Case study:
Homes for older people, Hull

This case study shows how Design Council Cabe supported a housing association to involve existing and future residents in the design of new housing for over 55s through design workshops.

Project name: David Lister school site
Location: Rosmead Street, Hull

Organisations involved:
Housing Association: Pickering and Ferens Homes (client for this programme)
Local authority and landowner: Hull City Council
Other partners:
Hull Clinical Commissioning Group (responsible for commissioning an integrated health centre)
Citycare (commissioned by the Clinical Commissioning Group to design and build the health centre)

The opportunity

The site of the former David Lister School in East Hull had been empty since the school closed in 2012. The site sits in the middle of a tight network of residential streets and has homes backing on to it. Hull City Council, as landowner, commissioned a housing association, Pickering and Ferens Homes, to build 54 affordable bungalows for over 55s. The homes will sit alongside a new community building that includes an integrated health centre and fire and ambulance stations. Pickering and Ferens also wish to design homes that are as dementia-friendly as possible to allow people to continue to live in their own homes as long as possible.

Top tips

- Build resident engagement into the housing project programmes at an early stage before the designs are fixed, to save time and cost making changes later.
- Aim to include both local people and prospective residents throughout the design development as both groups bring a different perspective and insight that can offer a better design solution.
- Plan for an ongoing dialogue with residents including post occupation feedback, as this can help prevent mistakes being made on the next project and therefore save money.
- Use interactive design workshops as a means of exploring and interpreting people’s concerns and ideas and translating them onto paper.
- Working in partnership can take time to develop but where there are shared interests e.g. improving the health and wellbeing of the community, it can reap rewards.
- Design is an empowering tool. By encouraging people to constructively contribute to the design process they are more likely to understand and support the final design.
What they did

Hull City Council and Pickering and Ferens were keen to ensure that existing and potential future residents’ voices were heard during the design of the scheme, giving useful insight into what matters to people already living in the local area and to older people in particular. This is where Design Council Cabe’s Community-led Design and Development programme stepped in to help, by arranging a series of events to reach as wide a representation of the community as possible. Pickering and Ferens already had a strong track record of engaging with its tenants and building feedback into the design of its new schemes, helping to ensure customer satisfaction with the quality of homes and services that support a long and active life.

Design Council Cabe facilitated design workshops for two groups so that their views could inform the brief for the architects of the new housing. The groups were:

- Residents living close to the site, who would bring local knowledge about the site and its community
- Existing Pickering and Ferens residents, who would bring an understanding of what is important to them in the design of a community for over 55s. This group also included people on its waiting list who hope to become residents in the near future.

The workshop for local residents was arranged in partnership with the Clinical Commissioning Group, its development partner Citycare and Humberside Fire and Rescue Service. This enabled participants to understand how the proposals relate to each other, to speak to all the services and contribute their own ideas. To resolve any resident concerns such as traffic, parking, and flooding, ideas were sketched out during the discussion to map out potential solutions. The drawings and notes from the workshops then contributed to a set of design principles to be included in the brief for the design team.

Residents demonstrated a positive approach to the new homes and recognised the need for more housing for older people. There were lots of constructive suggestions about how identified problems within existing homes could be overcome in the new ones, such as parking and providing space for bins.

The workshop with Pickering and Ferens existing and future residents was held at an existing sheltered housing scheme. The focus of the discussion was on the design of new homes ‘outside the front door’. This built on Pickering and Ferens’ previous post-occupancy feedback from residents which had focussed primarily on the internal design of its homes. Residents’ priorities for their home included (in no particular order):

- A sense of community
- Somewhere to meet (such as a drop-in or community space)
- Neighbourliness: being able to see your neighbour’s front door and over the back fence so you can keep an eye on each other
- Outdoor green space where neighbours can sit and meet each other – for residents only rather than for children to play on
- Easy access for people in wheelchairs and the less mobile (both the parking arrangements and the home itself). This extends to visitors too.

Workshop held with local residents, January 2016
© Pickering and Ferens Homes
What happens next?

This project is innovative in its approach for supporting independent and active living. Firstly, both the housing and integrated health centre are providing services specifically for older people, and both Pickering and Ferens and the Clinical Commissioning Group (responsible for the health centre) were keen to work together on wider objectives, including improving the health of residents and developing a strong sense of community.

The health centre facility itself marks a new approach for the city, by providing services to older people to keep them out of hospital and to support independent living. The Fire Service, which is also relocating to this site, is transforming itself too, and will take an active role in older people’s health. It already provides a first responder service to attend to older people across the city who have fallen in their own homes, and intends to build a relationship with new residents by getting to know them, offering personal training in the on-site gym and a providing a source of advice and help 24 hours a day.
Challenges

– Changes to national policy on housing and planning may have an impact on the timing or viability of projects. Pickering and Ferens were not alone in reviewing their programme of new homes, and were wary of raising expectations with local people before agreeing the project would go ahead.
– Age disparity. Participants in all of the workshop sessions were older members of the community, in some cases future residents of the new homes. We didn’t hear the voice of younger members of the community, who might have had different views, however as both the housing and the health centre are designed for older people it was deemed appropriate to give their needs priority in this case.
– Coordinating events that involve multiple partners can be time-consuming and complicated to administer. However it promotes clear, cohesive channels of communication and encourages confidence in residents that organisations are working well together. It helps if one person acts in a coordinating role as a main point of contact.

Solutions and lessons learned

– Working together: All the partner organisations were willing participants, keen to collaborate and understood the importance of listening to local views and reassuring people about the services they would be providing.
– Involving future residents: Previous research by Cabe suggests it is rare for future residents to have the opportunity to participate in the design of housing, but in this case Pickering and Ferens were able to involve people from its waiting list. There are major benefits to designing housing that ensures the needs and concerns of future residents are taken into account, and likely to result in greater customer satisfaction later.
– Design workshops make everyone feel like an equal contributor and ideas can be tested on paper as they emerge. It’s helpful to show on a plan what is fixed (in this case existing streets and access points, boundaries and the number of houses) and which aspects are more flexible.
– Timing: Pickering and Ferens housing scheme was still at an early stage so there was the opportunity for people to influence the design of the housing and for it to work in partnership with Clinical Commissioning Group/ CityCare and the Humberside Fire and Rescue Service.
– Venues: Using a local and well known venue close to the site can help to draw a greater number of attendees.