

Appendix Three – Kent and Medway Housing Strategy

Case Study – Farrow Court, Ashford, Kent

"Integrated by design: At the heart of a residential community, this development fulfils the new agenda for the 'integration' of housing, health and adult services."

PRP services: Architecture, landscape architecture, interior design & environmental services

Developer: Ashford Borough Council

LPA: Ashford Borough Council

Contractor: Bouygues

Schedule of accommodation:

- 84 apartments: 61 no. 1B @ 55m² : 23 no. 2B @ 71.5m²
- 8 recuperative care suites
- 12 learning disability apartments
- Resource Centre

No. of homes: 104

Site size (ha): 1.24

Net density: 82 DpH

Tenure mix: Affordable for rent

No. car parking spaces: 50 & 2 minibus spaces

Awards: Kent Design & Development Major Residential Award 2016

Farrow Court is a ground-breaking scheme commissioned by Ashford Borough Council to meet the new political agenda for integrated housing, health and adult services. The proposals combined four distinct elements including a community resource centre and three housing typologies; 84 sheltered (independent living) housing units for older people, an eight bed recuperative care centre and 12 independent living units for people with learning disabilities.

Phasing

The site was previously occupied by an out-of-date sheltered housing scheme, a recuperative care unit and a day centre. The project was therefore built in two phases to enable the existing tenants to remain on-site until a proportion of new homes were complete. The first phase included the new community resource centre and 33 new dwellings for the existing residents, whilst the second phase comprised of the remaining 51 dwellings for older people, a new recuperative care unit and a separate block of 12 dwellings for people with learning disabilities.

The overall layout was therefore strongly influenced by the phasing of the development.

Scheme description

The design concept was for a cluster of buildings connected by a protected linear circulation route. This approach enabled each group to maintain a distinct identity, with separate entrances and parking courts, whilst still belonging to the whole in terms of connectivity, sharing of facilities and consistency of architectural approach.

Farrow Court provides attractive and contemporary accommodation for older people, where integration with the wider community is promoted through access to a range of communal facilities within the resource centre. The resource centre was designed to provide a flexible service for all its users and encourage community use. The facilities include a restaurant/cafe, flexible multi-purpose activity room, hair salon, lounge, shop, consulting room, assisted bathroom and activity garden.

The main entrance to the residential accommodation shares an entrance with the community resource centre in the most prominent part of the site, creating the social heart of the development. The entrance block wraps round an oak tree which provides a focal point to the forecourt. To the north-east of the entrance court a series of residential blocks are connected by an axial circulation route which runs the length of the development.

The built form creates a series of courtyard gardens providing generous amenity areas for each of the resident groups. The access route between blocks is generously glazed providing views of the courtyard gardens to assist way-finding and informal seating areas which will promote casual social contact. The residential blocks also have their own external entrances, enabling easy access for residents from the smaller parking courts to the west. All apartments are designed to wheelchair accessibility standards and therefore exceed the Lifetime Homes Standards and Ashford Borough Council's Housing Standards. They have also been designed to embrace the recommendations of the HAPPI report.

The architecture is derived from simple traditional forms with pitched roofs and gables, clipped eaves and projecting bays and balconies. The materials are also drawn from a limited palette that will be robust and durable; brickwork walls with slate or tiled roofs, limited areas of timber boarding and metal-clad projecting bay windows. Generous glazing to the apartments, as well as the communal areas, will ensure good natural daylighting throughout.

Apartments

Individual one and two bedroom apartments have been designed to comply with the standards set out in Ashford Borough Council's Residential Space and Layout SPD.

The balconies were carefully considered at the design stage to ensure privacy and solar shading where necessary. In addition, external courtyard garden spaces provide substantial additional external amenity space for all residents in addition to private balconies.

All apartments comply with Lifetime Homes Standards and have been designed with the recommendations of the HAPPI report in mind.

- All rooms in the apartments have generous space standards, sufficiently wide doors for residents using a wheelchair or walking frame and good storage throughout.
- All apartments have generous windows to maximize daylight into the apartments. The design of the windows varies within the façade treatment to respond to the orientation of the dwelling.
- All apartments are care-ready with assistive technology installed.
- All walls have the strength to accommodate grab rails as required in the future, to support residents with varying or changing needs.
- The en-suites in the apartments have been designed to enable side transfer for wheelchair users and full access to the shower via a level access design.
- There is direct access from the main bedroom to the bathroom with the potential for a hoist to be fitted at a later date.
- The kitchens have been designed with space for wheelchair turning and an eye level oven which prevents residents from having to bend.

Recuperative care

The recuperative care suites, located on the ground floor, are 34m² with sufficient space for a small kitchenette and dining area to be accommodated. The suites, aimed at step down care between hospital and returning home, have been designed to be wheelchair accessible throughout with the doors sufficiently wide for residents using a wheelchair or walking frame. All walls will have the strength to accommodate grab rails if required in the future. Two of the suites have been designated for bariatric care with additional hoisting and strengthening added. The en-suites have been designed to enable side transfer for wheelchair users and full access to the shower via a level access design. All suites lead out onto their own private patio areas.

Dementia friendly design

Whilst the development was not designed to be dementia specific, there are many 'dementia friendly' design features within it which would assist those with short term memory loss or confusion. These include:

- On arrival there are clear views from the foyer into the main open plan communal lounge and garden area beyond, which aids orientation and are visually accessible to encourage people to enter the space.
- The layout of the building follows a very logical plan with a central circulation spine running from the main entrance through the site. The circulation spine is partially internal and partially external with views and access to the external courtyards which assist with way-finding from within the building.
- This circulation route has incidental social spaces each with a different interior design approach to assist with way-finding.

Landscape approach

The build form encloses a series of distinctive courtyard gardens for communal use, providing a variety of spaces for all residents to enjoy. Activity areas have been designed into the three south-east facing gardens (The Cherry Garden, The Terraced Courtyard and the Water Courtyard Garden) to encourage keen gardeners to keep active. The central terraced courtyard garden utilises the changes in levels across the site employing retaining walls with sensory planting to create three defined areas. All apartments benefit from private patios on the ground floor or generous balconies on the upper floors.

Planning history

The planning department was supportive of the principle for the new development at Farrow Court and worked closely with PRP throughout the design development process. The Planning Application was submitted in April 2013 and approval was granted at committee in June 2013.

Community consultation

Ashford Borough Council's commitment to consultation was central to the development of the design at Farrow Court. Farrow Court was an existing sheltered housing scheme with a strong sense of community between the residents and staff.

Two consultation meetings were carried out with the tenants of the existing accommodation. The first meeting took place shortly after residents were told that their homes would be re-provided and as such concentrated on what residents liked about where they currently lived and what they would like to see changed in their new building. The consultation boards provided aspirational photographs and images relating to the internal layouts of the apartments, the proposed communal facilities and the external environment.

A second tenant meeting and a separate public consultation exhibition were held once the design had been further developed. The drop-in exhibition included a 1:500 scale massing model as well as images of what the proposed building would look like. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive from all who attended. The residents in particular were very excited by the prospect of moving into a more spacious modern development which would provide them with an enabling environment.

As part of the planning process a formal pre-application meeting was held, after which the roof form was altered to respond to planners' comments. This was subsequently followed by the presentation of more detailed proposals to the planners, some committee members and the customer, homes and property department. This approach ensured that all issues raised were successfully addressed in the final Planning Application drawings.

The Ashford Access Group was identified as a key stakeholder and as such a meeting was held with them to review the proposals in terms of accessibility issues and dementia friendly environments.

Once amendments were made in line with their collective comments, PRP presented the proposals to Ashford's design panel prior to the final planning submission. There were valuable contributions from the panel in terms of detail design which were of further benefit to the design development.

The approach to consultation ensured that all stakeholders were meaningfully involved in the design process which resulted in smooth delivery of the planning permission.

On completion of phase one, the existing residents were able to move into their new homes, after watching them being constructed literally on their doorstep. Phase two completed in the summer of 2017 with a new set of residents joining the community.

Partnering

Working alongside a contractor partner and full design team from the early design stage on Farrow Court allowed the buildability of key design elements to be considered from the outset.

The design provided a rational approach to the vertical stacking of the dwellings and services, resulting in a cost effective and buildable solution. The architectural and structural detailing of the balconies and bay windows was resolved prior to the planning submission to ensure that they were costed in detail and deliverable within the client's budget.

Post planning, the canopy and windows were further rationalised, in collaboration with the contractor and design team, to value engineer these elements as part of finalising the construction cost for the project.

Post occupancy evaluation

PRP undertook an initial post occupancy event with a group of residents in phase 1 at the end of 2016 to understand how successful the design of the new development been and what the impact was on their lives. Feedback from the event was presented to PRP's in-house design team to ensure lessons learnt inform and continually improve future designs for older people. A further event is planned for a selection of residents for phases one and two together.

In addition to this PRP's environmental consultants undertook a post occupancy evaluation over a six month period to understand the performance of the building in terms of comfort conditions for residents, their energy consumption and their experience of living in the building. The study provided both qualitative and quantitative data: the collection of environmental data of temperature and humidity levels assisted by regular meter readings, as well as interviews with the residents and building manager at strategic points during the 6 months study.

Key findings suggested that whilst residents are happy with the design of their new homes, they don't necessarily understand how to best use the technologies installed, and would need to be introduced to heating and ventilation controls in particular; a breakdown of energy bills has assisted in raising awareness on energy consumptions whilst maintaining the desired comfort.



Entrance to Farrow Court



Residents Lounge



Community Court Yard



Cherry Tree Learning Disability Units



Cherry Tree Shared Garden



Semi-Recessed Balconies

Thanks noted to PRP Architecture and Planning for providing this comprehensive Case Study

<https://www.prp-co.uk/>

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