



## Inspiring new housing choices for older people in Walker, Newcastle

This case study takes a look at Your Homes Newcastle's new older people's housing scheme, Tree Top Village in Walker, Newcastle. It provides an overview of the new 'village' and captures the lessons learned following a North East Housing LIN regional meeting and study tour.

This took place over the summer of 2017, and was attended by 40 Housing LIN members, who came to be inspired about later life living and the impact of Tree Top Village on the new residents and the neighbouring community. Copies of the presentations can be found [here](#).



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## Looking and learning in the North East

The North East Housing LIN held its regional meeting at the scheme in July 2017. It was well attended by 40 Housing LIN members who came to be inspired about later life living at the scheme.

The morning session saw Dr Rose Gilroy, Professor of Ageing, Planning and Policy at Newcastle University and Ian Crow, Architectural Director, Ryders Architects talk about their Future Homes research project. Housing LIN members then explored thinking around future homes, and the results from that session will be fed into the [Future Homes](#) project.

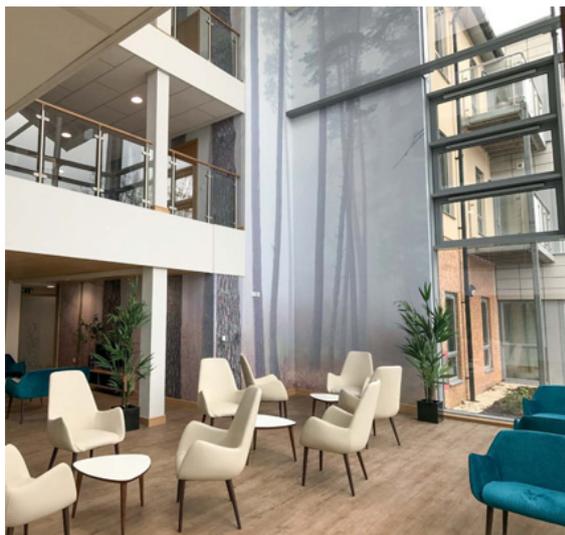
## About Tree Top Village

The afternoon session was an opportunity for attendees to hear about and look round Tree Top. The scheme is a flagship development for Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) and Newcastle City Council, inspired by the principles of the Dutch pioneer, Dr Hans Becker, of ageing well and combining high quality accommodation with leisure facilities for residents and local people alike to enjoy.



*Tree Top Village, Walker - Entrance*

Exclusively for people over the age of 55, whilst not an extra care scheme, Tree Top Village consists of an impressive main building, offering 75 sheltered housing apartments, bordered by 36 one and two-bedroom homes and 8 bungalows with gardens.



*View of Communal Lounge & Entrance*

With a hotel-like feel, the main building is centred around an impressive glass atrium with a lobby, reminiscence library, Italian restaurant, hair and beauty salon, mobility shop, and card and gift shop. These amenities are open to the public, to support the integration of older people with the wider community, as well as bring investment to the local area.

The apartments are spread over four floors and all have either a private balcony or outdoor courtyard area. Features inside the apartments include high specification kitchens and bathrooms, spacious bedrooms and light and airy lounges, many with striking views of Newcastle's iconic skyline. Each of the

properties can also easily be adapted to respond to a range of needs and has a level access shower, a transfer area and access to an on-site scooter store.

The Lifetime Homes design standard, and the values championed by HAPPI (Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation) as well as the design philosophy of Dr Hans Becker, which revolutionised older person's living in Europe, were central to the design of Tree Top Village, which has recently won a Chartered Institute of Housing Outstanding Development award.

## **Promoting the properties - learning from the private developers**

Your Homes Newcastle (YHN) decided to use the promotion of Tree Top Village as an opportunity to review their marketing approach, and to learn from the advertising strategies of private developers. Therefore, as a pilot exercise, rather than simply relying on the standard lettings system (whereby the onus is on applicants to view the online Tyne and Wear Homes Choice Based Lettings scheme), YHN arranged an open day, produced a promotional brochure and allocated a name to each property type, including the Maple, the Willow etc. They then advertised the event widely in the local paid for press and through free newsletters and posters. The promotional campaign was a success and resulted in all properties being let.

## **Letting commercial units – research driven**

YHN commissioned a research company to carry out a survey into what local people would like to see in the communal areas and to identify any gaps in the market. They then advertised the community trading units by targeting local businesses, and have now successfully let all four units.

**Unit 1** *Sweet Sentiments* (card, gifts and old fashioned sweet shop). The owner contacted YHN and expressed an interest as a result of a Facebook post.

**Unit 2** *Beautilicious* (hair & beauty salon). Following a local promotional drive to all salons in the area, the owner expressed an interest in relocating her business from Walkergate to enable her to expand her clientele. The owner has since employed another two members of staff, one beautician and one stylist, to manage the additional clients she has acquired since relocating to Tree Top Village.

**Unit 4** *Restaurant Villagio* (Italian restaurant). The owners expressed an interest in the restaurant following a discussion at a Breakfast Club. They have since engaged with YHN's employability team who run a one week hospitality training session with YHN tenants, with twelve residents attending each session.

**Unit 5** *Liveasy* (Mobility Aids). The owners expressed an interest in the space that was promoted as a fitness suite, following a discussion at a Breakfast Club.

Finally, in addition to the four commercial units:

**Unit 3** *Reminiscence Library* - this space was developed with the support of Tyne & Wear Museums, to enable residents, school children and other groups to use this resource to create a house of memories. Local residents helped choose the items that are displayed in the cabinets now.

## What residents say

Patricia Sinclair was one of the first residents to move in and was quickly followed by her sister Janice Spence who liked the look of Tree Top Village so much she moved into the flat directly above her sister. And to complete the hat-trick their mum, also called Patricia, quickly followed suit and moved into one of the apartments that comes with a sheltered housing service.



Patricia said:

*“When I heard about Tree Top Village I was interested immediately. I lived in a bigger house before that but knew I needed to think about downsizing so this is ideal for me. The apartments are very spacious and well-designed and we all have our own outdoor space which really means a lot.*

*“It’s also great having Janice and our mam so close by, although there is always someone to talk to. We’re looking forward to trying out the hair salon and restaurant too – it really is like a village.”*

According to Lynn Waters, YHN’s Regeneration Liaison Manager, another resident said that: *“It’s the best place I have ever lived”*; *“I have felt secure and settled since the day I moved and have never lost a wink of sleep”*.

This resident has also met up with former neighbours, alongside whom she lived in the 1970’s, who have also moved into Tree Top Village. They often leave their front doors open because of the secure environment.

Another resident stated that people are talking about Tree Top Village wherever she goes - in the post office, supermarket, on the bus etc. She listens to all the positive comments and *‘bursts with pride’* that she is one of the fortunate people who live there.



Since relocating into Tree Top Village, the hair and beauty salon owner has had to increase her staff to accommodate the increased clientele from residents, their family and friends. The restaurant has also recruited local people as staff. Both retailers offer a discount to residents in Tree Top Village, of which residents are taking full advantage.

Overall, the development has changed the lives of the majority of residents due to the social aspects of its design and operation, and it has reduced levels of social isolation.

## Project details, courtesy of IDPartnership (architects)

	Phase 1- Tree Top Village	Phase 2- Central Walker	Total
Housing Revenue Account	£8,773,937	£4,485,865	£13,259,802
Homes and Communities Agency contribution	£1,500,000	£880,000	£2,380,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£10,273,937</b>	<b>£5,365,865</b>	<b>£15,639,807</b>

- Completed May 2017
- 75 apartments, 36 Flats, 8 Bungalows –
  - 40 One Bed Apartment,
  - 35 two bed Apartment,
  - 12 one bed Apartment,
  - 24 two bed Apartment,
  - 8 two bed Bungalows
- All residents are aged over 55



*Exterior View*

## Building with Hearts and Minds, not Bricks and Mortar

Tree Top was designed to become the centre piece of the wider Walker Regeneration Programme. This area is now referred to as Central Walker. Walker is a post-industrial community, which has been devastated by the demise of coal and heavy industry and the collapse of shipbuilding and power generation manufacturing. Numerous initiatives to regenerate the area over the last 25 years have struggled to arrest the decline. Walker represents approximately a third of the City of Newcastle, by area and population.



*Central Atrium from Second Floor*

The Central Walker project focused Newcastle City Council reinvestment in a new school, new retail amenities, and new residential accommodation for older people, in a central location off Walker Road.

This generous and airy space is naturally lit from above by an “hotel” like atrium. This also provides access to flats above and enables residents to see what is going on and choose to participate in a range of interesting activities.

The Mall offers a range of attractive facilities; this space has now been taken up by the Sweet Sentiments Card and Gift Shop that provides a range of old fashioned sweets, a hair and beauty salon, health and mobility support services, and community rooms, as well as a prize winning Italian pizzeria and coffee shop with patio for “al-fresco” dining.

## Points of special interest

Originally conceived as the centre of a conventional “Core and Cluster” arrangement, the initial Masterplan was “torn up” by Your Homes Newcastle after a visit by the Design Team and a YHN representative to Dr Hans Marcel Becker (HMB) at his Humanitas Headquarters, as well as to Humanitas’ Retirement Villages, in Rotterdam.

HMB’s resident-centred approach to the care of older people inspired and transformed the eventual Central Walker Masterplan. HMB’s various mantra for a successful Retirement Village include: “Use It or Lose It”, “Yes is the Default for Carers” and “Maximise the Positive - Minimise the Negative”.

Overall, it was HMB’s commitment to delivering an authentic Village environment with a host of “hotel” quality facilities which won over the Design Team, and this ensured that, as well as inspirational buildings and a great living environment, the essential human - and humanising – factor of ensuring interested, committed, and engaged staff members, is key to the success of the new development. Tree Tops was the name chosen after careful interaction with local residents and school children.

A generous entrance foyer and reception welcomes residents and the local community into a spacious well-lit Village Mall. Rather than relying on Newcastle City Council’s Property Services Department to market shop owners and store holders, YHN commissioned “[Your Back Yard](#)” (local community regeneration and research specialists) to carry out a survey to find out what residents would really like. For example, many of the older people consulted said that they love pizza because their grandchildren do - and having a world class pizzeria with family friendly staff makes it so much more enjoyable to visit Gran and Granddad!

YHN also engaged with successful businesses in the local community such as “Beautylicious”, who competed for the space and brought their existing clientele with them into the airy and spacious new hair and beauty facility.

YHN consider that Tree Tops should be seen as an extension of the local community, and it is essential to ensure that local residents from that wider community feel interested and welcome to visit the building. With this in mind, NCC negotiated with Aldi, a food retailer that they wished to attract into Walker, to build alongside and to co-ordinate the design of their building, so that the Mall lines up with the



entrance foyer of the adjacent new food store. By so doing, the potential to “shop and drop” - having Gran or Granddad look after the children, whilst the weekly shop takes place, or sharing the weekly shop, and having coffee or tea afterwards - makes family interaction so much easier and more enjoyable.

On behalf of YHN, Lynn Waters engaged and became acquainted with many of the older residents within the Walker area. Identifying Tree Tops as representing a core hub for the community, Mark Massey, IDP designed a wide range of apartments, bungalows and two storey cottages with individual entrances adjacent to Tree Tops. Therefore, this represents the first phase of what will become an aspirational cluster of retirement accommodation located at the centre of the community.

The built form creates an internal courtyard and the rear block of apartments provides shelter for the internal courtyard. All flats are designed to wheelchair mobility standard, and a range of flats also provide enhanced levels of accessibility for residents with higher mobility needs. All flats have been designed to "[HAPPI recommendations](#)" and have compliant balcony and winter gardens.

Sprinklers have been fitted to provide enhanced fire safety, but also to enable the removal of the old fashioned two-door fire separation from the protected shaft, required in more conventional older persons housing.

## Key learning points

A couple of learning points are:

- Commission the research for the retail spaces as early as possible to inform the design
- Promote the retail spaces on the open market rather than liaising with training providers (the restaurant would have been at the front of the development as per the original design), and
- If we were starting again from scratch, we would probably try and ensure that the restaurants, patio, and dining areas were all in the main road elevation, ensuring that the local community were even more enthusiastically drawn into the new development. Every opportunity for integration with the local community should be explored.

## Conclusion

Tree Top Village has been created through a development process which has at all stages been influenced by its immediate community. YHN staff have established the wants and



*Entrance Communal Space*

needs of local people, and made it possible for many local residents to live in aspirational accommodation, right at the heart of their community, in an environment which ensures they are still "authentic" members of that proud and resilient community. The Village Mall accesses a wide range of community rooms and meeting spaces which can be used by Tree Top residents and the Walker community as a whole.

With the additional benefit of the reminiscence museum in which residents can create their own personal memories, as well as providing a focal point for celebrating local history and culture and as a centre of learning, its designers, operators and residents are all hopeful that Tree Tops can become the "beating heart" at the centre of Walker.

## Note

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

## Acknowledgements

All photographs are copyright to IDPartnership Northern.

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## 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 more information about extra care housing, visit the Housing LIN's dedicated pages at: [www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingExtraCare/](http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingExtraCare/)

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