

Opinion Projects for the elderly are taking giant steps to alleviate the problems of later life, says Richard MacCormac

The retired elderly spend up to 90 per cent of their time at home. This means the quality of the personal environment, space, privacy, security, sunlight and sustainability has become increasingly important.

On the Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation (HAPPI) (AJ 03.12.09), we were surprised and impressed by the number of schemes for the over 55s that acknowledged and anticipated the inevitable problems of later life, in particular isolation and loneliness. An exceptional private project at Roskilde in Denmark, From Here to Eternity, exemplifies such forward planning. It consists of 26 affordable single-storey houses with communal facilities, funded using equity released from under-occupied family accommodation.

The institutional feel of so much provision for the elderly arises from factors such as the character of circulation and shared space. A key to overcoming this is to ensure that shared space feels like social space, particularly where cost constraints tend towards double-loaded corridors.

In Colliers Gardens in Bristol, a sheltered housing project by Penoyre & Prasad, double-

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loaded corridors open out into sunny, top-lit shared spaces overlooking gardens. At the Postiljonen private nursing home in Sweden, rooms look over the surrounding neighbourhood and circulation, in the form of a broad ambulatory, furnished with old furniture and easy chairs, contributes to an atmosphere like that of a country house hotel.

We are familiar with the concept of lifetime homes, less so with lifetime neighbourhoods, in which accommodation for the elderly is embedded in the life of locality. At

Darwin Court, designed by Jestico + Whiles for Peabody in Southwark, London, 76 rented apartments share a swimming pool and café with the local community, creating a lively local centre.

At Groningen in the Netherlands, the De Rokade apartment tower provides 74 private apartments in a complex that includes 200 day care and nursing beds. Built over a local centre in the form of a double-height, covered town square, the apartments have direct access to a restaurant, library and market.

An even more compelling image of sustainable urban living as been realised at Bo01, the first phase of a new high-density suburb of Malmö, Sweden. Neptuna, a project consisting of 95 apartments for the over 55s, is located in a mixed-use neighbourhood, where shared surfaces prioritise pedestrians and cyclists over cars. The sense of social, urban and architectural integration make this project the most exemplary vision of the future lifetime neighbourhood for the elderly. Richard MacCormac was a member of the HAPPI panel, which made recommendations for provision for the ageing population in its report launched on 3 December