



Can Interior Design Improve the Quality of Life in Extra Care Housing?

This Factsheet is intended to be used as a discussion tool and aid when considering the interior design for a new build or refurbishment housing scheme for older people, including extra care housing. It is not about building regulations and correct design guidelines (you can find that in Factsheet no.6, Design Principles for Extra Care, and other relevant resources on the design pages on the Housing LIN web site), but rather about finding inspiration for making purpose-built housing desirable and an attractive place where older people want to live.



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Introduction

When considering the interior design of a specialist housing scheme, this factsheet may help and inspire you.

At PRP Interiors we are passionate about interior design not only for specialist housing developments for older people but any sector of housing. We know that good interior design can both play a significant part in attracting new residents to specialist housing and also help improve their quality of life through appropriate finishes, lighting, furnishings and so on. For these reasons, we look to inspire developers and providers from the outset to provide solutions that are not only fit for purpose now, but also suitable in the future.

Consideration should also be given to avoiding the same old suppliers and ideas that the sector has seen for many years. New materials, product innovation and a greater awareness of the needs and lifestyle choices of older people in specialist housing is beginning to enable us to expand our supply chain and reach out to new companies and manufacturers who can help us achieve environments which inspire us all.

The world has changed a lot in the last twenty years and the population as a whole is much more design aware with aspirations being much higher than they have ever been before.

One of the most inspiring things about designing for the older generation is they don't want to be categorised; they are not a homogeneous group. So designers shouldn't provide designs that they presume older people would automatically like or put up with. They need to engage with residents to create a brief and a solution in the same way one would for any other project. Indeed, our experience from the consultations undertaken with residents is that they want modern comfortable interiors, especially if they are moving into a contemporary new development. Furthermore, they want the interiors to reflect the new building and be refreshing and uplifting. It also provides identity and a sense of belonging following a move in later life.

Some residents may have a visual or cognitive impairment, such as dementia. It is therefore important to reflect people's changing needs and circumstances when considering the interior design.

Interior design can make residents feel proud and happy of their new surroundings and is therefore an imperative part of any new development.

We hope you like our ideas and find some inspiration.

Concept sketch for a corner shop in an extra care scheme.

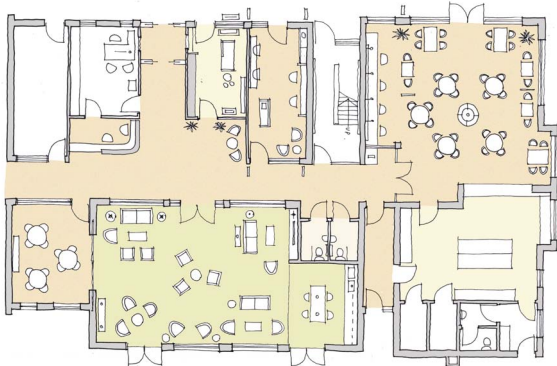
One of the important community hub areas providing a heart to a building.



Can interiors improve the quality of life?

We believe they can and here are a few suggestions which we think can help.

Provide logical layouts to help confidence and independence



Improve transparency within the building by providing clear views into and across communal spaces.

Avoid numerous long and 'dog legged' corridors.

Provide navigational clues around the building.

Design different themes to each floor level to aid orientation.

Provide neighbourly clusters.

Create a generosity to corridors to allow personalisation of apartment entrances and seating areas.

Create welcoming and practical entrances



First impressions do count!

Make residents feel at home and visitors welcome.

Provide a sense of security by providing progressive security.

If space allows provide seating for residents and visitors.

Create a community hub atmosphere with good notice areas to display activity time tables and events.

Design colour schemes which tie in with the architectural style and palette.

Themes and colours should flow and follow a main design concept.

Provide activity rooms such as a hairdresser's or shop as destinations, to create a feeling of going out without leaving the security of the building.

Use memorable focal points and clear signage



Provide easy to read signage. Use dark against light. Make sure there is a minimum contrast of 30 degrees light reflectance value between the two surfaces.

Less is more to create a non institutional appearance.

Illuminate signs with a good general light source and avoid deep shadows which can disrupt the visual appearance.

Provide visual clues, artwork or displays around the building to help orientation, which residents can contribute to and update. This helps to keep things fresh and provide a sense of ownership.

Provide memory shelves to place photos or objects to stimulate discussion. Maybe update seasonally.

Design inspiring communal spaces



Lounges which feel domestic and stylish.

Provide furniture layouts which encourage interaction rather than focusing on a TV.

Allow flexibility in the furniture layout for a variety of activities.

Fabric selections which are a delight to look at but are also practical in their performance.

Create a style fitting with the development.

Don't just specify from health care ranges. Many commercial suppliers now provide fabrics and furniture styles which are suitable for a supported housing scheme.

Choose the right furniture



Provide a variety of comfortable seat heights to suit all mobility groups and ages.

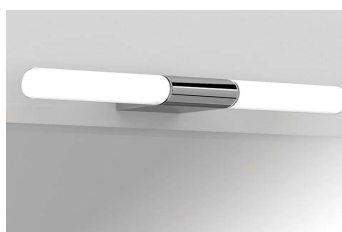
Choose appealing designs which complement the design concepts.

Contrast upholstery fabrics with surrounding materials to help residents navigate a room.

Consider sustainable materials.

Furniture is the most important element to create an atmosphere and alter a space from feeling institutional.

Specify the right light fittings



We all need more light as we get older. Provide correct light levels (LUX) to help aid visually impaired individuals.

Provide practical task lamps for reading and hobby activities.

Provide good bathroom mirror lights to aid washing activities.

Specify energy efficient lamp types.

Avoid fittings that produce too much glare.

Specify bulbs that provide a warm light as opposed to a cold white light.

Provide double circuits to bedrooms so that lights can be switched on and off from the bed.

Allow the possibility of dimming lights to provide different atmospheres.

Select the right materials



Choose contrasting colours to help with placement and orientation.

Make practical choices to aid maintenance and cleanability.

Provide different degrees of slip resistant floorings depending on the function of the room.

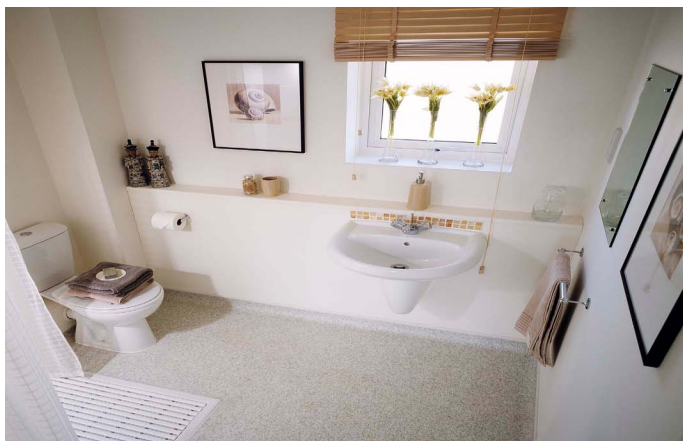
Choose materials that age gracefully with use and over time.

Consider a room's orientation, i.e. is it facing North or South, to help decide on colour choices.

Consider the view and colour themes of surrounding gardens.

Coordinate all details, i.e. handrails and ironmongery, within the scheme.

Choose the right sanitary ware



Accessibility is key.

Specify level-threshold showers.

Provide generously proportioned wash basins to improve accessibility and help minimise water spillage.

Use inspiring wall tile ranges and provide a good colour contrast to the white sanitary ware. This will aid residents in locating the sink or toilet especially for those with visual impairments.

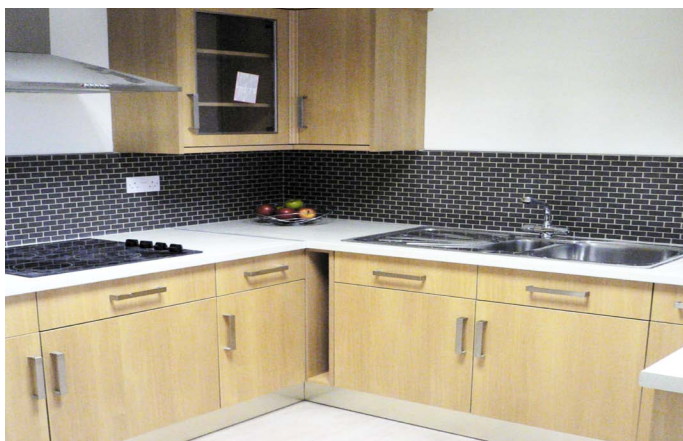
Consider usage and needs, i.e. for toiletries, seating and wheelchair access.

Provide inspiring grab rails that coordinate with the colour scheme but contrast with the main wall colour.

Provide hygienic and easy to clean surfaces.

Provide easy to operate push plates.

Select ergonomic kitchens



If possible provide a section which can be height adjustable.

Colour contrast work tops with wall tiling and door fronts.

Provide glass doors to wall cupboards and open shelves to jog the memory allow items to be easily found.

Coordinate kitchenette materials with main room designs.

Provide thermostatic controlled taps.

Provide easily accessible power sockets.

Make the exterior accessible



Eliminate trip hazards and provide level thresholds.

Provide generous patio areas outside communal spaces and ground floor flats. Provide balconies to upper floor flats.

Provide wide access doors.

Create minimal boundaries between inside and out.

Design full length glazing allowing views out even when sitting down.

Maximising natural light will assist with orientation, awareness of surroundings, the weather and time of day.

Useful detailing



Provide handrails to both sides of corridors with return ends and textured finishes to help alert residents of start and finish and avoiding any snagging of clothing or bags.

Specify easy to grip ironmongery to help dexterity.

Provide over sized and illuminated buttons to lifts.

Colour contrast power sockets and switch plates to wall finish.

Specify easy to use snib locks on doors.

Provide carpets on a double stick system that will not ruck when used with frames and wheel chairs.

Install easy swing door closers.

Provide wide angle spy holes to flat entrance doors at two heights

Specify easy to read door numerals.

Provide healthy interiors



Think of materials that give off less harmful emissions.

Specify easy to clean materials.

Use materials that can be recycled after use.

Use locally sourced and manufactured products.

Use natural products from sustainable sources.

Provide natural ventilation and light.

Prevent over heating.

Eliminate dirt traps

We hope these pointers will stimulate your journey and help provide an inspiring scheme for your residents. The next two sections shows some examples of finished schemes completed in late 2011. Enjoy.

Case Studies

These two case studies show how extra care sheltered housing can be an alternative to residential care, provide a setting for dementia care and be a valuable resource for the local community.

A Journey through Campbell Place, Fleet

(Shortlisted, Best Retirement Scheme, Housebuilder Awards 2012)

Front Entrance



Entrance Atrium



Restaurant



Main Lounge



Corridor seating bays



Upper Floors



A Journey through Campbell Place, Fleet continued

Flat Entrance



Upper Atrium floors



Atrium



Library IT room



Hobby Room



Entrance and reception



A Journey through Alexandra Place, Wokingham

(Winner, Most Innovative Supported / Sheltered Housing Scheme, Housing Innovation Awards 2012)

Front Entrance



Reception



Main Lounge



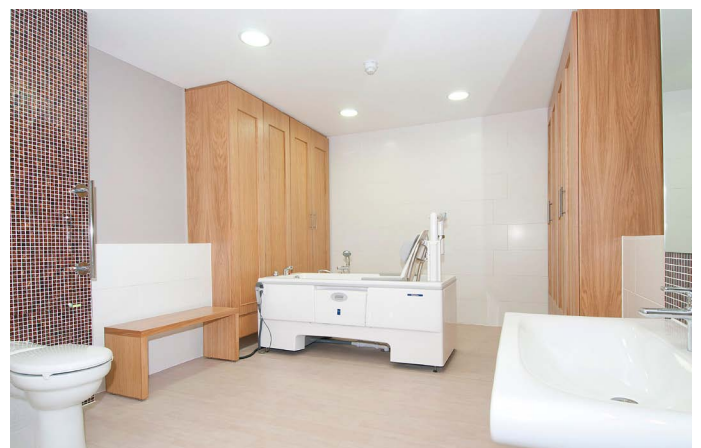
Main Lounge kitchenette



Dining Room



Spa Bathroom



A Journey through Alexandra Place, Wokingham continued

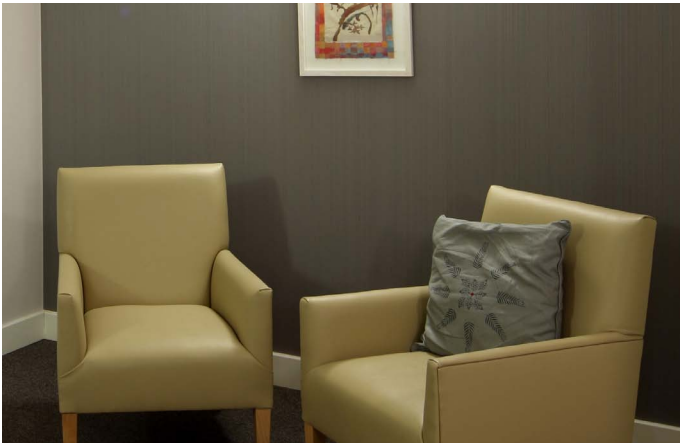
Hair Salon



Exercise Room



Corridors



Corridor seating bays



Balconies



Lounge terrace and gardens



Specialist housing's ever expanding supply chain

Things are looking brighter for designing interiors for older people. As the recession bites, and the ageing population grows, more sectors of manufacturing are seeing the private and affordable housing market for older people's accommodation as an attractive area to diversify into. This is very good news for commissioners, designers, residents, carers and providers who want to design, live and work in a non-institutional environment.

So who are the market entrants?



Fabric suppliers are providing more convincing upholstery fabrics that not only look natural but still have the beneficial properties of being water proof, stain resistant and anti microbial.



Furniture suppliers who normally supply the hospitality market are launching specialist ranges which are easy to use and come in a variety of seat heights and smart contemporary styles that are still comfortable.



Flooring suppliers are widening and developing their ranges, so slip resistant flooring doesn't have to have the typical dimple and carbon textures. These old style flooring products are not only a nightmare to clean but are also rough to the touch which is exactly what we want to avoid.



Sanitary ware manufacturers are now supplying new specialist housing ranges which are appropriate for the age group and are stylish in their appearance.



Tiling suppliers are producing interesting sizes and finishes at affordable prices. We don't need to stick to the 150 by 150 square tiles anymore.



Carpet manufacturers are producing more natural and subtle designs with impervious backings and tighter pile heights which can help mobility for those using a frame or wheel chair.



Communication Companies are fast developing telecare systems allowing residents to stay independent for longer in their own homes. These systems help residents to stay in touch and be secure. New technologies are changing rapidly so this will be a very interesting area to watch.



Kitchen manufacturers are producing ranges which accommodate varying height requirements and wheelchair access, alongside easy to use taps and appliances.

Helping to improve a development's market appeal

When the total budget is agreed for a new development allow a little more for the internal fit out. It will be a small percentage of the overall cost but it will make a vast improvement to the end product. Good interior design helps to sell a development, as it's what we see and use the most.

Here are a few bullet points which we believe will help:

- Keep apartment colour schemes neutral.
- Add good quality fittings which can aid the sales team in selling, i.e. fireplaces, bathroom and kitchen fittings, named white goods, entertainment options such as cable and wi-fi facilities.
- Focus the design on the reception and communal areas.
- Use natural products rather than cheaper synthetic materials.
- Use smart, contemporary designs and styles rather than overly patterned and traditional themes (except if it's a traditional refurbishment).
- Provide unexpected 'wow' features; these will create memory joggers after visiting the scheme.
- If it's a refurbishment project then try and retain any of the character which maybe of interest for future residents.
- Keep the scheme clean, tidy and well maintained.
- Provide privacy.
- Provide progressive security.
- Create a resource which will improve the local community.

Summary

Housing for older people, including specialist housing schemes, can benefit immensely if an experienced specialist housing interior designer joins the project team early on in the development programme. This will help materials to be included at tender stage and journeys through the building to be considered.

There is no single type of specialist housing scheme but there are now a significant number of examples upon which to draw feedback. For example, see the online directory of Department of Health funded schemes on the Housing LIN website or Elderly Accommodation Counsel's scheme locator.

The specifics of each site, the local need, the scale of development, the types of service on offer, the care facilities to be provided and budget will all determine how the brief and concepts materialise.

It is important to push the boundaries to maximise the end result and create designs which can add delight and give the user pride in their new surroundings. If this can be done then the quality of life can be improved for everyone who lives in, works at or visits a supported housing scheme.

About PRP Interiors

PRP Interiors is part of PRP Architects LLP, one of the largest multidisciplinary practices specialising in residential, specialist housing, mixed use, commercial, retail, healthcare, hotel, education and leisure sectors. Our interior design service ranges from simple colour selections to fully integrated design solutions with architectural teams to provide a complete design solution.

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About the Housing LIN

Previously responsible for managing the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund, the Housing 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.

For further information about the Housing LIN's comprehensive list of online resources and shared learning and service improvement opportunities, including site visits and network meetings in your region, visit

www.housinglin.org.uk

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 contact us.

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

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