

Housing for Older People

Landscape Institute Conference 2008

Housing, Land Use and Community

Northern Architecture
HOME project
2006

'Housing is much more than just the bricks
and mortar.

It determines people's identity, their
privacy, space and the
place where they express their
individuality.

It is one of the
determining factors in promoting the
independence of older
people, wherever they choose to live.'

(Quality and Choice, Department of the Environment, Transport
and the Regions and Department of Health 2001)

Introduction

The population of the UK is ageing.

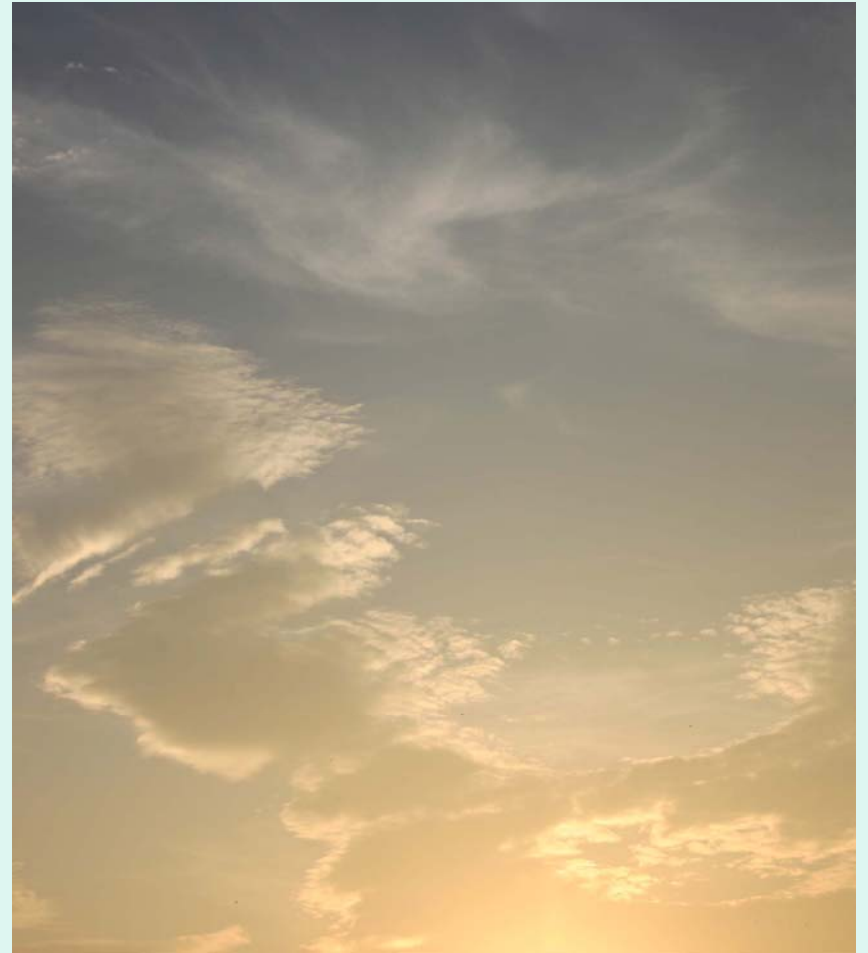
The vast majority of people prefer to
'age in place',
remaining in their own homes and
neighbourhoods
of choice, for as much of their life
as possible.

Older people in developed countries are suffering from increasing levels of anxiety and depressive illness.

It is therefore important for the health and welfare of older people that housing and neighbourhood planning, design and management mitigate these effects as far as possible.

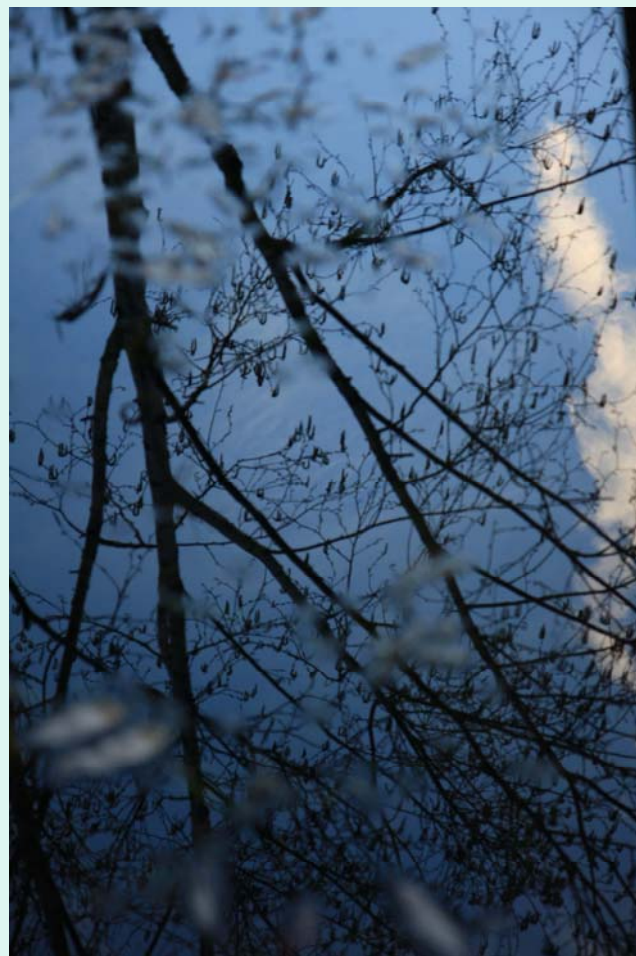
The restorative potential of nature

Nature is positively linked to healing, has restorative qualities and sustains people intellectually and spiritually.



The value of nature to older people

Views of natural landscapes, for example trees and water have value in the restoration of directed attention and can increase competency. This can assist in promoting independent living among older people.



Green space and health

In urban neighbourhoods, there is a stronger relationship reported by older people than the population as a whole between the proportion of green space within walking distance from home and the number of symptoms of poor health and residential and life satisfaction.

Landscape design and well being

Environments considered to have 'high aesthetic value' have been shown in a number of studies to significantly increase the well being of individuals.

Natural elements in designed landscapes, for example trees, contribute positively to the aesthetic experience and appear to provide healthier patterns of well being, residential satisfaction and social functioning.

Social interaction

While there may be an expectation that older people may spend more of their time within their own four walls, the possibility of continuing to go outside is important to limit physical decline and the loss of community links which may lead to social isolation, depression, and even early death.

Safe places with natural elements are found to be favourable locations for social interactions.

Place attachment

The general connection with places, characteristic of all social groups, is known as place attachment.

Research suggests that the personalised attachment older people have to their gardens and immediate locality may have a nurturing role in enhancing their psychological well being, place identity and memory recall.

The HOME project

The focus of the project was older people in their own homes and considered:

The physical features and access to facilities.

The cultural resonance attached to home through its association with family, identity, memory, environment, psychological well being and independence, all of which are believed to increase among older people.

HOME workshops for Older People

Four half day sessions were themed to provide focus and encourage contributions rich in qualitative detail.

1: The values of home

2: Your home

3: The process and problems of moving

4: Housing environments and the setting of home

Older people chose to take part in a photo-diary exercise in which they recorded important images and feelings about their homes and local environment.

Collaborative professional workshop

A workshop of older people and professionals involved in the themes of housing provision and home for older people developed ideas through a workshop entitled

'How do we create the homes that meet the needs of an ageing population'

Findings from the HOME project

The key messages from are

'Nothing for us without us'

and

'Independent living is crucial'

Participation

Not all old people are the same, the message is; embrace the diversity.

Talk, listen and give feedback as early as possible in the process.

Encourage participation in development plans, strategies and governance.

Environmental quality

High environmental quality, cleanliness and safety are considered very important.

Park keepers are valued.

Noise levels

Peace and quiet are important.

The sounds of people in the locality can have a positive effect on older people who live alone.

Access to facilities

Inclusive access to wide range of local facilities and transport routes is highly desirable:

- Shops and the Post Office
- Health centres and Libraries
- Leisure facilities
- Bus / train/ metro stations and stops

Social interaction opportunities

Safe meeting areas with a sheltered microclimate and the opportunity to watch activity.....

“It's (the view) not breathtakingly beautiful but provides interesting people watching.”



Walkability

The characteristics which older people mention as important to promote walking in their local environment include:

- quality paving
- comfortable seats and resting points
- adequate lighting

Physical barriers for example high kerbs, pavement obstacles, wheelie bins and cycling on footpaths limit access and discourage walking.

Views from windows

The importance of views from home is emphasised –seeing natural elements and hearing birdsong....

A quote from a photo diary....

“We often play cards and scrabble here. It's also pleasant to sit and read and listen to the birds”



Conclusion

Lifetime Homes and Neighbourhoods..

...to have the opportunity to remain in the home of one's choice within a multigenerational supportive neighbourhood was a frequently voiced aim of many older people in this and other studies.

References

- Day, R. (2008). Local Urban Environments and the Wellbeing of Older People *Scottish Centre for Research on Social Justice*
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- Available for personal educational use only as a paper copy from the Landscape Institute

L.I. Conference 2008 workshop

Housing for Older People

You are requested to draw a map of your home neighbourhood or a plan of a housing development with which you are familiar.

On this map/plan list:

- 3 positive qualities of the neighbourhood for older people
- 3 less positive (or negative) qualities, which may limit older people's independent living

Ranking the information

As a group, discuss the findings of the individual mapping exercise and then:

- List the 10 most important positive and negative qualities
- Score for importance, out of 10, each of the positive and negative qualities and display the results graphically.

Workshop results

- 19 delegates attended the seminars and workshops. They worked in four groups to discuss and debate their individual mapping results as a group and reach a consensus on the rating for each of the positive and negative qualities which the group considered important.
- These results have been amalgamated into the following tables from which it can be seen that themes emerge which have resonance with older people's views from the HOME project.

POSITIVE NEIGHBOURHOOD QUALITIES	DELEGATE GROUPS RANKING OUT OF 10			
	1	2*	3	4
Access to facilities Shops/doctors Walking or accessible bus Pedestrian links/paths Good crossings/pavement quality	7	3 votes	6-7	9
Well designed roads/crossings		1 vote		
Convenient public transport (also social opportunity)			9	7
Walkability / Local connectivity / Local Geography / Paving, hills Well proportioned streets Traffic calming/Non-vehicle dominated	6	2 votes	6-7	7

*Group 2 voted on, rather than ranked, their findings

POSITIVE NEIGHBOURHOOD QUALITITES (cont.)	DELEGATE GROUPS RANKING OUT OF 10			
	1	2*	3	4
Landscape quality			6-7	
Benches –well located and designed and resting points			8	
Good lighting/Well maintained			4-5	
Creation of microclimate Shelter from the wind and intrusive noise	8			
Good noise /visual surroundings / Viewing space/activity Schools, birds, none-intrusive group noise; Gardens, birds	8	4 votes		
Nature/countryside/ecology		2 votes		
Gardens/allotments		2 votes		
Community age mix			7-8	8
Compact talking neighbourhood / Active community group		2 votes		9
Social interaction opportunities/ Community hub			9	
Entertainment/Leisure				7

NEGATIVE NEIGHBOURHOOD QUALITIES	DELEGATE GROUPS RANKING OUT OF 10			
	1	2*	3	4
Roads - scary, unpredictable, difficult to negotiate, major roads Severed neighbourhoods	8	1 vote	9	8
Sprawl				7
Facilities Lack and loss of shops/pub			8	10
Poor access to facilities	7			
Poor environmental / landscape quality Public areas - poorly maintained / paving / transport links. No central focus or square		4 votes	9	7
Obstacles – pavements etc			6	
Poor quality green space with no interest or seating		5 votes	8	
Not enough green space		1 vote	6	
Lack of colour		1 vote		
Perception of danger - crime and strangers/ antisocial behaviour, anxiety, feeling of being trapped, depression	9		8	
Poor security / lighting		3 votes		

*Group 2 voted on, rather than ranked, their findings

Workshop conclusions

Facilities

- Ease of access to good quality, comprehensive, social and community facilities and the design and safety of route ways are deemed to be of particular importance. Roads are perceived as physical and psychological hazards to individuals and neighbourhood cohesion.

Environmental / landscape quality

- Many of the qualities of the environment which support and detract from independent living and well being for older people are identified in these results for example seating and well designed comfortable, interesting green spaces which attract birds.

Community

- The chance to socialise and have positive opportunities for community interaction, which limit feelings of anxiety, lack of safety and the sense of being trapped are considered important.

Final thoughts

- Many of the themes drawn out from the conference workshops parallel those run with older people and mixed groups of older people and professionals.
- It is important for designers, planners, policy makers and housing providers to be aware of the diversity of wishes and requirements of older people. As mentioned in the presentation the results of the HOME project, there is emphasis placed on the participation of older people in all projects at every stage in order to promote inclusive planning, environments and communities.
- Older people (like all other groups) are experts in their communities – an important principle of participatory appraisal and consultation.
- Methods of consultation which are highly participatory and draw on the depth of this local expertise will assist in protecting or forming socially sustainable communities in which the needs of all individuals and groups are considered, respected and met.

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