.

Note

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

About Optivo

Optivo is one of the largest housing providers in the UK. Its 44,000 homes give 90,000 people in London, the South East and the Midlands, somewhere affordable to call their own. Optivo's extra care developments won the 'Outstanding Customer Satisfaction' award at the 2017 Constructing Excellence in London and the South East awards. The Optivo retirement service at The Orangery and other schemes in Sussex, London and Kent is rated 'outstanding' by the Centre for Housing & Support.



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.

For more information about extra care housing, visit the Housing LIN's dedicated pages at: www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingExtraCare/

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