



Deck access, balconies and bungalows: new trends in HAPPI award-winning buildings

Every year two Housing Design Awards are given out to the best residential schemes for elderly living, as part of the HAPPI (Housing our Ageing Population: Plan for Implementation) programme. This case study report explores recurring design strategies adopted by past and recent winners, and the lessons that can be learnt to inform and influence future 'age-friendly' mainstream housing and purpose-built specialist housing.



Heald Farm Court, St Helens

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Images courtesy of the Housing Design Awards and PRP Architects.

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Introduction

Deck access and bungalows: two components of residential design whose time had surely been and gone? The former symbolised ambitious municipal post-war reconstruction, the latter uncontrolled sprawl as low-density land-hungry homes snaked out of urban settlements alongside every connecting route.

Decks received a sudden and powerful blow when geography professor Alice Coleman's *Utopia on Trial* (1985) argued that large areas of common parts bred anti-social behavior, highlighting the Corbusian 'streets in the sky' high-level walkways as the most fecund. Her analysis heralded a decade of procurement when registered providers shied away from commissioning apartment buildings, preferring houses, and led to the Design Improvement Controlled Experiment (DICE) when government spent £50m principally on finding out how much impact removing decks would have on reported litter, vandalism and graffiti.

By contrast, bungalows withered slowly under assault from development economics, the quantity of square feet they yield to their land footprint undermining any bid for building plots. As prices leapt in the 1980s, rallied in the 1990s and accelerated again in the run up to the Credit Crunch Crash, land demanded apartments and roof-in-the-roof houses. Bungalows were simply uncompetitive. But the collapse in provision was the choice of the supplier only. A recent viewpoint for the Housing LIN looks at the viability of a revival of the bungalow as a desirable, affordable option which could attract older people to downsize from a family house (Morrison, 2014).

A survey conducted by the then governmental design adviser Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in 2005 found that purchasers ranked them as their most popular house type. This was an inconvenient truth because the research had been commissioned as part of a campaign for more urban housing form, such as the continuous frontage of the terraced townhouse which CABE had been championing over gap-filled streets of one and two-storey detached houses. But even as they disappeared from the new-build portfolio, it was obvious that if someone could work out how to make bungalows stack up, demand was waiting to be satisfied.

HAPPI principles



In 2009, an All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Housing and Care for Older People, chaired by Lord Best, published the influential Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation (HAPPI) report. It set out the evidence base for a national elderly housing strategy that supports movement to well-designed, purpose built retirement accommodation, in return for greater livability and manageability, reduced health and social care costs, and the release of existing housing stock for younger people and families. The HAPPI Housing Design Award forms a mechanism to recognize

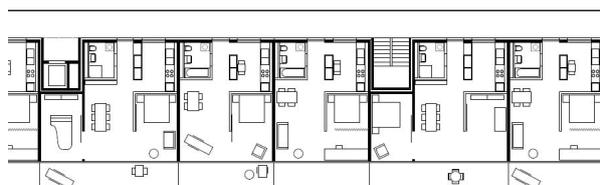
and reward design innovation in meeting these challenges, generate benchmarks for the government's £300m Care and Support Housing Fund, and incentivize private sector service providers and registered social landlords to reap the benefits of a HAPPI award's market profile. 2012 saw the publication of HAPPI2, the subsequent Plan



for Implementation, an update on progress in implementing the recommendations and design criteria, by Jeremy Porteus, Director of the Housing LIN and Secretary to the APPG Inquiry.

Essentially, the HAPPI recommendations for age-inclusive design can be summarized into 10 design principles:

1. Generous and flexible internal space including additional habitable rooms for carers/visitors
2. Natural light in the home and in circulation spaces, avoiding internal corridors and single-aspect flats
3. Balconies and outdoor space
4. Adaptability and 'care aware' design which is ready for emerging telehealthcare technologies
5. Social circulation spaces that encourage interaction and avoid an 'institutional feel'
6. Shared community facilities and interaction with the wider neighbourhood
7. Plants, trees, and the natural environment
8. Energy efficiency, with good ventilation to avoid overheating
9. Extra storage for belongings and bicycles
10. Shared external areas such as 'home zones' that give priority to pedestrians.



Wide, semi-private access decks with good views over the city at Flurgarten are planted and used as outdoor extensions to the living area.

In generating these principles, the research panel reviewed approaches to elderly care and independent living across the UK and internationally, and travelled to experience living in different arrangements firsthand.

Lessons learned

Just as in continental Europe: the biggest surprise awaiting the research panel behind the HAPPI report was how deck access and bungalows were widely used in the provision of senior housing from Stockholm to Zurich. The panel visited a string of developments in Switzerland, including a modular block in St Gallen, that were heavily dependent on access decks. The access decks were a key communal feature, designed to be wide enough for one group of friends to be talking (perhaps in wheelchairs) while others still had room to pass on the way in or out of apartments. However, it was noted that the access decks were discrete to each apartment block and linked just a few apartments back to lift cores. They in turn became an extension of the homes they served, evidenced by personalization through potted plants and ornaments.

There were similar tweaks to the bungalows, many of which were single-storey terraces, often with a mono-pitched roof with eaves sailing over the street frontage that was designed to flatter its height. They were also the only housing type used in developments of 25 to 75 properties (not just a couple of units alongside a mix of houses), with the leading Danish consultant practice Vandkunsten Architects demonstrating how these low-rise units could be laid out in clusters and terraces to give similar qualities of enclosure as their two- and three-storey counterparts.



Bungalows at Herfra til Evigheden



Deck access at Christopher Boone's almshouses

PRP Architects, represented on the advisory panel of the HAPPI report by their head of senior housing design Roger Battersby, quickly borrowed this confident use of decks for schemes it was designing. The first output was Christopher Boone's Almshouses in Lewisham for the Merchant Taylors Company, 88 apartments where most homes on upper floors are accessed from decks on the internal side of the blocks, a scheme which received planning in August 2010, less than 9 months after the launch of the first HAPPI report.



Deck access at St Bede's in Bedford

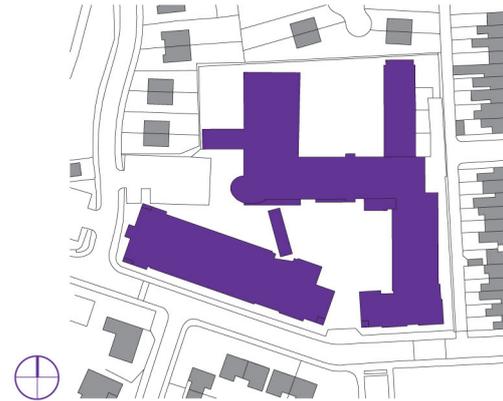
It was roughly contemporaneous with another PRP design in Bedford for Orbit Housing Group, which used shorter runs of decks tucked under a sheltering canopy structure. The covered decks were part of changes recommended by the client and have proved very successful. This

scheme won a Housing Design Project Award in 2011 and has just been completed with final occupations taking place in November and December 2014. It meets every single aspect of the HAPPI design principles with vigor, not least for its location at one end of Bedford's high street with just a short walk to the railway station. There is already a long waiting list for both rented and shared ownership apartments and the developer Orbit reports very high resident satisfaction ratings, as well as the local authority care authority adopting it as their benchmark scheme.

St Bede's use of covered access has been revisited by the architects for a scheme of 31 independent apartments in Leicester for Pilgrims Friends Society. Broken down into its basics, this is two long runs of apartments stacked over each other, with doors to the ground floor units accessed through an elegant brick colonnade and doors to the upper floor units accessed from a covered gallery, again crisply framed with brickwork. The mix of materials and architecture gives a very dignified impression, consciously echoing the cloisters of cathedrals such as Winchester, a perfect idiom for the developing trust which is an ecclesiastical society.

The success of Pilgrim Gardens, winner of the 2014 HAPPI award for completed schemes and the 2012 award for unbuilt schemes, is in producing closely packed homes that give the impression of having their own discrete demise, with traditional features such as an obvious front door opening to the outdoors and additional outdoor space to the back, here through a winter garden.

Like Pilgrim Gardens, Heald Farm Court by DK-Architects (for developer Helena Partnerships & operator MHA), the first HAPPI award winner in 2009, features a collegiate courtyard layout and traditional materials. The 86 2-bed apartments are presented as terraces of gable-fronted brick villas with bronzed copper cladding, internal wood paneling, and generous balconies. Landscaped spaces and covered walkways connect the independent living apartments to the communal services hub (which is open to, and widely used by, the local community); but there are direct, fully enclosed routes to the extra care facilities for frailer residents.



Halton Court, home to Kidbrooke Extra Care, PRP's 2010 winning addition to the regenerating Ferrier Estate in Greenwich for Berkeley Homes and Viridian Housing, also includes a village hall, cinema and fitness centre for use by the wider community. The first floor access deck immerses residents in the neighborhood as they move within their secure accommodation. From this landscaped podium, 5 sunlit access cores with a large communal balcony at each level, lead to the 170 apartments, each with a separate private balcony or terrace, dual aspect windows, and open plan rooms with sliding partitions.



Cloister-like layout at Heald Farm Court

The need for private outdoor spaces connecting with nature also influenced the design of Trees Extra Care Housing in Haringey, London for Hill Homes and One Housing Group - the 2011 HAPPI award winner. Set in a leafy suburban conservation area, the building presents itself as three pavilions interconnected with glazed staircases. In addition to outdoor terraces, each apartment features large, wheelchair accessible glazed balconies that



Private first floor garden podium and fifth floor roof garden linking distinct apartment clusters at Halton Court, Kidbrooke



Private balconies at Trees Extra Care



Deck access and patios at Solinsieme

look onto the surrounding trees, helping to maximise exposure to direct sunlight and its benefits to ageing minds and bodies.

A preference for separate but connected dwellings, ‘interdependency’ rather than independence or dependency, as seen at Pilgrim Gardens, was a key finding in the HAPPI analysis, which even found a project in St Gallen in Switzerland that had built it into the design brief, crystallised in the name of their project, Solinsieme or ‘Separate together’. This was the same objective of the residents procuring their bungalows together at Herfra til Evigheden, a collective custom-build project whose influence can be seen in the work undertaken by architects Bell Phillips for London Borough of Greenwich, a Housing Design Award HAPPI project winner in 2014.

Bell Phillips’ genius has been to design a modular terraced bungalow for potential use across a number of different sized disused

local authority garage sites of roughly similar shape. The design was a response to Greenwich council’s analysis of local housing need which showed there was especially high demand for single-storey units among residents aged 60 or more. The bungalow plots at about 40 homes to the hectare in spite of its 91sqm 2-bed internal dimension. Raised density was achieved by terracing the properties and by building relatively narrow frontage, deep plan forms.

On paper, this usually leads to dark internal spaces with few windows, a contradiction of HAPPI principles which seek to create well ventilated and well daylighted homes. But the Bell Phillips design counters this with a high front elevation that tucks a large fixed light under projecting eaves, to allow light from above to fall deep into the plan form. The plan form will also help with a bedroom and living space that open directly onto private outdoors space and a second, probably less used bedroom to the front along with dining space. It means that the two rooms where people only dip in and out of and the kitchen and bathroom are at the deep centre of the plan, rooms where artificial light is more acceptable.

Conclusion

Deck access and bungalows are highly unlikely to return to being as commonplace as they were once in the last century, and the case studies referred to here need to be monitored for how they perform. But there is no doubting that for the first time in more than 30 years these much criticized designs are beginning to prove that for particular groups and in particular designs they give excellent results – flexible private and social outdoor space; access to sunshine, fresh air and views; proximity to public amenities; and a sense of personal comfort and security that encourages engagement with the community and environment.

CASE STUDIES - THE 2014 HAPPI WINNERS

Deck Access at Pilgrim Gardens, Evington



All apartments are dual aspect and so well-lit and ventilated, due to the sheltered gallery access that wraps around a landscaped courtyard at the heart of the development.



The covered access gallery also functions to securely enclose the central courtyard's vulnerable users, while connecting new Assisted Living apartments with an existing Dementia Care home.



The rendered access deck framework stands proud of the brick faced apartment block, and features well-detailed handrails, drainage and lighting, as well as nice views.



Seating areas within or overlooking the access deck, and constant views to the townscape beyond the courtyard, encourage sociable connectivity with the community.

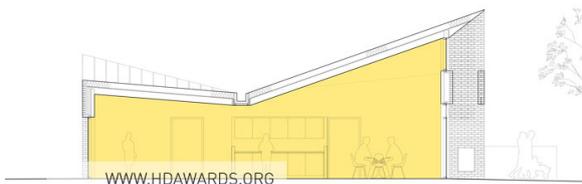
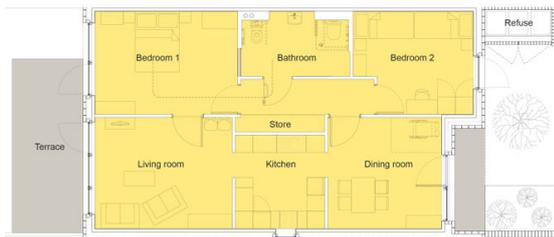


The apartments were designed to avoid north facing habitable rooms and feature balconies with sliding, folding winter gardens to enable year round use.

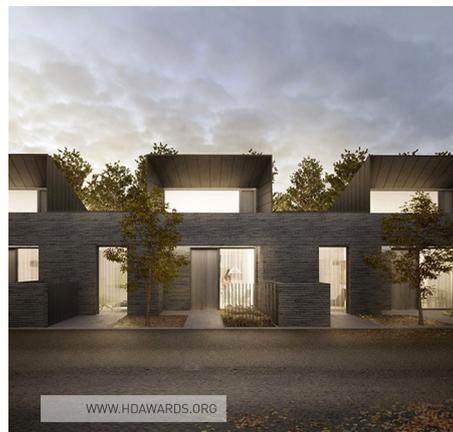
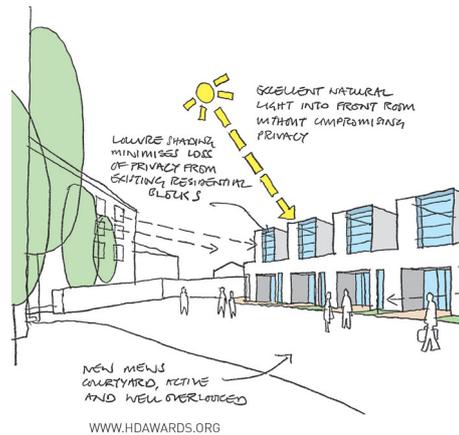
Bungalows Reinvented at Ravens Way, Greenwich



Each terraced bungalow at Ravens Way was built on a tiny site previously occupied by a garage, and surrounded by high density housing and parking. These bungalows are prototypes designed to be replicated on similar garage sites across the borough.



The living room and main bedroom open onto a private terrace, while the street-facing dining room and second bedroom feature high ceilings and a louvered clerestory.



The need for light and privacy are balanced by providing properties with top-lit open living zones through skylights in mono-pitched zinc roofs, and louvred glazing on the main façade overlooking the street.



These wheelchair-accessible bungalows are single-storey, but disguised as two storeys due to the projecting roof, to fit within the surrounding context of 2 to 4 storey buildings and to better enclose the mews street, creating a robust sense of presence.

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Note

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

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

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