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## Case Study 164

# A mixed age, intergenerational living model of extra care housing in Leicester

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# Introduction

Located in the Belgrave area, near Leicester's "Golden Mile", Abbey Mill and the Wolsey Building are extra care schemes comprising one- and two-bedroom self-contained apartments for rent developed and managed by PA Housing (formerly Asra Housing), overlooking the Grand Union Canal.

Unlike most extra care housing schemes, tenants in Abbey Mill are a mix of working-age adults with a care and support need as well as older adults. As the two schemes are connected and share facilities in the Wolsey Building, there is a mixed-age community across the two schemes. This differs to the traditional model for extra care housing where there is a lower age limit, generally of 55 or 60.

The Wolsey Building opened in 2010 on the site that was formerly home to the Wolsey Knitwear Company. The scheme has 63 self-contained flats for tenants aged 55 and over.

Abbey Mill opened in 2015 following the renovation of a nineteenth-century spinning mill located next to the Wolsey Building, and a first-floor corridor was built joining the two buildings together. This scheme has 50 self-contained flats for tenants aged 18 and over with a care and support need.



*The two schemes are joined by a first-floor corridor*

Facilities shared between the two schemes include a communal lounge, communal kitchens, hobby rooms, a library and I.T. suite, a laundry room, a mobility scooter charging room, guest rooms and a hairdresser. The location of the building means that tenants enjoy a central location that is close to local transport links, shops, and other amenities.



*A communal lounge in the Wolsey building is shared by all residents*

Flats in the two buildings have either one or two bedrooms (the two-bedroom flats being for people who require sleep-in care). Flats are level-access with an open-plan kitchen/living room and a wet room.

## Strategic context for the evaluation

Leicester City Council's [Supported Living and Extra Care Housing Strategy 2021 – 2031](#) outlines a plan for delivering up to 396 units of accommodation across the ten-year period. Extra care housing is emphasised in the Strategy as having the following important roles:

- New provision for statutory cases – this includes avoiding placements in residential care providing accommodation for people on the waiting list for supported living (including working-age and older adults)
- New provision to delay entry into statutory care – providing accommodation for people on the housing register awaiting sheltered accommodation (aged 60+) and Council tenants in existing sheltered housing who are known to social care.
- Replacement of sub-standard existing provision for statutory care
- Provision for care leavers aged 18-25

The Strategy notes the financial case for using extra care housing as an alternative to residential care for both working-age adults and older people where their support requirements are below certain thresholds.

155 units of extra care housing are to be developed at the Tilling and Hamelin sites. The Strategy also proposes further potential sites.

A review of two existing extra care schemes was undertaken in 2020 to explore the extent to which these extra care schemes promote residents' independence, prevent social isolation, and generally improve residents' quality of life. It evaluates the physical design of the building, the way the scheme is run and the extent to which the mixed age community improves residents' experience of their accommodation. By evaluating these two schemes, insight can be gained on what does and does not work well in extra care schemes. Given the significant role of extra care housing in the provision of accommodation in Leicester for working-age and older adults, as well as the popularity of these schemes in Leicester, this insight will be useful in informing the design and configuration of future extra care housing developments in Leicester.

Engagement with tenants and their families/carers was undertaken via survey and through face-to-face engagement sessions.

## The Mixed-Age Community

Since the development of Abbey Mill in 2015, the resident community across the two schemes has comprised both working-age and older adults. However, analysis of data on tenants known to adult social care shows that the majority of tenants across the two schemes were aged 55 and over. Even in Abbey Mill, where there is a lower age limit of 18, the majority of tenants (just under 64%) were aged 55 and over. When combined with tenants from the Wolsey Building which continues to have a lower age limit of 55 (just over 97% of tenants are aged 55 and over), this means that almost 79% of the resident community across both schemes are aged 55+. This demonstrates that although there are tenants of a variety of ages who are part of this community, there is by no means an even split of working-age and older adults.

The majority of people responding to the survey agreed that the mix of tenants aged 18+ in Abbey Mill and aged 55+ in the Wolsey building had a positive impact, ensuring a diverse environment.

The scheme manager's observation on the mixed age community was also very positive:

*'Some of our younger residents help out the older ones with shopping etc, and some of the older ones support the younger ones who may not have family. This makes for a nice community of people who can balance each other's strengths and needs.'*

However, some concerns were raised by older tenants at the scheme about the mixed-age model. Firstly, there was a concern that it's difficult to arrange activities that cater to both older and younger people. A second concern stemmed from a perception that younger people were more likely to consume drugs and alcohol on the premises.

It was notable that some of the Wolsey tenants who attended engagement sessions had lived in the Wolsey Building since it first opened in 2010. Some Abbey Mill tenants who were aged 55+ had lived at the scheme since it opened in 2015 and expressed that they had been under the

impression that Abbey Mill too would have a lower age limit of 55. The context in which these concerns are being expressed is key: For some tenants, the lower age limit of 55 was a factor in their choice of accommodation. This meant that the change to the resident community when Abbey Mill opened contradicted what they wanted from their accommodation and even caused problems.

The provision of extra care housing for working-age adults with care needs means that they benefit from being in a self-contained and adaptable 'home for life'. However, this evaluation shows that people's experiences of a mixed-age community would be better if that community was mixed-age from the start and able to establish itself as such organically as opposed to having a 55+ community abruptly converted to a mixed-age community.

The evaluation also shows the benefits of having a mix when it comes to people's strengths, abilities and levels of need. The diversity in the community at Abbey Mill and Wolsey allows for a culture of peer support amongst tenants.



*Residents enjoying the communal lounge*

## Promoting independence

There were varying levels of independence amongst the tenants who took part in engagement sessions. Most tenants were able to go to day centres, shops, and places of worship independently, whereas others were not able to leave the building. Tenants who were able to complete errands independently cited the convenient location of the building near to amenities as a key factor in promoting their independence and enhancing the extent to which the scheme was connected to the local community. With regard to domestic and personal care tasks, tenants spoke positively about the level access flats and wet rooms as making things much easier.



*Dementia-friendly design: Corridors are colour-coded to tell people what floor they're on*

Tenants were asked about the 24-hour onsite staff. Whilst the onsite staff have a housing management role and are not trained to provide care and support, their presence was still reassuring to tenants. Staff know all tenants personally and can provide encouragement to help residents to be more independent, but also know what to do for each person if something goes wrong. Generally, tenants felt that staff went above and beyond to support them, for example, when doing regular testing of the alarms in flats, staff would use this as an opportunity to check in on tenants and see how they're doing.

A guiding principle of Leicester's Supported Living and Extra Care Housing Strategy is that accommodation is configured to operate on a flexible basis. For residents in need of care and support, this is individually commissioned, meaning that the person can receive domiciliary care or supported living services depending on what best meets their needs. This also gives people a greater degree of choice when it comes to selecting a provider and means that residents who received care and support before moving to the scheme can keep the same provider or personal assistant at their new home.

Out of 55 residents receiving a package of care and support from Leicester City Council, 12 people are using supported living services from our framework. This has been commissioned to use a strength-based approach underpinned by co-production, making the best use of available assets and encouraging self-help.

Although domiciliary care packages are generally more prolific, it is clear that supported living services are commissioned to a greater degree for adults aged under 55, with supported living services making up around 37.5% of services commissioned for under 55s as opposed to only 15% of services commissioned for adults aged 55+.

Overall, the model promoted independence: conveniently located to amenities, adaptable and accessible flats, onsite staff and a supportive resident community meant that tenants could retain their independence with confidence.

# Preventing social isolation

For many residents, living at Abbey Mill / Wolsley prevents loneliness as they can socialise with others from the comfort and safety of the communal lounge. This is especially the case for older residents who largely felt that being able to socialise with other residents meant that they didn't have to rely on visits from busy family members for social interaction; their neighbours were like a family to them.



*Communal kitchen: People can cook together for special occasions such as birthdays and anniversaries*

Residents took ownership over organising activities in the communal lounge, using the communal kitchens to cook together for occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, holidays, and cultural / religious days.

Residents were highly appreciative of activities arranged by the landlord such as bingo and discos. Staff were also able to support residents arranging their own activities, for example, by setting up the projector for their Bollywood film nights.

## Key learning points

A key objective of this evaluation was to look at the effectiveness of a mixed-age model in extra care housing. The resident community across the two schemes benefits from a diversity of strengths which is viewed positively by the majority of residents. However, this evaluation has shown that the age of the resident community can be a factor in people's choice of accommodation and that some older people do prefer to live in accommodation with only other older people. A key learning point from this is that whilst mixed age communities can bring about many benefits for residents, it is important that the residents have made an informed choice to live as part of a mixed age community.

More broadly, this evaluation has shown that the central location of the scheme not just convenient but enabling and empowering for residents. Most residents have a strong sense of being connected to their community and are able to engage with the community on their own terms. Similarly, the accessibility and adaptability of the building and flats enable greater independence for longer.

This evaluation has demonstrated the effectiveness of 24-hour onsite staff in reassuring residents and supporting them to live a good life. Although onsite staff have a housing management role, in practice they go beyond this to ensure that people feel at home in the building.

There was a strong sense of community within the scheme with the communal lounge as its hub. The ability to socialise with and support fellow residents was highly valued by people I spoke to, and it was clear that they took pride in the relationships they'd built and activities that they arranged together.





# Conclusion

Given Leicester's ambition to provide high-quality accommodation that enables independence and empowers people to engage with their community, Abbey Mill and The Wolsey Building are really positive examples. Residents have their own space which feels like a home, and which is built to meet a range of different access needs. At the same time, residents are comforted by the 24-hour presence of onsite staff and can access a communal hub which has become the epicentre of a mutually supportive resident community.

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# About the author

Natasha Bednall is a Business Change Commissioning Manager in Leicester City Council's Social Care and Education department, working within the Commissioning Team for Independent Living and Mental Health.

You can find further information about Leicester City Council's commissioning intentions around extra care housing and supported living on our [Social Care and Education Provider Hub](#).

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Permission to use the pictures in this case study was given by PA Housing. Additional images have been supplied by David Brown.

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The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 25,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population.

Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist/supported housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people to live independently in a home of their choice
- provide insight and intelligence on latest funding, research, policy and practice to support sector learning and improvement
- showcase what's best in specialist/supported housing and feature innovative projects and services that demonstrate how lives of people have been transformed, and
- support commissioners and providers to review their existing provision and develop, test out and deliver solutions so that they are best placed to respond to their customers' changing needs and aspirations.

To access a selection of related resources on intergenerational housing, visit our dedicated page at: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Housing/HousingforOlderPeople/intergenerational-housing/>

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