

The *dwell* Dialogue

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Issue 02

December 2015



DWELL exhibitions showcase Age-friendly housing designs for Sheffield City Centre

In October researchers and participants from the DWELL project hosted exhibitions at the Winter Garden and Moor Markets in Sheffield City Centre.

The exhibitions featured 'age-friendly' houses and apartments designed for the Sylvester Gardens site near to St Mary's Church. The aim was to gather feedback from Sheffield residents on DWELL

design work, as well as testing local interest in new types of retirement living in the city centre. We had a busy two days, involving hundreds of (mostly positive) conversations with residents and visitors.

See page 5 for a full report on the exhibition. Further details of the designs are available on our website:

www.dwell.group.shef.ac.uk/urban-living/

Participants from the DWELL project addressed a packed seminar discussing public participation in research and design of health services.

The event in December at the University of Sheffield School of Health & Related Research looked at the issues that arise when local residents are involved in the research process.

Discussing the DWELL Dore group, Martin showed how shared learning and collaboration is important, but that as a project develops it can be difficult to include all opinions and balance local and research project needs.

Julia spoke of the positives of being involved in hands-on processes as part of the Citywide group, and of the importance of getting people to think dispassionately about new ideas.

Both Martin and Julia reported successes in agreeing principles and producing solutions.

Report by Martin Dudley

DWELL (Designing for Wellbeing in Environments for Later Life) is a research project at the University of Sheffield that aims to improve the design of homes and neighbourhoods for older people.

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to the DWELL project so far.

NEWS & EVENTS



Residents vote on visions for Dore as a 'Lifetime Neighbourhood'

In September, the Dore DWELL group launched a snapshot of the ongoing research and design as a series of 'future visions' for the village. These were eight proposals for further developing Dore as a 'Lifetime Neighbourhood' - a place that is accessible for all members of the community. These visions were intended to imagine how it might look in 2, 5 or even 10 years' time, and ranged from a series of new pedestrian crossings to a new meeting place in the heart of the village.

At the Dore Show, we invited other residents and visitors to vote on which of these eight visions they felt were high, medium,

or low priorities using a traffic light voting system. Interest in the DWELL stall was overwhelming, with almost 500 votes cast on the day. We were kept busy answering questions and explaining the thinking behind the visions and the research.

Following this launch, members from the Dore DWELL group are now in discussion with the Dore Village Society to look at how some of these ideas might inform the Neighbourhood Planning process in the village.

Details of the visions for Dore are available at: www.dwell.group.shef.ac.uk/DWELL_Dore_visions_2015.pdf

Tackling loneliness and isolation... with hens!

Friederike and Malcolm attended the British Society of Gerontology Conference in Newcastle in July, and presented a talk on mobility and ageing. We suggested that we need to look beyond mobility as just getting from A to B, and to consider older people's wider engagement with the world around them. Examples were drawn from interviews with participants to help illustrate how our engagement with the world changes as we age.

At the conference we also learned about projects such as 'HenPower', an initiative by Equal Arts that involves older people keeping hens to help to address isolation and loneliness. Malcolm also got the chance to handle a chicken (it has to be said, rather nervously!)



Down-sizing research presented at Critical Housing conference

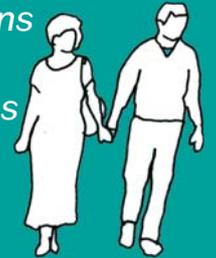
In a presentation for the 'Critical Housing' conference at the University of Liverpool, Adam and Friederike explored some of the contradictions between the politics and personal attitudes to downsizing in later life.

The presentation looked at the risks of older people becoming marginalised

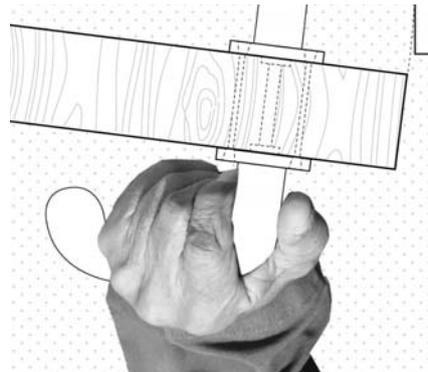
within society unless more affordable and attractive housing options were available. We then set out a number of recommendations for local and national policy-makers to improve the choice, quality, and flexibility of housing for later life.

The talk has been written up as an article, and will be published in Spring 2016.

"We need housing options that are more flexible - to adapt to the changing expectations of future generations of older people"



DWELL research on downsizing in later life



Sheffield's downsizers star at the Royal Academy's 'Future of Housing' exhibition

Working closely with DWELL participants, and Sarah Wigglesworth Architects, Adam was involved in creating a display for the 'Four Visions for the Future of Housing' Exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

The exhibition examined the challenges for designers and house-builders in the housing crisis, and asked four architects

practices to respond in a creative and challenging way. The DWELL display explored the concept of the 'threshold', and the importance of movement across thresholds in housing design.

Examples included a space to feel both indoors and outdoors (such as a window seat) and the design of outdoor garden spaces for shared activity (such as allotments).

The exhibition featured the voices of three DWELL participants, who described the benefits and challenges they faced when they reached the key life transition (or 'threshold') of deciding to down-size.

The exhibition ran from February to May 2015 and was accompanied by a programme of talks from the architects involved (including a talk from Sarah Wigglesworth).

NEIGHBOURHOODS

* City-wide group

Designing age-friendly housing



Members of the Citywide group on a site visit to Sylvester Gardens in the city centre.

A group of residents from across the city has been designing age-friendly housing for real sites in Sheffield. The group has been involved in a range of design activities and discussions. The resulting housing designs are suitable for both those who wish to 'downsize' as well as those who envisage that they might require care and support in the near or not-to-distant future.

To inform the design process, Friederike, Adam, and the group visited a development of extra-care housing in Norfolk Park (Guildford Grange) where we were given guided tours by the manager. We were

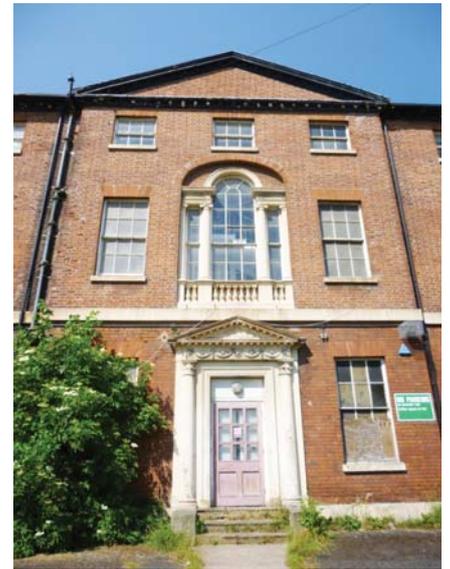
also able to visit a nearby 'eco' housing scheme to compare the layouts of other recently built apartments.



Eco housing at Norfolk Park

A few weeks later, members of the group met on a very warm summer day to visit two sites in the city centre which are to be developed with potential for older people's housing. Mount Pleasant in Sharrow is an old mansion within attractive

grounds, benefitting from views of the park and within walking distance to facilities on London Road. Members enjoyed the beautiful site and characterful building.



Mount Pleasant at Sharrow

By contrast, Sylvester Gardens (see photo top left) is a large site in the city centre surrounded by a mix of industrial and residential buildings. The site is part-derelict but currently used for car parking, and has a river running alongside it. Although some members of the group felt enthusiastic about the potential of the site and its location, others felt that the site was surrounded by unattractive buildings and would need a great deal of design work to provide a suitable environment for older residents.

Age-friendly Urban Living Exhibition:

'We took a peek into the future - and we liked what we saw'



Julia, a DWELL participant, reflects on her experience of engaging Sheffield residents in the DWELL design work at the city centre exhibition at the Winter Gardens in October.

It has been almost a year since we embarked upon the DWELL project. In that time we have made new friends; researched into housing provision for the elderly; modelled, designed and modified; laughed and probably cried, though not in public. The researchers, Friederike and Adam, have choreographed it all beautifully.

The feeling as I approached the Winter Gardens exhibition was one of anticipation and hope, laced with nervous energy. First night nerves. "Break a leg", I thought to myself. With relief I noticed that

people passing by were mostly willing to take a look, some from a distance, others more direct in their approach. I worried about whether trying to engage them in conversation would frighten them away. We wanted opinions.

To my surprise the conversation flowed more easily than expected, and there was the buzz of animation in the discussions. Once people had been given time to examine the designs it took little effort to tease out their ideas and opinions: It became clear that location and facilities were of prime importance. Home, after

all, is what you make it. The city centre location of the scheme was a big plus point for some, as it helped them to overcome the transport issues. For others noise and the need to cross main roads was an issue - I hope that this could be resolved.

One or two people noticed that the townhouse designs provided accommodation over three floors. This seemed like a nightmare until I explained the intention: the ground floor provided independent living with potential for the family or a carer to live above. These houses, they agreed, could provide flexible living, adapting to the changing needs of the occupants.

Talking to people, I realized the value they placed on having doctors, chiropodists, and physiotherapists easily available. Equally important was a café and meeting area, and the chance to stock up on basics such as bread and milk. Some showed an interest in facilities such as the workshop that meant that hobbies would not have to be shelved on downsizing.

By the end of the day I was feeling very positive. People had been extremely encouraging in their response, showing how important our work had been to Sheffield residents.

NEIGHBOURHOODS

* Foxhill + Parson Cross group

Moving from the past to the present ... and into the future



The Foxhill group leading a walking tour of the neighbourhood.

From February to May 2015 DWELL researcher Lee Crookes and Foxhill residents worked with a local history project at the Foxhill Forum.

As part of the 8-week project, Lee and the group discussed how Foxhill could be improved for older residents. It soon became clear that because of the long residency of many members, the present (and future) of the neighbourhood could not be understood without the past. Members felt a strong attachment and loyalty to their local area, but there was a feeling that repeated waves of regeneration of housing and the local

environment had not taken account of the experiences and advice of local residents, which had left many frustrated. In addition, social problems continued to affect the estate and left many older people wary of going out, especially after dark.

To consider what types of housing might be appropriate for the area, the group visited Brunswick Gardens in Woodhouse and the regenerated apartments at Park Hill. Group members then took DWELL researchers on a tour of Foxhill, where we identified issues and potential neighbourhood improvements, including

proper car parking provision to avoid grass verges becoming churned up and unsightly. Other challenges to older people's mobility included steep hills and patched-up uneven pavements, overhanging bushes and neglected and broken street lighting.



Members of the Foxhill group visiting Park Hill flats.

To make Foxhill more age-friendly, the group suggested new play areas, signed walking routes, and performance spaces to provide opportunities for residents of all ages to play and stay healthy. A greater variety of older people's housing in more central and accessible locations was also felt to be very important, including bungalows. Above all, residents wanted to be listened to and involved in any decision-making on local issues.

* Dore group

Towards a 'Lifetime' neighbourhood

Since October 2015 the DWELL team have been working with a group of Dore residents to improve the village centre. Alongside Adam and Friederike, group members have taken part in a range of activities, culminating in the development of 8 visions for Dore village as a Lifetime Neighbourhood (see also p. 2). The group's work emphasised that any

improvements needed to benefit residents and visitors of all ages, not just older people. A Lifetime neighbourhood is characterised by a number of features (see right). Crucially, the involvement of local people in the planning and implementation is required to achieve *sustainable* changes in the social and physical environments.

For more details see the 2011 DCLG report by Bevan and Croucher: www.dwell.group.sheffield.ac.uk/lifetime-neighbourhoods

A Lifetime Neighbourhood:

- is accessible and includes all members of the community,
- is attractive and safe for pedestrians,
- offers a range of facilities, services and green spaces for all ages,
- offers housing options for residents of any age and ability,
- provides opportunities for volunteering, socialising and other activities,
- engages all residents in community decision-making, *and*,
- promotes a strong sense of place and local identity.



Members of the Dore group at work in the Old School



The local greengrocer - one of the businesses involved



New traffic calming measures featured in the DWELL visions

The group have been keen to involve other residents and interest groups in the DWELL design process:

In June, a group of Year 4 children from Dore Primary School took part in a village walkabout and workshop to assess which features of the village were accessible and attractive to different age groups.

Conversations with all local businesses uncovered some of the pressing issues in the

village centre. A lack of car parking and drivers' lack of consideration when parking were identified as top priorities. Other concerns included the recent closure of the bank and other core amenities and the potential spiral of decline affecting other businesses. These challenges contributed to the development of the visions for the village centre. More encouragingly, some of these conversations

identified a willingness to open business premises for community use and activity.

The group also worked with the Dore Village Society, and Adam was invited to speak to the Village Society committee in June. At the meeting, members spoke positively about the DWELL research and its potential to inform future thinking around the village and the Neighbourhood Planning process.

COMMENT

City fringe or city centre?

Peter Barclay, city-wide group member

In view of recent discussions in Sheffield over new housing development, I spoke to ten fellow members of the University of the Third Age (U3A) to test their attitudes to life in the countryside and the city. All walk regularly and enjoy outdoor spaces, but when I asked them to envisage moving from Sheffield out into the Hope Valley they were strongly opposed.

The countryside was viewed as a hostile desert, which lacked the facilities to care for the elderly.

So Sheffield suddenly seemed a joyful land with splendid medical centres and well equipped hospitals, and as people get older they often want to be nearer to these facilities. Depending one's health and age, there may be several stages in the 'downsizing' process. A person may initially live in the outer suburbs, but then move within easier reach of the city. With increasing

mobility limitations one may then weigh up a further move to an apartment in easy walking distance of the facilities of a neighbourhood or city centre.

One couple I spoke to had made the leap from the periphery of Sheffield to a modern apartment off West St: 'We wish we'd made the move years ago,'

they told me. Another friend of mine was strongly in favour of city living - 'I was brought up in Central London,' she told me. This made me wonder

whether a city centre childhood has a bearing on one's future attitudes to the use of urban brown-field land for retirement accommodation.

It seems to me that the city becomes vitally important in later life. The countryside may offer a green and pleasant living environment, but you need to be young and physically fit to enjoy it.

'Downsizing'
may involve more
than one move in
later life

Forthcoming *dwell* events in 2016

March 2016 - Social and feedback event for all DWELL participants and interviewees.

Spring/ Summer 2016 - presentation of research findings to stakeholders

October 2016 - DWELL final conference.

We will be in touch with more details about these events in the New Year.

Get in touch

For more information about the DWELL research project: please contact Friederike Ziegler:

 **0114 222 8385**

 **dwell@shef.ac.uk**

 **dwell.group.shef.ac.uk**

Or write to us at:

DWELL Project
Arts Tower, Floor 13
Western Bank
Sheffield S10 2TN