

Are Intentional Communities the New Social Condensers?

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Abstract

This dissertation contends that intentional communities represent a reinterpretation of the ideas utilised in Social Condensers. By using comparative case studies, the research analyses the Narkomfin, a Social Condenser built in Moscow in 1930 against three modern examples: Marmalade Lane (Cambridge), Ty Darren (Caerphilly) and Appleby Blue (London).

The study utilises a thematic analysis grounded in Constructivist theory and environmental psychology to evaluate how specific architectural devices, tools of state-led social engineering , such as programmatic layering of private to communal spaces, the utilisation of circulation as social infrastructure, and volumetric modulation, are re-presented in contemporary architecture as instruments for fostering personal autonomy and communal belonging.

Data was gathered through a triangulated approach using floor plan analysis, project assessments and qualitative interviews with architects and residents.

Key findings reveal that while the architectural devices used to instil ‘collective living’ or ‘community’ remain remarkably consistent over the century time difference, the presentation of the schemes differs. The socio-political scripts that guide their use have shifted fundamentally from coercion to choice. Historical residents at Narkomfin often resisted prescriptive routines and minimal private spaces assigned by the state. In contrast, contemporary residents opt into these communities, utilising shared facilities as resources to support their own goals for mutual aid and social contact.

The research concludes that modern intentional communities represent a new, softer iteration of some of the key ideas of social condensers. By prioritising resident agency, voluntary association and gradients of engagement, these designs offer a resilient model for addressing social isolation, demonstrating that collective life is most successful when it is chosen rather than imposed.

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Table of Contents

PAGE TITLE	PAGE NO
Author's Declaration	2
Copyright statement	3
Abstract	4
Acknowledgments	5
List of Illustrations	8
Chapter 1: Introduction	9
Aims	9
Objectives	9
Methodology	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review of The Evasive Concept of Contemporary Community.	11
Sense of Community	11
Societal Changes	11
Social Consequences	12
Intentional Communities	12
Marmalade Lane	13
Ty Darren	14
Appleby Blue	14
Chapter 3: Literature Review of Manufacturing a Soviet Community.	17
What is Social Engineering?	17
History of the Social Condenser	17
The Narkomfin Building	19
Psychological Effects of Volume	20
Constructivism	21
Social Infrastructure	22
Chapter 4: Community; Coercive and Chosen.	24
Social Political Representation	24
Interaction with External Space	26
Materiality and External Perception	27
Architectural Devices:	30
The Narkomfin Building	30
Marmalade Lane	31
Ty Darren	32
Appleby Blue	33
Overview	34
Chapter 5: Conclusion	36
The Narkomfin Legacy	36
The 21st Century Evolution	36
Choice vs. Coercion	37
Key Findings for Future Socially Resilient Design	37
Figure List	39-40
Reference List	41-44
Bibliography	45-53

Appendix A: Case Study: *The Narkomfin Building, Moscow, Russia* 54-70
Appendix B: Case Study: *Ty Darren, Risca, Wales* 71-76
Appendix C: Case Study: *Appleby Blue, London, England* 77-85
Appendix D: Interview Transcript: *Chris Wilkins from Pentan Architects 23/01/2026* 86-105
Appendix E: Questions & Quotes from Interview: *Chris Wilkins from Pentan Architects 23/01/2026* 106-109
Appendix F: Interview Transcript: *Meredith Bowles from Mole Architects 30/01/2026* 110-116
Appendix G: Questions & Quotes from Interview: *Meredith Bowles from Mole Architects 30/01/2026* 117-118
Appendix H: Interview Transcript: *Resident 1 at Marmalade Lane 30/01/2026* 119-125
Appendix I: Questions & Quotes from Interview: *Resident 1 at Marmalade Lane 30/01/2026* 126-128
Appendix J: Interview Transcript: *Resident 2 at Marmalade Lane 03/02/2026* 129-130
Appendix K: Questions & Quotes from Interview: *Resident 2 at Marmalade Lane 03/02/2026* 131-132
Appendix L: Pilot Questionnaire: *Primary Research for Developing Architectural Themes for Community Based Over 55 Living* 133-135

List of Illustrations

PAGE TITLE	PAGE NO
Figure 1: Map of Case Study Locations	10
Figure 2: Population pyramids, 1966, 2016 and 2066 (principal projection), UK	12
Figure 3: Graphic depicting the information from the Town and House Cluster Section from A Pattern Language.	13
Figure 4: Axonometric Drawing of Marmalade Lane.	13
Figure 5: Plan Drawing of Ty Darren with Social Rooms and Entry Points Highlighted.	14
Figure 6: Fly over of Appleby Blue.	15
Figure 7: The Garden Room.	15
Figure 8: The First OSA Meeting in 1928, Ginzburg is Centre.	17
Figure 9: Roof Terrace View from Narkomfin Looking at The Stalin-era Kudrinskaya Square Building.	18
Figure 10: Perspective Drawing of Narkomfin.	19
Figure 11: Section of Narkomfin Showing Room Volumes.	19
Figure 12: Sunlight Casting into F-Type.	20
Figure 13: Volumetric effects on Residents.	20
Figure 14: Demonstrating (Para)hippocampal Awareness of Space.	21
Figure 15: Elevation View of Narkomfin.	21
Figure 16: Bridge to Commune Block, Narkomfin.	22
Figure 17: Photograph taken from the corner of the L-shape, facing the park.	26
Figure 18: Render of Park and Narkomfin, from Ginsburg Architects During Restoration.	26
Figure 19: Axonometric of Marmalade Lane, Highlighting Outdoor Space.	26
Figure 20: Axonometric of Ty Darren, Highlighting Outdoor Space.	27
Figure 21: Above View of Appleby Blue, Highlighting Outdoor Space.	27
Figure 22: Double Set Timber Frame Ribbon Windows.	28
Figure 23: Balcony View.	28
Figure 24: Elevated View of Marmalade Lane.	29
Figure 25: Elevated View of Victorian Terrace Housing.	29
Figure 26: Industrial Wales, Pontymister Works, Risca.	29
Figure 27: Walkway in Appleby Blue.	29
Figure 28: Type-F Walkway.	30
Figure 29: Diagram showing the ‘Common Areas at Heart Pattern’.	31
Figure 30: Routes from Residential to Car Park.	31
Figure 31: From Public, to Commune, to Private in Appleby Blue.	33
Figure 32: Circulation in all Case Studies.	34

Chapter 1: Introduction

Aims

The primary aim of this research is to compare the architectural objectives of the Social Condenser to 21st century Intentional Communities. While the Soviet Avant-Garde, epitomised by the Narkomfin Building, experimented and professed an understanding of how human behaviour could induce collectivism. Modern intentional communities like Marmalade Lane, Ty Darren and Appleby Blue suggest a shift toward voluntary, agency-led social cohesion.

This study aims to determine whether the agency ascribed to architectural devices of the contemporary case studies is of the same ilk as the Social Condenser. From opportunities of state-led social engineering to tools for fostering personal autonomy, security and communal belonging. Ultimately, the research seeks to determine whether the Social Condenser remains a valid typology for addressing modern urban isolation or whether the Intentional Community represents a fundamental paradigm shift in how we design our cities and spaces for social interaction.

Objectives

The first objective is to synthesise a definitive set of Social Condenser criteria by analysing the Narkomfin Building in detail. This involves a thematic review of Constructivist theory to identify specific architectural catalysts such as the internal street, the reduction of the private domestic sphere, and the integration of collective social cells. This benchmark will serve as the lens through which modern case studies are evaluated.

Secondly, I will conduct a detailed spatial analysis of Marmalade Lane, Ty Darren and Appleby Blue. This involves how the initial architectural devices identified in the Narkomfin Building translate into the contemporary case studies, whilst assessing whether residents respond well to them and whether the designs enhance their lives. The contemporary case studies have slightly different initiators (clients/funding) and architects, which provides a good scope to understand where concepts could derive from.

Proceeding to gather primary qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with both architects and residents. By interviewing Meredith Bowles, the architect of Marmalade Lane, and Chris Wilkins for Ty Darren, I intend to understand the specific social ambitions behind their design choices. Simultaneously, resident interviews will provide a critical reality check to see if these spaces successfully deliver a sense of community, or if they create unintended social friction. This objective addresses the gap between architectural intention and lived reality.

The final objective is to cross compare the findings from the historical benchmark and modern case studies. Evaluating the success of voluntary collectivism by analysing the results. The dissertation will conclude by proposing whether intentional communities could be classified as the "new Social Condensers" and what this would mean for the future of socially resilient housing design.

Methodology

This research uses a comparative case study design. To answer whether intentional communities are the new Social Condensers, analysing a historical and architectural benchmark, the Narkomfin Building in Moscow, against contemporary examples like Marmalade Lane, a co-housing scheme in Cambridge, Ty Darren, an over-55s later living scheme in Caerphilly, Wales and Appleby Blue, a

modern take on an almshouse, in Bermondsey, London. These three contemporary case studies closely compare to the different standpoints of architectural theory in the Narkomfin Building, the community led Marmalade Lane, the local authority version with Ty Darren, and the urban charity take with Appleby Blue. This selection enables an analysis of social groups, inter-generational residents and political contexts to understand how socially ambitious architecture operates across different socio-political climates.

The Research seeks to establish which architectural devices encourage a sense of community and general wellbeing, based on Moisei Ginzburg's principles of programmatic layering of different functions and spaces to encourage more communal behaviour. This is then compared to similar architectural preoccupations in our contemporary society.

A study of the Narkomfin Building's original plans and socialist intent to define the "Social Condenser" baseline. Primary qualitative data was collected through interviews with residents and architects from Marmalade Lane and Ty Darren. These interviews explored the positive social interaction intended by the architects versus the lived reality of the inhabitants. Conducting project analyses of Marmalade Lane, Ty Darren and Appleby Blue, focusing on architectural devices that act as modern catalysts for social interaction, such as utilising the circulation, private outdoor spaces and facilities in other communal areas. Conducting an initial pilot questionnaire for a broader subject served as a scoping tool for this methodology. It provided early indicators of user attitudes toward shared domesticity and community in later life, which informed the specific prompts used in the later, directly relevant interviews.

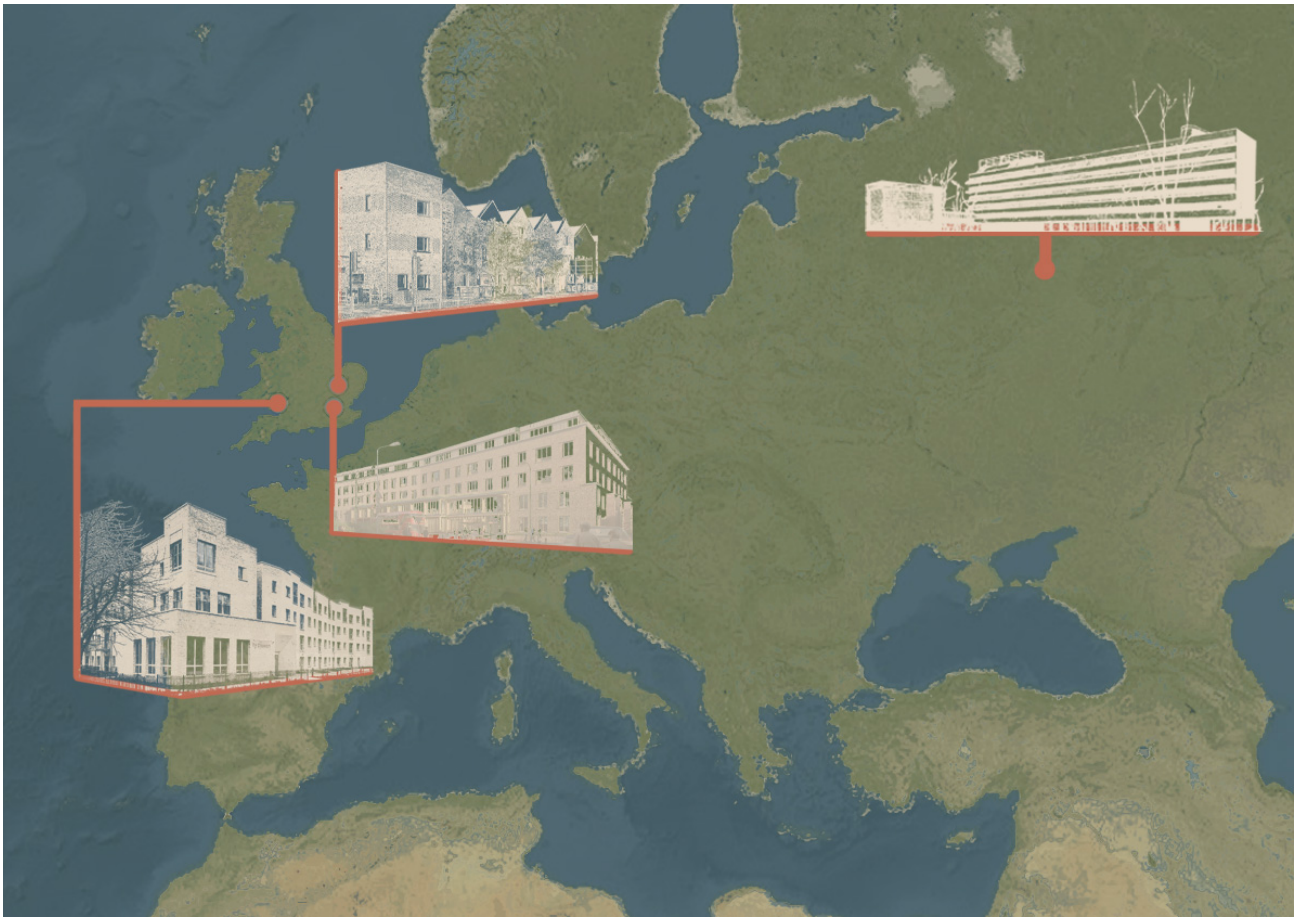


Figure 1: Map of Case Studies (Cuciureanu, 2026)

Chapter 2: Literature Review of The Evasive Concept of Contemporary Community.

The Sense of Community

A community is both a place and a psychological experience. The duality is key to explaining why so many people experience communal problems today and why intentional communities have become more attractive.

Psychologically, the sense of community is distinguished as a community of location, a geographically bound zone of a town or neighbourhood, or a community of interest and identity, which can be locationally fluid (Pretty et al., 2006, p. 5). Nasar and Julian (1995) suggest that aspatial networks can be based on profession, lifestyle, ethnicity, or shared opinions.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined sense of community as a dynamic force comprising membership, influence, reinforcement and shared emotional connection. When a person, or group of people have a strong psychological sense of community, it is repeatedly linked to greater life satisfaction (Farahani, 2016, p. 17), lower loneliness and depression rates (Steidle et al., 2021, p. 6), as well as having higher civic and political participation with improved collective efficacy (Spezia, De Rosis and Nuti, 2025, p. 12). Samman (2025) argues that the dilution or absence of a sense of community is the most destructive dynamic in people's lives within society.

In current society, it is argued that there is a simultaneous abundance and deficit of the psychological sense of community within individuals. People now belong to multiple overlapping communities: local, digital, professional and identity based. Surveys and qualitative studies in Australia, Canada and Europe report that people still feel some sort of neighbourhood belonging, but there is widespread concern that the sense of community is declining throughout the Western world (Francis et al., 2012, p. 1). This is enabled by the evolution of commuting and car dependency (Best et al., 2009, p. 13), the development of internet platforms, and the dispersion of family members.

Nasar and Julian (1995) note that the spread of increased individualism has encouraged a culture of privacy and convenience, therefore isolating people from each other, albeit by their own choice. Enhancing the isolation that comes with individualistic privacy is the commercialisation of public spaces, such as shopping centres and parklands (Gehl, 2010, p. 122). Qualitative research captures this tension; people describe their neighbourhoods as both familiar and fragmented. People appreciate local ties but lament isolation, fear of crime and the loss of shared public life (Chen et al., 2025, p. 3).

Societal Changes

Studies have shown a shift from a single centred notion of local community to a multi-layered, fragmented ecology of communities, under pressure from spatial, technological and demographic changes. Car oriented planning and therefore out of town shopping centres are examples of suburbanisation and sprawl that have dispersed everyday life and undermine walkable, mixed-use neighbourhoods that traditionally support casual encounters (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein, 1977, p. 187). Mixing into this concoction are precarious rental conditions, housing shortages and cuts to local services. Thereby weakening ordinary neighbourhood life, placing burdens on the individuals that live there and idealising an individualistic lifestyle, where people provide everything themselves and have no direct community reliance (Carrere et al., 2020, p. 2). Creating a cultural

emphasis on autonomy encourages withdrawal into private homes, cars and personalised media, rather than shared spaces (Nasar and Julian, 1995, p. 2).

Alexander and Gehl's work, with more recent 'ageing in place' and 'HAPPI' reports, all criticise environments that separate homes from work, services and public spaces, arguing that this erodes the everyday interactions on which community rests.

Social Consequences

In the United Kingdom, we currently have an ageing population. Periods of ill health, especially among older people, are intensified by the consequences of weak support networks (Hammond and Saunders, 2021, p. 31).

Socio-economically, rising inequality contributes directly to spatial segregation and feelings of relative deprivation, further straining the social cohesion (Stanley, Stanley and Hensher, 2012, p. 13). Additionally, migration and multiculturalism have made local communities more diverse, raising both opportunities for rich pluralism and tensions around belonging, discrimination and perceived exclusion.

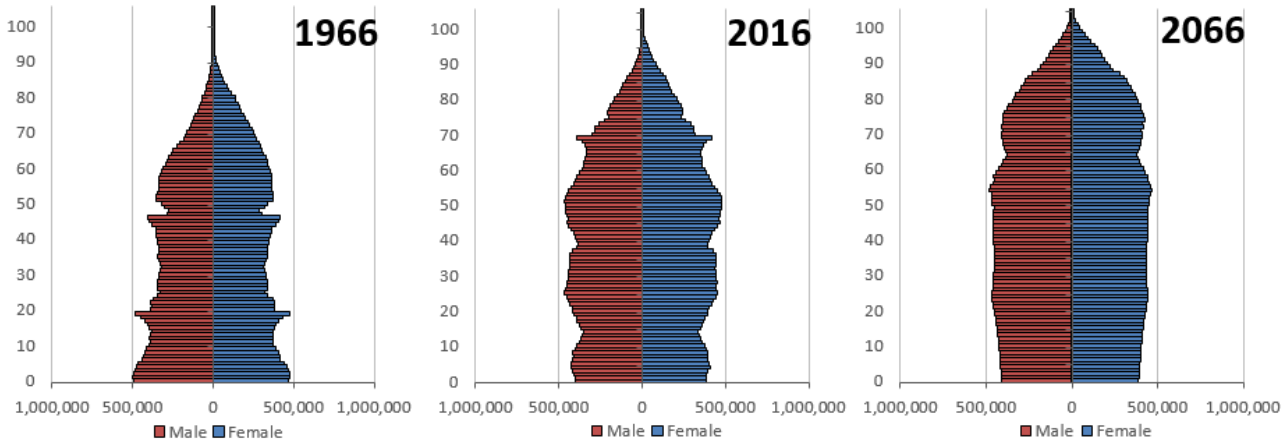


Figure 2: Population pyramids, 1966, 2016 and 2066 (principal projection), UK (Office for National Statistics, 2018)

Across the board, a low sense of community and weakened communal ties are consistently associated with loneliness and social isolation, along with generally poorer mental health within individuals. Social epidemiologists have demonstrated that community connections, belonging and social capital play a significant role in the health and mental well-being of populations and sub-groups (Pretty et al., 2006, p. 9). Modern intentional communities directly address the unmet psychological and practical needs that society faces. Architecturally and organisationally, intentional communities deliberately embed workflows that encourage a psychological sense of community.

Intentional Communities

Intentional communities echo Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein's (1977) hierarchy of governance/community organisation, using "house clusters" and "communities of 30-50" as an optimal scale for self-management and meaningful participation. But, blending the communal narrative with the contemporary feeling of wanting to retain one's individualism unearths concerns about autonomy and privacy. The balance of self contained homes complemented by common

houses, shared gardens, pedestrian oriented paths and social thresholds provide gradual opportunities for interaction without sacrificing privacy or personal space.

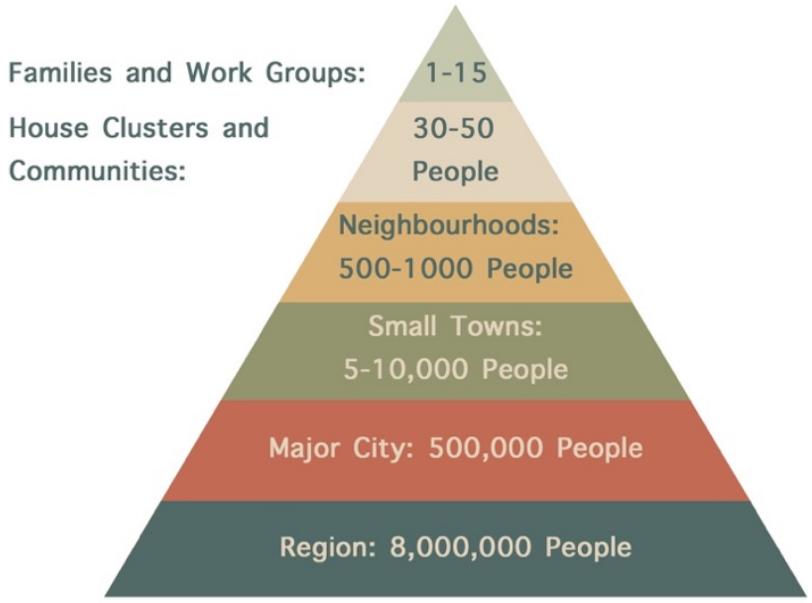


Figure 3: Graphic depicting the information from the Town and House Cluster Section from A Pattern Language. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

Residents ultimately expect to give and receive practical, emotional and informational support in everyday ways, rather than being alone and turning to formal care services (Carrere et al., 2020, p. 15). Many of these modern schemes integrate members of the wider community to use the shared facilities. Therefore, intentional communities are rising in popularity as they offer a solid, designed response to a problem many people are feeling the effects of. Psychologically, they attempt to restore the interdependence Sarason (1977) identified as central to wellbeing, not by returning to nostalgic village models, but by consciously constructing new forms of living together suited to contemporary conditions.

Marmalade Lane



Figure 4: Axonometric Drawing of Marmalade Lane. (Mole Architects, 2018)

Located in Cambridge, Marmalade Lane is the city's first purpose built co-housing scheme, completed in 2019, consisting of 42 privately owned homes. The lane is the main design feature of the scheme, as it is a car free space arranging the homes in two parallel east to west terraces. TOWN (2023), the developer, and Mole Architects used a collaborative design process involving the future residents to ensure that the physical layout reflected the community's social aspirations.

The heart of the site is a 396 m^2 Common House, which houses a large catering kitchen and dining hall, a children's playroom, flexible workspaces, three guest bedrooms, a gym, a workshop, a community laundry and a small internal shop. Around the perimeter, a 0.25 hectare shared garden provides space for food growing, wildlife habitats and informal recreation, while the lane and

extensive cycle parking create a pedestrian focused streetscape that encourages spontaneous interaction. Together, these intergenerational, resident governed facilities create a built environment that deliberately supports social contact, mutual support and a strong sense of belonging.

Ty Darren

There are different forms of intentional communities, and another rendition of one is an over 55's living scheme. Ty Darren is situated in Risca, a town within Caerphilly County Borough, in a U-shape, with a column of communal facilities at the main entry. The general idea was to achieve public gardens that blend into community only spaces. The communal areas above the entrance consist of a residents' lounge or shared space, a library/reading room, and an IT workspace for residents to interact, learn from each other and work from home. Locationally, creating a communal space for people to flow in and out of at ease, acting as a pillar of the community.

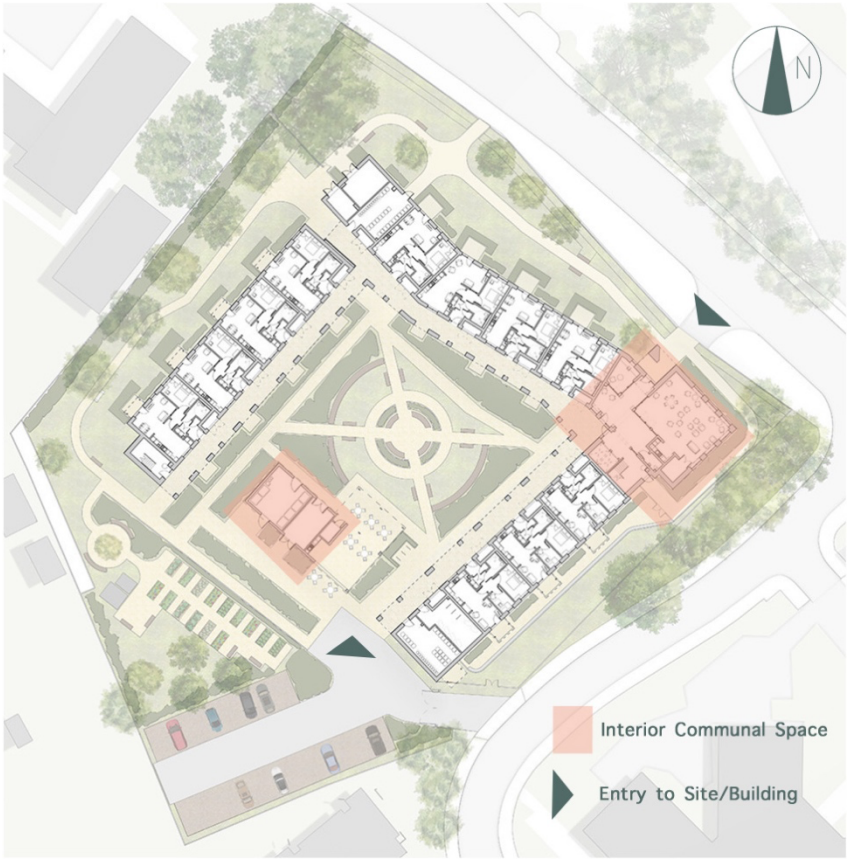


Figure 5: Plan Drawing of Ty Darren with Social Rooms and Entry Points Highlighted. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

In addition to the cloister-like residential apartment blocks, there is a hall that provides a flexible gathering space for the residents of the community daily, whilst allowing the wider community to use and hire it out. The overall design of the hall is to have an open relationship with the courtyard and allotments to encourage people to meander between inside spaces and outside, drawing the public in from the southern side, and residents from the northern side, encouraging intergenerational engagement.

The homes themselves seek to provide accommodation that allows residents to move into a space that supports ageing in place as opposed to 'downsizing', freeing up larger family social homes to the market or housing waiting lists.

Appleby Blue

The Appleby Blue Almshouse won the RIBA Stirling prize in 2025 because it addressed two of the UK's most pressing crises: the housing shortage and the loneliness epidemic. Ali, (2025) described the project overall as "provision of pure delight", praising it for being aspirational social housing. It was seen as a clarion call for a new model of communal living that keeps people rooted in their communities rather than separated into remote and out of site care facilities (Sayer, 2025).



Figure 6: Fly over of Appleby Blue. (Barandy, 2025)

The initial purpose of Appleby Blue was to shift the conversation on ageing and how it is dealt with, from an individual to a national level. Located in the dense, characteristically brick built southeast London district of Bermondsey, Appleby Blue Almshouse includes 59 spacious apartments arranged in a U-shape around a bright central courtyard (Architect Projects, 2025). The apartments range from 55 m2 one bedroom to 79 m2 two bedroom, with 11 wheelchair accessible apartments and 2 studio units for research assistants. The busy high street is ideal for today's older generation who want to lead an active life in the heart of the inner city. With a bus stop on its doorstep, local shops and cafés nearby, the design blurs the boundary between private and public life, enabling residents to remain active participants in the neighbourhood (Skerl, 2026).

Conceptually, the project offers a dignified refresh of the UK's centuries-old almshouse typology: modest, low terraced buildings operated by charities for poor or disabled residents, where feelings of isolation were frequent. Hickman, (2025) notes that WWM's design offers an alternative to the uninspired, dreary nature of contemporary housing for residents aged 65 and over.



Figure 7: The Garden Room. (Vile, 2025)

Social spaces meant to ward off loneliness and foster social interaction, including a shared roof garden and a community kitchen. The building's facilities are not just for residents but are offered as a gift back to the wider neighbourhood (Architecture Today, 2023). Upon entry, there is a garden room and a community kitchen, a double height space used for multigenerational cooking and other classes. The roof terrace, situated on the south facing two storey side of the almshouse, features raised beds for residents to grow vegetables; the height of the

beds allows for all levels of accessibility to participate. Promoting physical activity whilst enabling private, elevated, outdoor spaces with views of London over the terraced house skyline (Housing LIN, 2025).

Politically, Appleby Blue represents an incentive to downsize. By providing a superior alternative to the family council homes of potential residents, it has successfully released over 100 bedrooms back into the local Southwark housing stock (Housing LIN, 2025). The project has shown that downsizing doesn't have to be a dreary, negative concept, proving that high quality architecture for the elderly can solve broader housing issues (Luborsky, Lysack and Van Nuil, 2011).

Chapter 3: Literature Review of Manufacturing a Soviet Community.

What is Social Engineering?

Social engineering refers to the deliberate devices used in architecture and urban planning to subconsciously guide people to behave in a certain way. Kuchenbuch (2015) describes it as readjusting everyday life, like social relations and behaviours, in line with a desired model of community. He goes on to highlight that city planners and architects use scientific or technical means, such as spatial layouts, housing types and infrastructure, to stabilise communities by restoring or fostering social cohesion.

In the Soviet Constructivist context, this took the architectural form of a Social Condenser, buildings and settlements intentionally designed to transform habits by collectivising domestic life and structuring patterns of interaction. The goal is to nudge residents towards a socially superior way of life without direct enforcement from another person or system. This is typically achieved by mixing necessary functions like housing, childcare, exercise and culture within a single space to harbour social encounters.

History of the Social Condenser

In Russia, the October Revolution of 1917 brought the Bolsheviks to power under Vladimir Lenin. Creating the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR). Following this, the Bolsheviks fought the anti-communists in a civil war, which they won in 1922 (Marxists Internet Archive, 1923).

With the direct aim of creating a new socialist man, the Party set about building Social Condensers. The core philosophy was to dissolve old habits, such as privacy, religion and traditional family units, by forcing different social classes into shared, condensed space. While utopian modernists in the West, such as those associated with the Bauhaus or the Weimar-era Siedlungen, also imagined new communal living patterns and used architecture to shape society, the Social Condenser was uniquely radical in its ambition to use spatial design as an active instrument for breaking down class divisions



Figure 8: The First OSA Meeting in 1928, Ginzburg is Centre. (Wolfe, 2023)

and private life, making the Soviet project uncompromising in its drive toward engineered collectivism (Buchli, 2017, pp. 387-402).

Before the Party began building new structures, they tested out their theories in the existing urban fabric. By condensing people into the large, aristocratic apartments and dividing them into Kommunalka (communal apartments). Every family would be given one room to live in, then kitchens and bathrooms were shared by five or six families (Koriakovskaia and Mizono, 2020). Forcing multiple families into one space initially failed because it was too radical for residents to accept, leading to significant friction among the families.

The OSA Group (Organisation of Contemporary Architects) was a state funded architectural association, active from 1925 to 1930, considered to be the first group of constructivist architects. Architects like Moisei Ginzburg and the Vesnin brothers used architectural devices such as overlapping spaces, eliminating isolated rooms in favour of expansive hallways and open common areas to force social interaction. Taking domestic tasks like cooking, laundry and childcare into their separate zones, as public, communal facilities. Idealistically, buildings also included wider community facilities such as libraries, gyms and theatres to keep citizens engaged within the collective (Buckler and Cross, 2015).

As the USSR stabilised further, the Party funded new architecture, leading to specific social engineering prototypes within the Dom-Kommuna (House Commune). Industrial scale kitchens and dining were designed to liberate women from their isolated, traditional roles in the home. Workers' clubs were used for political education, as well as providing children's colonies where children were raised more by the state than by their parents. The state sought to inculcate communist values, reducing the family's role in children's education. Thereby, encouraging women to join the workforce within the condensers or for the union of the RSFSR (Koriakovskaia and Mizono, 2020).

The Narkomfin Building, designed by Moisei Ginzburg, completed in 1930, is a primary example of a Social Condenser (Archibald, 2013). This was different to the other Social Condensers at the time, as it was purpose-built for a specific group of people. Ginzburg recognised that the communities within these buildings would not change overnight, meaning this was a building designed to bridge the gap between the old life and the new Soviet one (Wolfe and Cathcart, 2015). Leading Moisei Ginzburg to develop the transitional type...

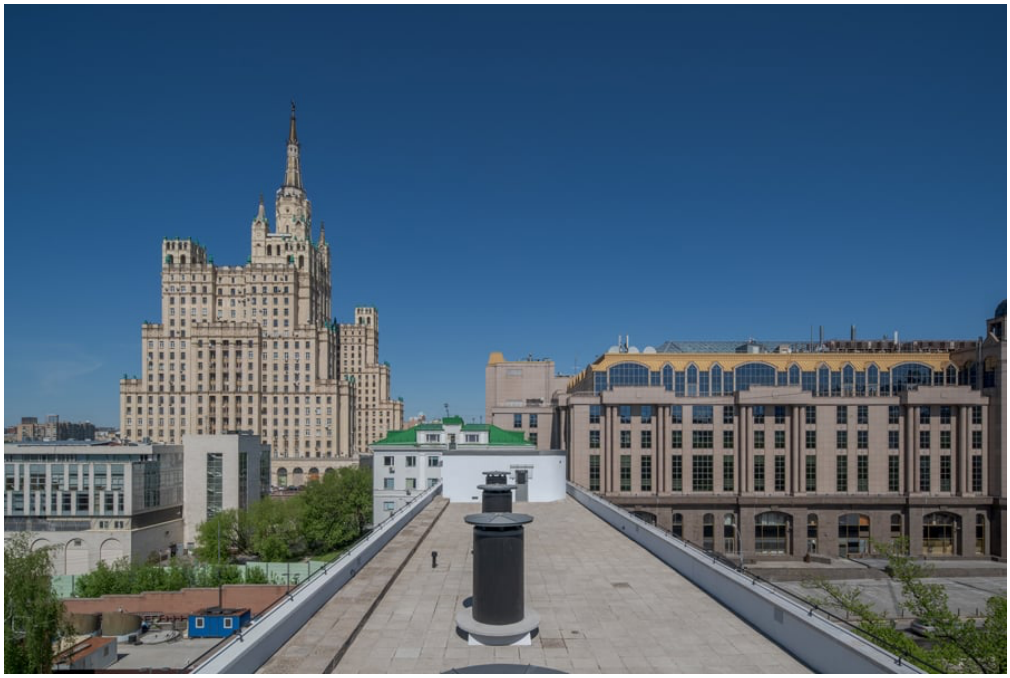


Figure 9: Roof Terrace View from Narkomfin Looking at The Stalin-era Kudrinskaya Square Building. (Muraenko, 2020)

The Narkomfin Building

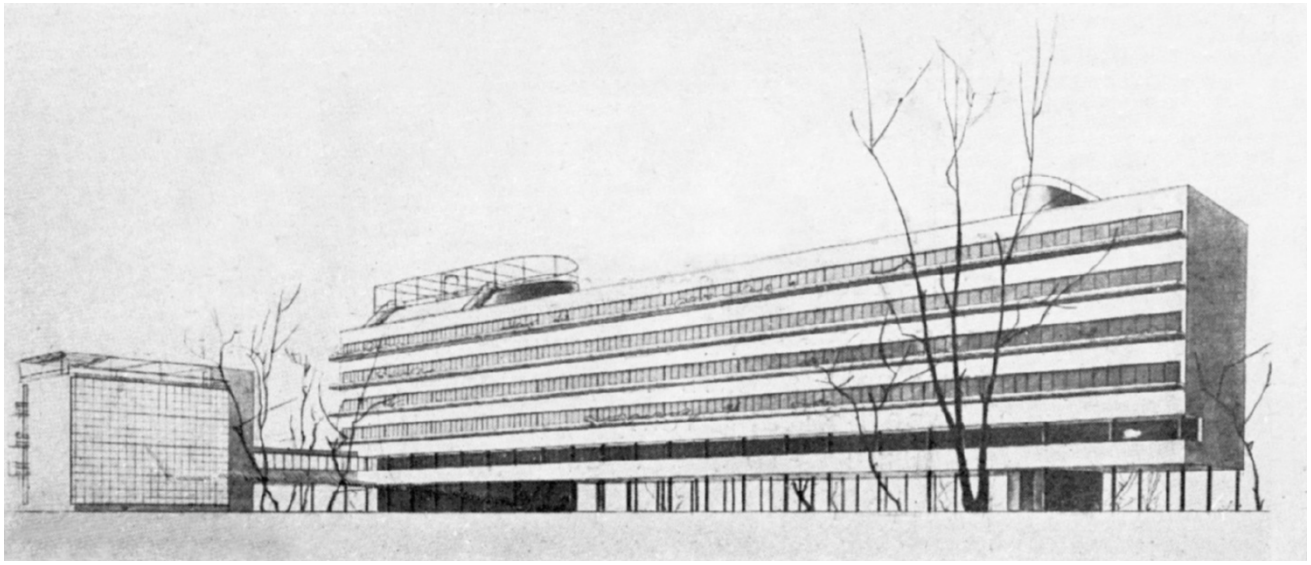


Figure 10: Perspective Drawing of Narkomfin. (Ginzburg and Milinis, 1928)

Moisei Ginzburg and Alexander Pasternak utilised research from the Stroikom committee to create interlocking apartments that maximised space (ArtLark, 2022). The Type-F unit was a duplex, or split-level apartment (Ginzburg, 1982, p. 5). Floor plans show the 'bedroom' on a separate level from the main living area, which created a physical and psychological separation between rest and daily activities (Seo and Sohn, 2016, p. 40). This split-level design was an innovative way to maximise the utility of a small footprint while creating distinct functional zones (Fontenele, 2019).

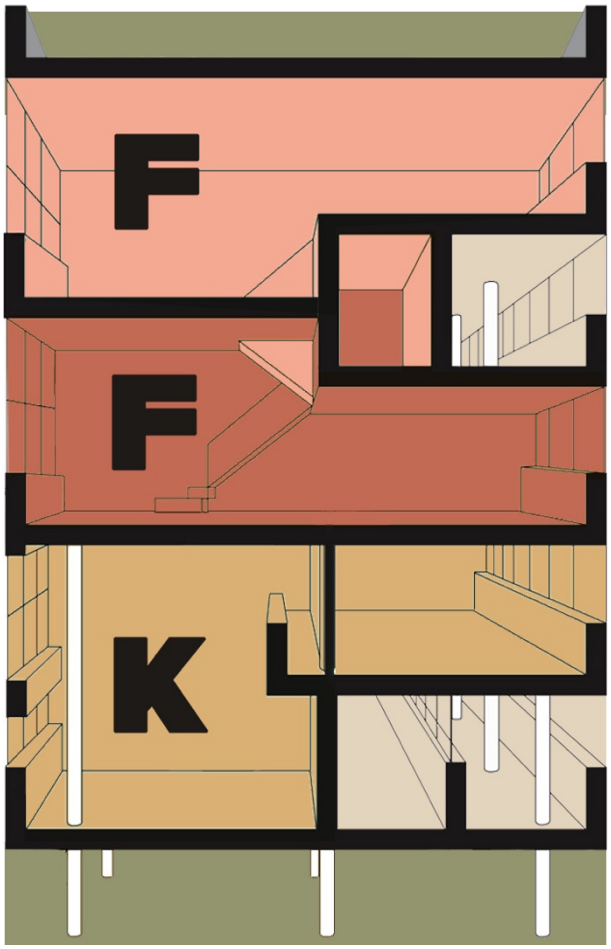


Figure 11: Section of Narkomfin Showing Room Volumes. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

Upon entry to the F-Type apartment, before the resident is guided up or down the stairs, despite there being a laundry room, all apartments have small washing machines, a small sink, and a utility space with a small worktop and a cupboard or two. The apartment's overall footprint is 37 square metres (Eliseeva, 2021). The F-Type cell, designed for smaller families than the K-Type, a maximum of a family of three, features a double-height living room measuring 3.6 metres high and a sleeping area with a lower ceiling height of 2.2 metres (Buchli, 1998, p. 172).

Due to the building's orientation, the sun casts a beautiful light into the bedroom areas, and you can see the walls' colouration slightly changing tint, as designed by Hinnerk Scheper, who worked with Moisei Ginzburg (Bauhaus Foundation Tel Aviv, 2017). The windows were timber framed ribbon windows on a double set system. Eliseeva (2021)



Figure 12: Sunlight Casting into F-Type. (Vassiliev, 2016)

highlights the external facades where windows had openings, Ginzburg designed supported areas for residents to place window box planters. Not only was this to give the residents their choice of floral flair, but also to make the exterior elevation feature rows of greenery standing out against the stark white rendering, curating a personalised and lived in frontage.

Moisei Ginzburg deliberately created a contrast between the volumes of the open plan living room and the sleeping quarters to influence the occupants' psychological state and daily rhythms in each space. The bedroom was designed as a sleeping niche, intentionally intimate, with a low-slung ceiling height compared to the rest of the unit (Buchli, 1998, p.172). Ginzburg believed that the design of the space would help regulate the occupants' mood and activity levels (Kopp, 1985, p.80). The bedroom zones faced east, so they received natural morning light that filtered through the trees of the park. Although this was not just a volumetric space saving measure. It was researched that the bedroom area would feel like a separate, private and slower mode of life, encouraging sleep and restorative behaviours (Ginzburg, 1982, p.9). In contrast, the open-plan common room was much taller, making it brighter with natural light, as the windows were stacked to double height in these spaces, intending for more vigorous activities during waking hours (Buchli, 1998, p. 172).

The two social corridors, on the second and fifth floors, act like the building's arteries (Movilla Vega, 2020, p. 10). They were lit by ribbon windows and heated by large radiators linking the piloti to the edge of the facade's interior. The transition from a resident's own house into the hallway was a move into a semi-public space, done purposefully to blend the communal principles with the residents' apartments.

Psychological Effects of Volume

The interlocking, scissor-like interplay of the apartments enabled dual-aspect ventilation for all units. The organisation of low ceiling bedrooms and tall living rooms was not just a matter of aesthetics; Buchli (2017) argues that it is a

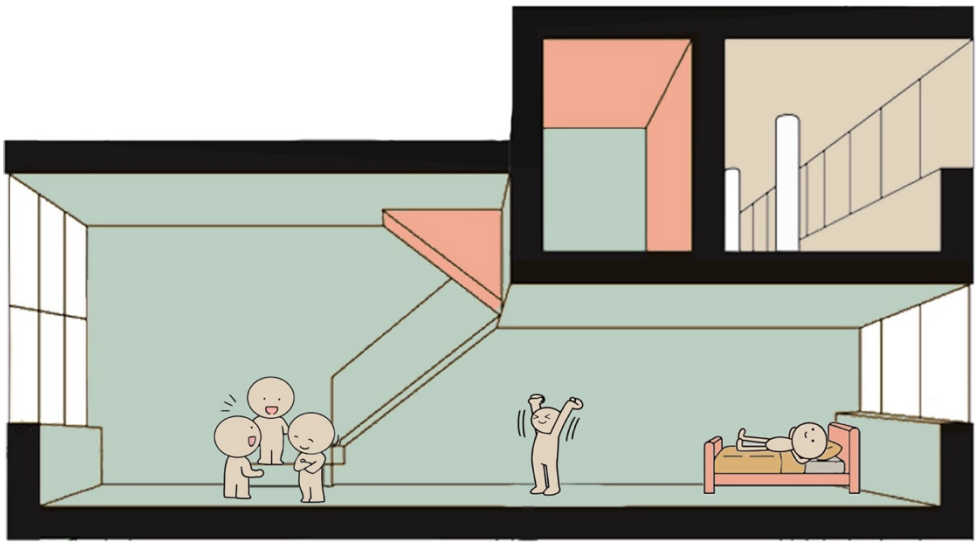


Figure 13: Volumetric effects on Residents. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

deliberate psychological tactic to make small, space-efficient floor plans feel modern and expansive.

Aside from aesthetics, the spaces were tested and designed like this for deeper reasons. As a resident, moving from compressed sleeping niches to soaring living room volumes functions as a sophisticated instrument for psychological self-regulation (Buchli, 1998, p. 174). The design leverages environmental psychology and neuroarchitecture to bridge the gap between private domesticity and the concept of the new socialist collective.

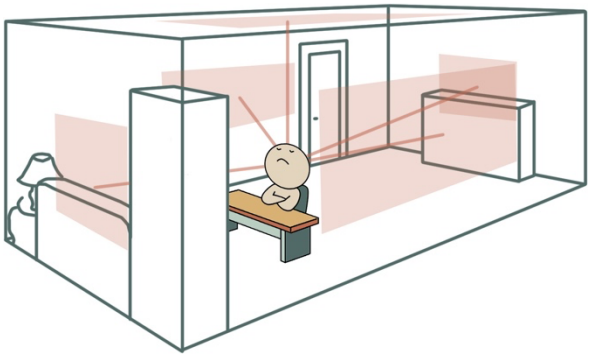


Figure 14: Demonstrating (Para)hippocampal Awareness of Space. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

Christopher Alexander's pattern, Ceiling Height Variety, posits that humans instinctively read ceiling height as a proxy for social distance (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein, 1977, p. 881). Low ceilings induce a feeling of intimacy, withdrawal and introspection; ideal states for personal or functional tasks. Conversely, high ceilings facilitate abstract, associative thinking and openness, reducing feelings of confinement. The duality of the compressed bedroom and the double height living space allows the dynamic of privacy and peace to social engagement within the home.

Modern neuroscientific research confirms these effects are processed by the brain's visuospatial networks, including the hippocampus and the parahippocampal area (Abbas et al., 2024, p. 10). These brain regions build cognitive maps of volume, which directly influence arousal, stress and exploratory behaviour. The stark contrast between compression and expansion is critical. Meaning that the tight scale of the bedroom intensifies the sense of release when the resident enters the light filled living area.

This clear spatial hierarchy within each flat directly echoes the social philosophy behind the building. The bedrooms, intended to be the most private and functional spaces, are compressed and practical. The design makes the living room the heart of shared domestic life and the most inviting space, guiding residents from seclusion toward participation and aligning with the building's broader intent (Buckler and Cross, 2015).

Constructivism

Moisei Ginzburg applied the latest architectural techniques to facilitate the goals of the Narkomfin Building. Lifting the structure on piloti not only enables communal gardens and pathways beneath but also symbolically frees shared space for the collective. The ribbon windows do more than provide technical daylight; they are a statement of equality, ensuring that every resident receives the same quality of light, blurring distinctions of individual status (Sayer and Muraenko, 2020). The walls feel light as the load bearing duties are



Figure 15: Elevation View of Narkomfin. (Muraenko, 2020)

transferred to the columns, allowing spaces to be double-height and open plan, supporting the ideals of transparency, openness and communal participation.

Constructivist architects believed that modern housing must provide residents with maximum daylight, fresh air and contact with nature. Kopp (1985) describes how Ginzburg explicitly saw this as “indispensable human environment: air, sun and greenery”. The roof completes this environment's strategy as a sun-exposed recreation zone. Providing communal gardens, a solarium, outdoor leisure areas and a space used for summer dining (Kopp, 1985, p. 71). The roof, together with the internal street corridors, was thus part of a deliberately designed social infrastructure that encouraged neighbours to meet, exercise and relax together (Pokrovskaya and Kolganov, 2020).



Figure 16: Bridge to Commune Block, Narkomfin. (Palmin, 2020)

Social Infrastructure

The Narkomfin Building was visually honest concerning its layout and how you could move around the spaces. The building was split into two volumes. The residential and the communal, creating a clear distinction between the commune and the residential home. The two blocks are connected by a heated bridge that protects you from the harsh Moscow winters. Entry to the communal block led to a large kitchen and a double-height dining room, much like the apartments but on a larger scale.

The bridge serves as a ritual space for residents; crossing it signifies a shift in identity from the individual to the citizen. Early Soviet theorists liked this shift in identity, from private inhabitant to collectivist citizen, but for some residents the psychological effect could be double-edged. Empowering when communal life functioned well but felt disciplinary when it did not (Bianchi and Pardini, 2017, p. 14 & 43).

The food hall is loud when it's full, the clatter of crockery, overlapping conversations, the smell of different dishes. The space reinforces this sense of a shared ritual of collective eating, all at the same time as your neighbours. Elsewhere in the communal block, more intimate rooms supported other aspects of collective life. One floor housed a gymnasium with changing rooms and large showers; another, a library and a reading room where residents could work or attend meetings (Lucarelli, 2016). These spaces were quieter and more specialised than the dining hall: a library session might be hushed and concentrated; the gym noisy and physical; the laundry steamy and pragmatic. Succeeding in their social aims by providing access to culture, hygiene and leisure that a small flat could not.

Holistically, the variety of communal facilities makes Narkomfin’s social infrastructure feel almost like an extension of the residents' homes, with varying degrees of privacy. The wide corridors and stairwells, because they are wide and well-lit and overlook the park, become semi-public living

rooms where you can pause to chat, observe, argue or feel that others are nearby (Kopp, 1985, p. 67, 71 & 75). Offering escape from both the smallness of the apartments and the discipline of the canteen, the roof terrace was a place where the collective is experienced not as an obligation but as a pleasure.

Chapter 3: Community; Coercive & Chosen

Social Political Representation

Buildings are designed by people, for people. The architects designing the spaces have an ambition or goal for how the space is perceived and used. How well that end ideal is received by users is not within the architect's control. Social-political representation within buildings can be the way the architectural form, spatial layout or regime, gives function to social relations and political ideas.

Constructivists defined the Social Condenser as a building or complex whose spatial organisation aspires to condition the collective behaviour of the residents, deliberately guiding everyday life towards a new, more egalitarian social order (Bianchi and Pardini, 2017, p. 144). Critical theory on Soviet architecture describes buildings as ‘powerful tools for ideological dissemination’, embodying socialist principles and shaping collective memory and social values while still operating as instruments of power and control, emphasising how design can convey ideological narratives (Bibhakar, 2025, p. 19). Environmental psychology and socio-legal work on architecture argue that the built environment is not psychologically neutral, because architectural devices such as layouts, thresholds and circulation patterns give order to social interaction, and can encode bias in favour of groups or values (Shah and Kesan, 2007, p. 4).

Due to the nature of the OSA with the Narkomfin, residents were allocated to live in the new scheme, so there was a period of adjustment into their new homes, the building and, of course, each other. This took longer than the other schemes as moving to the Narkomfin wasn’t an open housing market choice for all.

After the building's opening, families experienced a strong collective community which had its own difficulties but, in practice, enabled cleaners and ministers' families to live side by side, with their children playing together with little sense of social barriers (Bibhakar, 2025, p. 2). However, because of the influx of workers into cities and the need to build new housing cheaply and quickly, the communal spaces were often repurposed as living spaces, and the flats intended for a single person were occupied by whole families. Resultantly, the concept of the socialist utopia, where everyone lives in harmony with each other, was only partly realised (Pokrovskaya and Kolganov, 2020). Under Stalin, many original residents were repressed, and the complex became associated with fear and loss as much as it did utopia.

But since the building's restoration, artists have embraced it more as a gentrified design icon, since it is a lived socialist experiment. According to Eliseeva (2021), a current resident, all the people using the building today enjoy the design through and through. The social spaces are often used for meals or birthday parties, and people have kept all the original features within the apartments.

Because initial residents were effectively placed there by the state and daily routines were tightly scripted, the building is remembered ambivalently: architecturally admired but also often resented. Its social-political script was strong enough to provoke resistance rather than identification (Mandelman, 2021, p. 95).

Whereas in Cambridge, Marmalade Lane, is a resident led, egalitarian cohousing model with an intergenerational focus on collaborative, low-carbon neighbourhood life (TOWN, 2023, p. 6). The architecture and communal governance express cooperative politics within residents’ lives, from private homes and the common house resident control over management and decisions for the establishment. All the residents of Marmalade Lane are living there voluntarily, joining the cohousing

group by buying or renting into the scheme. Conducting an interview with Meredith Bowles, the lead Architect on the scheme, he discussed that the homes were initially “marketed as custom build so there were lots of options as to how people could configure their houses”, encouraging the residents to take ownership and feel proud of their establishment (Appendix F & G). Giving people the opportunity to actively choose the model of their homes and co-create it, they typically identify strongly with what it represents. Things like mutual aid, environmentalism and democratic control of their community and therefore report very positive feelings. The socio-political aims and lived experience are closely aligned.

Ty Darran represents state care and independence in built form. Their perception is likely to hinge on whether the promised non-institutional feel and neighbourly contact materialise; the design is trying to earn trust and provide safety. Due to the project still emerging, having opened its doors to the public in March 2026, there is no post-occupancy resident testimony yet. But the architects, Chris Wilkins and his team, were explicit that they did not want the building to feel institutional. Discussing at interview, that a “personalised wide residential corridor… without passing through institutionalised reception spaces” was imperative to the overall entry and feel to the building (Appendix D & E).

Whereas Appleby Blue Almshouse reimagines the historic model of a retreat from society, in favour of direct contact with urban life. Framed as a response to the housing shortage and the growing loneliness epidemic among older people. It’s an almshouse approach to social housing, with residents selected by application.

Post-occupancy feedback shows reduced loneliness, improved wellbeing and strong place attachment directly to the building’s design and support model. United St Saviours Charity (2025) interviewed some residents one year on from their first day at Appleby; “Moving to Appleby was like jumping out of a plane without a parachute and landing on a bouncy castle.” The effect of voluntary admission to Appleby Blue is that residents are not ideologically conscripted; they seek security, locality and dignity. That makes them generally receptive to the social script the building proposes, such as shared meals, visible presence on the high street, gardening and intergenerational events. Residents often experience it as liberation from previous poor housing or isolation, rather than constraint. The social-political project of ageing with dignity, in community, in the city, is reinforced by lived gratitude and pride (United St Saviours Charity, 2025, p. 8).

In summary, the social-political representation of each of the four schemes show that when residents actively choose to live in the respective buildings, they generally experience better, happier outcomes for longer. This is then enhanced by involvement within the design process alongside the architects, as residents take further pride and ownership of their spaces. But overall, the feeling of living somewhere that is a new age development is exciting and encouraging for residents and therefore, emotionally spurs them on, even if the establishment develops in an unexpected way.

Interaction with External Space

The Narkomfin Building is configured as a narrow white block on piloti, set in a park, with a separately adjoined glazed communal block linked via a bridge on the second floor (Kopp, 1985, p. 70). The ground plane of this space largely flows under and around the bases of the buildings rather than being shaped into defined positive space, despite the building essentially taking the form of an L-shape.



Figure 17: Photograph taken from the corner of the L-shape,



Figure 18: Render of Park and Narkomfin, from Ginsburg Architects During Restoration. (Ginsburg Architects, 2017)

The social life is meant to be internalised within the building's communal areas, in heated streets or on the roof. The residents' engagement with the external ground isn't dictated by the building; the Narkomfin Building prioritised sun, air and views within the construction as opposed to the landscape. Outdoor space is limited due to Moscow's harsh winters, where outdoor spaces can reach temperatures of -42.1°C (Climates to Travel, 2020). Therefore, the Narkomfin reads as an architectural object set within the landscape, handling everything internally.

Marmalade Lane consists of two rows of terraces facing each other with a fully pedestrianised lane between, drawing on the typology of a typical town street and referencing the surrounding neighbourhood of Cambridge. There is a large, shared garden in the complex, as well as each house's small private gardens. The shared garden acts as a primary social space, enclosed and continuously overlooked by front doors, kitchen windows and balconies, curating positive outdoor space, bounded by buildings and community structures. Everyday spills into these central areas, children play in the lane, adults stop to chat in thresholds, residents garden or eat together in the shared green and the main Common House's doors open straight onto the main garden square.



Figure 19: Axonometric of Marmalade Lane, Highlighting Outdoor Space. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

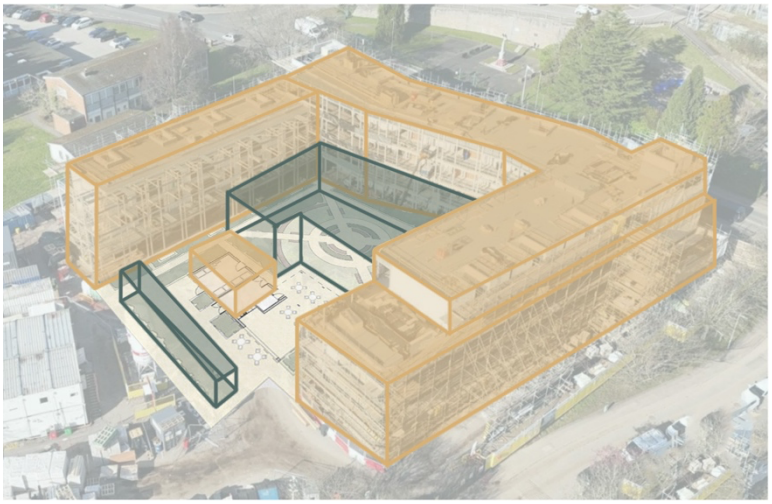


Figure 20: Axonometric of Ty Darren, Highlighting Outdoor Space. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

Ty Darran uses external space as a carefully layered social infrastructure. The scheme uses built form to create positive outdoor space. It wraps around the perimeter of the site, creating three tiers of privacy for the external spaces: public gardens on the edge of the building that members of the community can use, a semi-public community allotment area on the southern side of the site, and, at the most private, the central courtyard and the single storey hall forming the boundary of private and public. The layout is explicitly about graded positive spaces, and paths meander through planting. The community hall and shared rooms sit on the more public edge so that inside and outside activity bleed into each other.

In Appleby Blue, there is an overall configuration of a U-shape, like Ty Darren, but on the first 2 storeys it is connected as a complete loop. Creating a narrow courtyard of 40mx8m with glazed galleries on three sides and a 'garden room' spanning from the street to the courtyard edge, blending the public to private zones above the double storey connection, the connecting floors are used as a roof garden with walkways and roof beds to support communal food growing and summer dining. Designed to be outdoor rooms, the courtyard and roof garden are therefore a visual and social focus, underpinning the design.



Figure 21: Above View of Appleby Blue, Highlighting Outdoor Space. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

In short, the Narkomfin Building has external space, but it is largely an undifferentiated landscape around an object. Whereas the contemporary case studies are space making ensembles, buildings arranged in a way to form legible bounded courtyards, lanes and gardens, which in themselves function as deliberate Social Condensers.

Materiality and External Perception

The Narkomfin Building stands as a reinforced concrete frame on slender round columns. The facades are finished with a smooth white render with horizontal ribbon windows and semi-circular balconies on the southern end. Plentiful ribbon windows for the residential area and the communal block's facade that faced to the internal gardens has an entirely glazed elevation. As an initial take, industrial modernity can feel austere. Contemporary accounts emphasise its "tough and elemental primary geometry" as the purest expression of 1920s & 30s Constructivism (20th Century



Figure 22: Double Set Timber Frame Ribbon Windows. (20th Century Architecture, 2021a)



Figure 23: Balcony View. (20th Century Architecture, 2021b)

Architecture, 2021). Neuroarchitecture and environmental psychology point out that hard, uniform surfaces and low tactility tend to feel less comforting and lacking in personable ornament (Abbas et al., 2024, p. 2). So, Narkomfin registers as new and anti-bourgeois, which is exactly what it needed to be at the time. Ginzburg's whole method is functional. A thin rectangular form for cross-ventilated duplexes; glazed communal block for shared functions; piloti to free the ground for light/air; strip windows for maximum daylight into narrow units (Ginzburg, 1982, p. 85).

As a form its honest in its appearance, its main mass is for residential, the smaller is for communal, connected via a delicate bridge linking private and collective. Piloti express the structure clearly, allowing the mass to just gently float over the ground. Form follows function here, in a rationalist sense, but the building is legible mainly to those who share that design code, less so to other users. The materiality and aesthetic was intended as a clean break from Moscow's eclectic masonry and ornament of the time (Bibhakar, 2025, p. 26).

Marmalade Lane is socially functionalist; the terraced houses and the low level apartment block are constructed of brick and timber. Utilising simple, robust domestic materials with coloured front doors and timber fencing. The textures of brick, painted timber and planting around doors give what Pallasmaa (2005) calls a "tactile, inhabited" character. Meaning surfaces you can lean on, touch and modify, which help people associate the spaces as their place. At eye level it's very easy to read the hierarchy of spaces blending from public to communal to private. This aligns with what Gehl (2010) calls the importance of active, readable ground floors where people can see doors, windows, planting and, importantly, other people. They can instantly tell where they're welcome to walk or linger. From interviews, residents describe everyday movements like "going out at the same time as someone else or taking out the rubbish" as moments of casual connection in the lane (Appendix: F & G).



Figure 24: Elevated View of Marmalade Lane. (TOWN., 2025a)



Figure 25: Elevated View of Victorian Terrace Housing. (Paget, 2025)

Ty Darren's site has an industrial background, Pentan Architects chose to translate that into vernacular brick buildings, whilst maintaining an articulated communal facility tower-like form, used as a beacon or visual cue for residents to know that they are home. Internally, treating the decks and shared rooms as extensions of home, thereby supporting a legible distinction between private, communal and public spaces, which is important for older people's psychological comfort (Chen et al., 2025, p. 10). Overall, Ty Darran sits between functionalism and symbolic formalism, because of legibility and homage to its historical materiality.

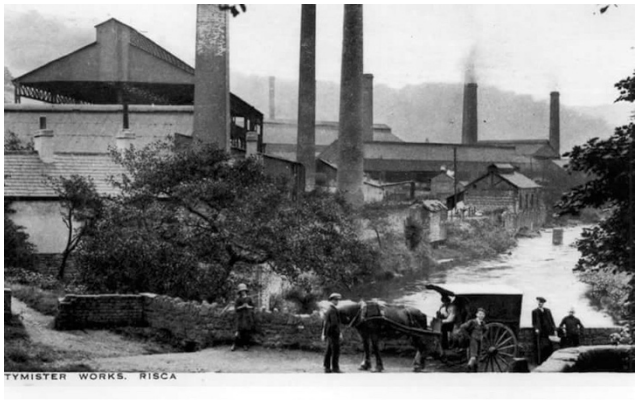


Figure 26: Industrial Wales, Pontymister Works, Risca. (Jenkins, 2016)

Finally, Appleby Blue utilises materiality to pay homage to its surroundings. The street elevation has four storeys of traditional brick with a stepped down rear to only two storeys to gently meet the traditional Victorian terrace housing adjacent to the complex. Whereas the internal materials use timber framing, the structure was designed to resemble a colonnade of trees, with kinks to represent natural growth and to mitigate a clinical feel with repetitive lines. The irregular, kinked wood feels smaller scale and handcrafted, showing the complexity of the carpentry skills, making the residents feel special and worth the architectural investment. Brick and timber, carefully detailed, give an immediate sense of warmth and domesticity.



Figure 27: Walkway in Appleby Blue. (Vile, 2019)

Residents and visitors describe the atmosphere as "vibrant, welcoming, joyful", with laughter and music in the Garden Room and courtyard (Reeves, 2026). Neuroarchitecture suggests that such textured, biophilic, daylight-rich environments support positive affect and reduce stress, especially for older adults. The U-shaped brick mass around a planted Garden Court makes it clear that the courtyard is the shared heart; glazed galleries facing it read as routes and social

thresholds rather than anonymous corridors. Appleby Blue is strongly functionalist in organisation, but its form is also carefully crafted to read as open, civic and homely. Paying homage to both the terraced street tradition and reasserting the historic almshouse's civic presence.

Architectural Devices, The Narkomfin Building

The Narkomfin building utilises different architectural devices to encourage specific behaviours from its users, such as connections to communal facilities, the accentuation of circulation spaces, the apartments themselves, and the use of dual aspect within the homes to allow full absorption of daylight for the residents' circadian rhythm.

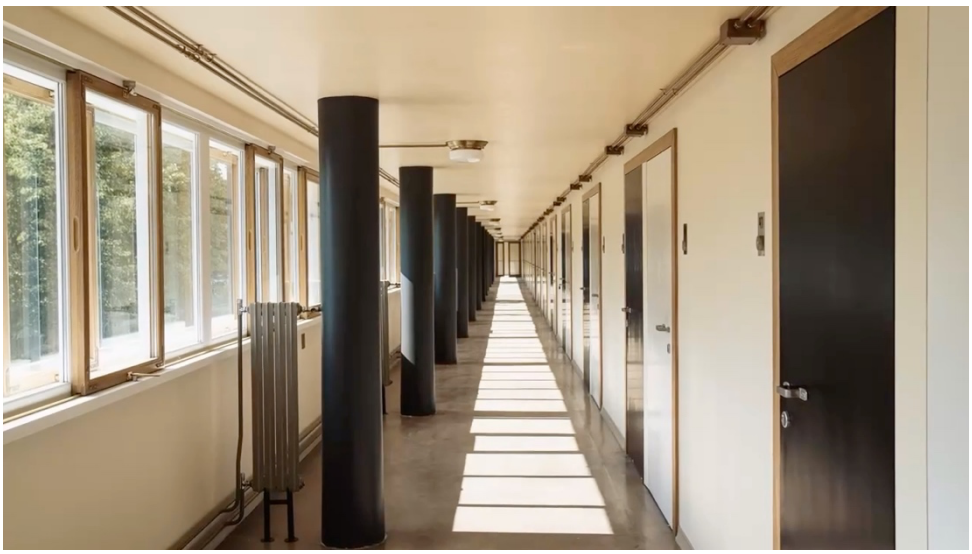


Figure 28: Type-F Walkway. (Ginzburg, 2022)

Constructivists saw circulation itself as a key design tool as the Narkomfin's internal arteries were designed to be sociopetal rather than purely functional (Kopp, 1985, p. 67). The term sociopetal was coined by Humphry Osmond in the 1950's, referring to spaces that promote community, in contrast to sociofugal designs that minimise interaction. These main galleries were placed on the façade, fully glazed, facing the park. Ginzburg described them as forums for collective exchanges, a transitional realm between private cells and communal rooms. Psychologically, these galleries sought to reduce anonymity and encourage weak-tie encounters, the kind of everyday greeting and recognition that contemporary sense of community research shows is strongly correlated with belonging and wellbeing (Farahani, 2016, p. 358).

Narkomfin's flats in themselves are utilised as an architectural device for social change and adaptation. The design explicitly reduced the private sphere of the families to a minimum, encouraging the larger and better spaces to be used as an extension of the home (Fontenele, 2019, p. 6). Constructivists were aware of the health and psychological effects of light and air. This is why the main residential block was intentionally placed stretching from north to south, with long horizontal ribbon windows on the west and east sides to utilise as much natural sunlight as possible. All apartments were enabled to be dual aspect due to their volumetric interlocking, allowing the corridor outside the front door of your apartment to be single loaded, park facing, with your bedroom to be either above or below it, with the same external views.

The roof terrace and solarium provide residents with the opportunity to enjoy midday sun in their own private outdoor space taking advantage of direct sun exposure, sky views and greenery are elements which Ginzburg considers essential for hygiene and mental health (Bibhakar, 2025, p. 19). Modern neuroarchitecture studies support the belief that exposure to natural light and views engages brain regions such as the parahippocampal place area and supports circadian regulation and mood (Abbas et al., 2024, p. 10). Built environment work with older adults similarly finds that green space and

daylight are strongly associated with reduced depression and better mental wellbeing (Chen et al., 2025, p. 8). Therefore, the Narkomfin's dual-aspect units and roof terrace thus prefigure later evidence: light and views are not just aesthetic but fundamental to psychological comfort and sense of vitality.

Architectural Devices, Marmalade Lane

Marmalade Lane uses the configuration of the communal facilities that allow residents to walk along the car free lane, towards the main green or Common House and bump into other residents, like the heated streets in the Narkomfin. Other shared facilities like the laundry, gym, workshop and shop are embedded in the residential fabric at the base of the block of flats, as opposed to a separate building.

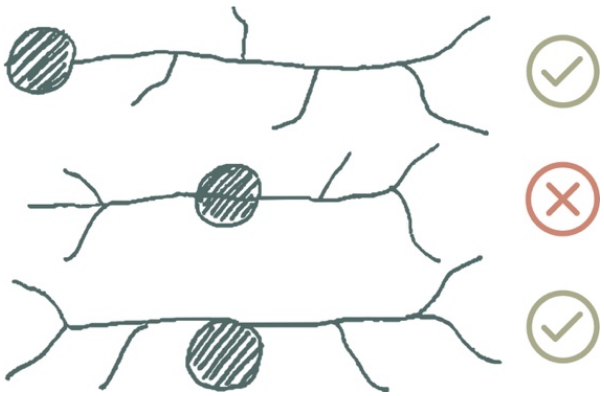


Figure 29: Diagram showing the 'Common Areas at Heart Pattern'. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

This configuration means that daily necessities (laundry, post, car club, picking vegetables, attending children's activities) all run through or alongside communal rooms, effectively realising Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein's (1977) "Common Areas at the Heart" pattern from 'A Pattern Language: Towns, Buildings, Construction'.

Treating the site's circulation as social infrastructure, all houses have front doors onto the lane and back gardens opening onto the communal garden. Car parking for all residents is pushed to the periphery. Meredith Bowles discussed that this was purposely done; to place them all in one cluster away from the homes, people would walk to their cars together or pass each other and say hello (Appendix F & G). The lane and gardens act as a primary example of a Social Condenser, residents describe children "pretty much always outside" playing; adults stopping to talk en route; an environment where spontaneous contact is normal. Residents report that this environment produces high levels of "neighbourly help and support", and they rank "the community and the connection with other people" as the best



Figure 30: Routes from Residential to Car Park. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

thing about living there (Appendix H, I, J & K). These outcomes match broader Central London Healthcare research showing that schemes with purposeful design of circulation and shared spaces have lower loneliness and a stronger sense of community than conventional housing (Scanlon et al., 2021, p. 7).

The homes' layouts are open-plan on the ground floor, with direct visual connection to the lane or garden, supporting both privacy and casual supervision of children outside. Residents repeatedly emphasise that they value having both their own well-lit open-plan living spaces and immediate access to community; one resident notes that the combination lets them "have a social life just a few steps from my home and be alone also when it suits me" (Appendix H & I).

While not all units are dual aspect, the scheme is designed for good daylight, views and visual integration with the community. Terraced houses are relatively shallow plans with windows front and back, giving through-light from lane to garden. Whereas the apartment blocks use cross-laminated timber construction with large windows and balconies to maximise daylight and natural materials. The Common House's "great hall" has large windows and a roof lantern, giving daylight from two sides and above; personalisation from the residents, timber finishes and views to the large garden square create a psychologically warm environment (TOWN, 2023, p. 16). Aligning with neuroarchitecture and ageing studies that highlight daylight, views and thermal comfort as key contributors to wellbeing and to feeling lifted by one's environment (Abbas et al., 2024, p. 1).

Architectural Devices, Ty Darren

Ty Darren is conceived explicitly as "an exemplar later living development", combining independent flats with shared facilities for residents and the wider community (Wilkins, 2022, p. 21). Upon entry of Ty Darren, all residential floors radiate from the main lift/stair core, leading directly onto a 2000 mm-wide external deck access that wraps the courtyard. These decks intentionally bring residents past the lounge, library and workshop on their way in and out, visually connecting them to the courtyard and communal facilities. The relationship of resident only spaces like the lounge and library with the public facing facilities of the hall and allotments is intentional to avoid age segregated isolation and create a "community village feel" that supports both older residents and the wider neighbourhood.

At interview, Chris Wilkins discussed that the 2m wide external walkways are designed so they can be "occupied, decorated and inhabited by the residents to become places of interaction as if it were a traditional pedestrianised street" (Appendix D & E). These spaces are intended to encourage casual contact and recognition amongst residents because they can look over at the communal gardens and main community hub from their walkway, potentially bumping into a fellow resident and having a light conversation.

Chris Wilkins' interview reinforces that this was a deliberate response to the HAPPI guide's style of thinking that corridors should encourage interaction and avoid an institutional feel, while still allowing privacy (Appendix D & E). The intention is that generous circulation, thresholds and sightlines support confidence and wayfinding while inviting low pressure socialising. This is consistent with ageing research that highlights the importance of supported independence and visually legible routes (Hammond and Saunders, 2021, p. 1). Psychologically, this acknowledges the strong desire of older people to retain autonomy and identity in their own home while still having community available on their doorstep.

Ty Darran's design brief emphasises dual-aspect apartments and plentiful daylight as a non-negotiable. At interview, Chris Wilkins stated that "Regardless of circumstance, our dual aspect apartments deliver access to plentiful daylight, sunlight and fresh air, which are essential for physical and mental wellbeing." (Appendix D & E). Directly aligning with what the Constructivists and Moisei Ginzburg successfully achieved with the Narkomfin's orientation and glazing strategies. All apartments utilise a dual-aspect design tailored to orientation to ensure good sun access and cross-ventilation through the flat.

Aligning closely with HAPPI and "Our Future Homes" guidance, which states that daylight, ventilation and natural views are core to age-friendly design and to supporting mental health in later life (Best et al., 2009). Older residents typically spend more time at home, so visual and thermal comfort are critical in sustaining wellbeing. Ty Darran's design recognises this explicitly.

Architectural Devices, Appleby Blue

Appleby Blue is a 57-home almshouse that "reimagines the historic model of a retreat from society in favour of direct contact with urban life" (Housing LIN, 2025), with communal facilities designed as a catalyst for health and social connection. Double-height Garden Room on the ground floor, directly adjacent to the high street and opening onto the Garden Court. Used for socialising, community events and intergenerational programmes, directly connecting the public outside, through to the heart of the project. A community kitchen is within the gradient from public to private, used for resident meals and community food projects like the LEMONADE Project (Amenyah et al., 2019).

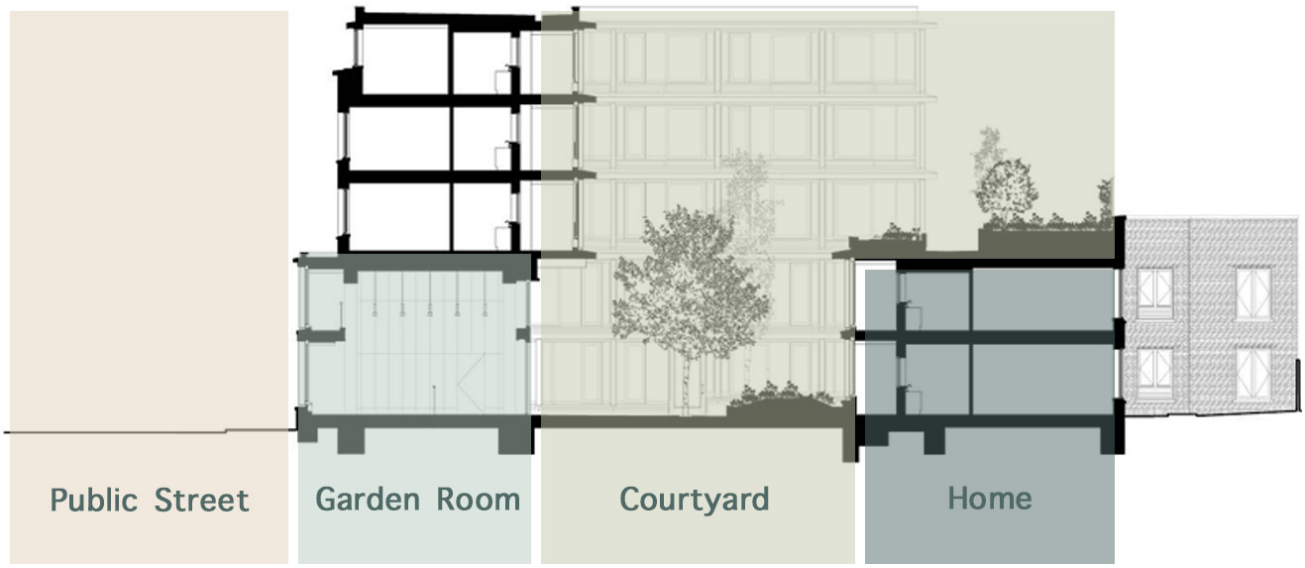


Figure 31: From Public, to Commune, to Private in Appleby Blue. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

The building forms a cloister-like surround to the central garden space. Apartments are arranged on three sides, with the Garden Room and occupying most of the fourth side at ground level. Access to flats is, like Ty Darren, through galleries overlooking the courtyard. These galleries are widened and furnished with planters and benches, explicitly designed as social corridors for the residents to decorate and personalise, again, encouraging lingering and light conversation. The roof terraces are accessed directly from the galleries, so moving vertically through the building brings residents to both internal and external communal spaces. The seating and planting along galleries act as a mini front garden, allowing the residents to sit with neighbours or simply observe life in the courtyard below.

These are small behavioural hooks that environmental psychology identifies as key in creating informal social contact.

This layout creates gradients of communality. Ranging from the busy public high street into the transitional Garden Room, the central garden courtyard, galleries to apartments. It also deliberately opens the communal facilities and community events to the wider neighbourhood, echoing the Social Condenser ethos but at an urban scale. At street level, bay windows give residents direct views to the high street, allowing visual participation in city life and chance interactions with passers-by. All flats are dual aspect via the glazed galleries with sliding windows that open to the garden courtyard.
The design supports both the feeling of being at home in a personal, controllable space whilst also being part of something bigger via constant, low-pressure visual and physical links to community spaces. This balance is known to support older adults' sense of autonomy and competence, which in turn is associated with better mental health (Farahani, 2016, p. 373). Appleby Blue sits consistently with research showing that daylight, external views and thermal comfort are major determinants of older adults' mental wellbeing, and that green views are associated with reduced loneliness and better self-rated health (Ye, Huang and Li, 2023, p. 14).

Architectural Devices: Cross Analysis/Overview

The Narkomfin concentrates communal functions of the kitchen, dining, laundry, childcare and culture into a separate but bridged block, with internal galleries feeding into it (Kopp, 1985, p. 71). The connection is strong symbolically but less so behaviourally. The distance from the apartment to the commune block was connected by the hallway but was essentially not on any passing route. Residents had to explicitly want to go there, rather than walking past already and receiving a visual reminder. Whereas Marmalade Lane and Appleby Blue integrate communal facilities into the spatial and functional heart of the schemes, they both sit right on the main circulation routes, serving everyday needs as well as social and cultural ones. Ty Darran uses two focal points of a resident only hub and a public hall knitted together by decks and landscaping, such that movement to and from flats naturally passes shared spaces.

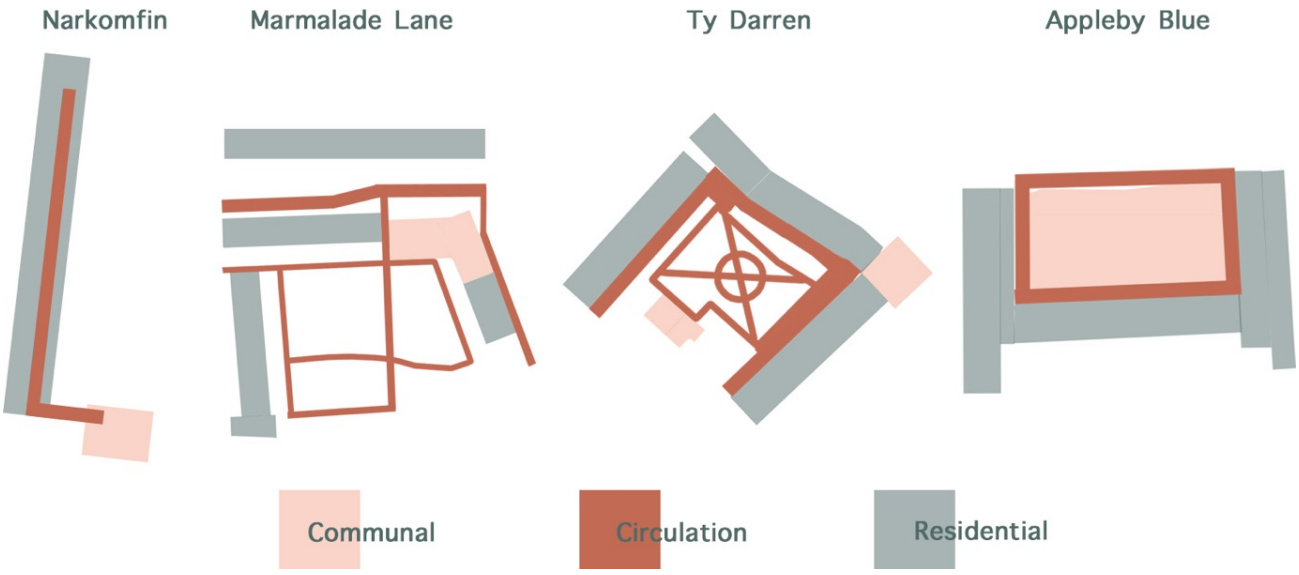


Figure 32: Circulation in all Case Studies. (Cuciureanu, 2026)

From a psychological standpoint, these circulation spaces create low-stress neighbourhood contact environments, they support place attachment and identity. They enhance the feeling of safety and perceived control as they are visible, well lit, human scale circulation. Studies of sense of community repeatedly find that the frequency of neighbourly interaction is a strong predictor of happiness, reduced worry, and better coping (Farahani, 2016, p. 373).

Within the private homes, the Narkomfin tries to shrink the private home to a minimal cell and externalise much of the domestic life into communal facilities, with mixed success. Whereas, Marmalade Lane, Ty Darran and Appleby Blue all treat the flat/house as a fully functioning home, with strong links to the community from the threshold outward. This latter approach better satisfies autonomy for the resident, giving them power, not the building. The presence of common spaces immediately outside the resident's front door increases opportunities for companionship and mutual aid without demanding it.

All the schemes utilise dual aspects within their apartment designs. Arguably, the Narkomfin is the best rendition of this. As the internally facing bedroom windows open out onto fresh air, due to the volumetric interlocking. But Ty Darren and Appleby Blue are both designed for older people, and therefore, stairs would have been largely avoided in the design process. Neuroarchitecture highlights that daylight and visual richness positively stimulate brain networks associated with spatial cognition and emotion, while poor lighting and monotony can induce stress.

Across the four analytical case studies, this shows that communal facilities move from being tools to change behaviour, to resources that support residents' own goals. Circulation shifts from a formal experiment to a recognised behavioural lever, deliberately crafted to support the micro-interactions and place attachment that psychological sense of community research deems critical. Home spaces are platforms for identity, control and psychological safety, with community layered around them instead of replacing them.

The psychological thread through all of this is that people do not simply become what the architect or designer imagines. They respond to spatial affordances in ways shaped by autonomy, attachment social needs as well as prior habits. Environments that address those needs by offering gradients of engagement, opportunities for mutual support and sensory qualities that feel uplifting can still act as powerful Social Condensers, but in a softer, more reciprocal way than early modernist social engineering experimented with.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This dissertation has traced the Social Condenser from its origin in the Soviet avant-garde to its contemporary reemergence within the intentional community space, testing whether its architectural devices have shifted from instruments of cultural coercion to enablers of communal autonomy. By systematically comparing Ginzburg's Narkomfin communal house with recent projects like Marmalade Lane, Ty Darren and Appleby Blue, the study shows the underlying hardware of communal architecture. Highlighting that programmatic layering, shared facilities and socially charged circulation have changed remarkably little in the 100-year difference. But what has altered fundamentally is the software the buildings are injected with, the socio-political scripts through which these devices are deployed, shifting from state led efforts to re-engineer everyday life towards resident led arrangements that support different forms of mutual aid and connection.

The Narkomfin Legacy

In its original Soviet setting, the Social Condenser was conceived as a radical pedagogical device to manufacture a new socialist man (Bianchi and Pardini, 2017, p. 12). The dom-kommuna, epitomised by Narkomfin, thus operated as both a dwelling and an instrument of cultural revolution. Its gradient of cell types, from minimal single rooms to more generously sized K-units, was intended to erode the conventional nuclear family and stratified domestic hierarchies, nudging residents towards more collectivised living arrangements. By making private cooking spatially inconvenient and collective eating highly serviced, the architecture attempted to choreograph daily routines in line with Marxist-Leninist ideas about the socialisation of domestic labour and the emancipation of women from household drudgery (Bibhakar, 2025, p. 10).

Yet, as Buchli (1998) and others have shown, the lived reality of Narkomfin was far more ambivalent. Allocated by the state rather than chosen, many residents treated the prescriptive routines and underspecified private spaces with suspicion or frustration, subverting the intended script. Over time, the communal facilities deteriorated, and the house slipped from avant-garde showcase to dilapidated relic, revealing the limits of coercive social engineering when architectural form runs too far ahead of residents' agency, desires and material circumstances.

The 21st Century Evolution

A century later, the core devices pioneered at Narkomfin persist with striking clarity in projects such as Marmalade Lane, Ty Darren and Appleby Blue. Using layered communal programmes and circulation spaces that double as social arenas or alighting spaces. Rather than a historical curiosity, the Social Condenser has proved to be a durable architectural idea, continually re-appropriated to address contemporary concerns such as loneliness, ageing and the search for everyday community (Bianchi and Pardini, 2017, p. 151).

In all three contemporary schemes examined, programmatic layering is deployed in ways that echo, but revise, Ginzburg's logic. Appleby Blue combines independent flats with a Garden Room, community kitchen, hobby and skills spaces, creating overlapping zones of use that invite residents and neighbours into varying intensities of contact. Circulation ceases to be a neutral conduit, becoming a socio-petal infrastructure, consistent with environmental psychology findings that well designed bridging spaces foster gentle weak-tie interactions and a psychological sense of community (Gonzalez, 1978, p. 10).

Appleby Blue can be read as a contemporary benchmark for the Social Condenser. Commissioned by an almshouse charity with a 500-year history in Southwark, the scheme substitutes the Soviet canteen with a generously scaled Garden Room and community kitchen that hosts shared meals, intergenerational food growing projects and skills programmes. These spaces are acoustically and materially calibrated as a sanctuary courtyard heart, yet they open directly onto the high street, bus stop and local networks, ensuring residents remain embedded in the life of Bermondsey rather than withdrawn from it. In this way, Appleby Blue leverages familiar Social Condenser architectural devices refectory to counter isolation while respecting residents' urban attachments and daily routines (Benzimra et al., 2023, p. 4).

Choice vs. Coercion

Taken together, the case studies suggest that the new Social Condenser succeeds where its Soviet antecedent faltered precisely because it replaces coercion with choice. At Narkomfin, collectivisation was to be achieved by constraining private alternatives, whereas at Appleby Blue, Ty Darren and Marmalade Lane, it emerges from a surplus of invitations rather than a deficit of options. Social cohesion here is not an outcome imposed from above, but a process continually negotiated by participants, in line with community psychology research that links sense of community to empowerment, shared decision making and the ability to influence one's environment (Samman, 2025, p. 394).

Crucially, residents consistently link their wellbeing to this ability to calibrate engagement. Marmalade Lane interviewees describe feeling "less alone" yet under no pressure to socialise, joining shared meals or film nights "when you want to". Appleby Blue residents benefit from the proven longevity and health advantages associated of almshouse living and strong micro-communities, while retaining private front doors, views and control over daily rhythms. In environmental psychology terms, these schemes offer both prospect and refuge, enabling psychological self regulation between social vigour and restorative solitude and thereby supporting autonomy and dignity in everyday life (Cighi, 2008, p. 97).

Key Findings for Future Socially Resilient Design

A first key finding is the centrality of circulation as social infrastructure. Deploying external galleries, stair halls, lanes and cloister-like walkways that function as socio-petal spaces, encouraging people into informal encounters at conversational distances.

Secondly, the Social Condenser's long standing use of volumetric modulation remains salient. Contemporary projects similarly exploit ceiling height, outlook and dual-aspect views to mediate between rest and sociability. This volumetric psychology allows residents to choose settings that match their energy and social appetite, an important ingredient in sustaining long term communal life (Dalton, 2000, p. 82).

Thirdly, the most successful contemporary condensers reposition themselves not as retreats from the city but as "gifts" to it. Appleby Blue's active ground floor, with its double height garden room and street facing bay windows, invites neighbours in for events and casual encounters. Marmalade Lane opens its common house and gardens for public open days, and Ty Darren has a communal hall for both residents and community use. Porteus (2018) highlighted in HAPPI how rural schemes demonstrate how well designed community hubs can anchor ageing populations in village and market town settings. This urban embeddedness is particularly significant in countering loneliness, as

it broadens residents' social fields beyond the immediate community to include local networks and services.

Finally, there has been a decisive shift in the role assigned to communal facilities. Whereas Soviet Social Condensers were explicitly tasked with changing behaviour, contemporary projects treat shared spaces as supports for residents' pre-existing aspirations for mutual aid, sociability or purposeful activity. The Appleby Blue community kitchen underpins researched backed food-based intergenerational projects like *'LEMONADE'* (Amenyah et al., 2019). Marmalade Lane's Great Hall hosts clubs, shared meals and governance meetings that emerge from the community itself. Ty Darren's social lounges and gardens provide stages for the kinds of everyday neighbour activities that residents already value. In this sense, the Social Condenser has been re-tooled as an adaptive infrastructure that amplifies resident agency rather than dictating a singular way of life.

The evidence assembled here supports the claim that intentional communities of all kinds are the new Social Condensers. They represent a refinement the Soviet experiment by demonstrating that while architecture can still guide us towards more communal patterns of living, its real potency lies in providing a resilient, forgiving "bouncy castle" of support rather than a parachute-less leap into enforced collectivism. By aligning spatial devices with voluntary association, diversified domestic life and a nuanced understanding of psychological and social needs, these projects point towards a socially resilient design language in which collective life is not imposed, but continually chosen.

Figure List

Figure 1: Cuciureanu, H. (2026a). Map of Case Studies.

Figure 2: Office for National Statistics (2018). *Population pyramids, 1966, 2016 and 2066 (principal projection), UK*. [Online] *Office for National Statistics*. Available at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/ageing/articles/livinglongerhowourpopulationischangingandwhyitmatters/2018-08-13 [Accessed 24 Apr. 2026].

Figure 3: Cuciureanu, H. (2026b). Graphic Depicting the Information from the Town and House Cluster Section from a Pattern Language.

Figure 4: Mole Architects (2018). Axonometric Drawing of Marmalade Lane. [Online] Marmalade Lane. Available at: https://www.marmaladelane.co.uk/ [Accessed 16 Apr. 2026].

Figure 5: Cuciureanu, H. (2026c). Plan Drawing of Ty Darren with Social Rooms and Entry Points Highlighted.

Figure 6: Barandy, K. (2025). Fly over of Appleby Blue. [online] Designboom | Architecture & Design Magazine. Available at: https://www.designboom.com/architecture/wwm-architects-wins-riba-stirling-prize-appleby-blue-almshouse-witherford-watson-mann-architects-10-16-2025/ [Accessed 15 Apr. 2026].

Figure 7: Vile, P. (2025). The Garden Room. [online] Ribaj.com. Available at: https://www.ribaj.com/buildings/riba-stirling-prize-2025-shortlist-witherford-watson-mann-appleby-blue/ [Accessed 24 Apr. 2026].

Figure 8: Wolfe, R. (2023). The First OSA Meeting in 1928. [online] The Charnel-House. Available at: https://thecharnelhouse.org/tag/thesis/ [Accessed 24 Apr. 2026].

Figure 9: Muraenko, I. (2020b). Roof Terrace View from Narkomfin Looking at the Stalin-era Kudrinskaya Square Building. [online] ArchDaily. Available at: https://www.archdaily.com/947148/the-winding-saga-of-the-restoration-of-the-narkomfin-an-icon-of-soviet-constructivism [Accessed 13 Feb. 2026].

Figure 10: Ginzburg, M. and Milinis, I. (1928). Perspective Drawing of Narkomfin. [Hand Drawing] ArchEyes. Available at: https://archeyes.com/the-narkomfin-building-by-moisei-ginzburg-and-ignaty-milinis/ [Accessed 18 Apr. 2026].

Figure 11: Cuciureanu, H. (2026d). Section of Narkomfin Showing Room Volumes. Figure 11.

Figure 12: Vassiliev, N. (2016). Interior of F-Type. [online] Flickr. Available at: https://flic.kr/p/EGiixi [Accessed 29 Mar. 2026].

Figure 13: Cuciureanu, H. (2026e). Volumetric effects on Residents.

Figure 14: Cuciureanu, H. (2026f). Demonstrating (Para)hippocampal Awareness of Space.

Figure 15: Muraenko, I. (2020a). Elevation View of Narkomfin. [online] ArchDaily. Available at: https://www.archdaily.com/947148/the-winding-saga-of-the-restoration-of-the-narkomfin-an-icon-of-soviet-constructivism [Accessed 13 Feb. 2026].

Figure 16: Palmin, Yu. (2020). Bridge to Commune Block, Narkomfin. [Online] Ginsburg Architects. Available at: https://ga-arb.ru/projects/restoration/dom-narkofminamoskva Figure 16.

Figure 17: Shtanuk, A. (2023). Photograph Taken from the Corner of the L-shape, Facing the park. [online] Google Earth. Available at: https://earth.google.com/web/search/Narkomfin+building,+Moscow,+Russia/@55.75674146,37.58139913,153.16503958a,0d,59.02163944y,355.57023601h,100.33816822t,0r/data=CiwiJgokCZuBHbwZz0lAEYFV_SyPzklAGZq4Dk883AjAIcApsmDJ5AjAQgIIASIaChZDSUhNMG9nS0VJQ0FnSURCalppTFpBEAU6AwoBMEICCABKDQj_____8BEAA?hl=en-GB&authuser=0 [Accessed 24 Apr. 2026].

Figure 18: Ginsburg Architects (2017). Render of Park and Narkomfin, from Ginsburg Architects during Restoration. [Online] Archi.RU. Available at: https://archi.ru/en/73824/aleksey-ginsburg-you-cannot-just-go-ahead-and-renovate-the-narkomfin-building [Accessed 22 Apr. 2026].

Figure 19: Cuciureanu, H. (2026g). Axonometric of Marmalade Lane, Highlighting Outdoor Space.

Figure 20: Cuciureanu, H. (2026h). Axonometric of Ty Darren, Highlighting Outdoor Space.

Figure 21: Cuciureanu, H. (2026i). Above View of Appleby Blue, Highlighting Outdoor Space.

Figure 22: 20th Century Architecture (2021b). Double Set Timber Frame Ribbon Windows. [online] Architecture-history.org. Available at: https://architecture-history.org/architects/architects/GINZBURG/OBJECTS/1928%2C%20NARKOMFIN%20HOUSE%2C%20MOSCOW%2C%20RUSSIA.html [Accessed 13 Mar. 2026].

Figure 23: 20th Century Architecture (2021a). Balcony View. [online] Architecture-history.org. Available at: https://architecture-history.org/architects/architects/GINZBURG/OBJECTS/1928%2C%20NARKOMFIN%20HOUSE%2C%20MOSCOW%2C%20RUSSIA.html [Accessed 13 Mar. 2026]. Figure 23.

Figure 24: TOWN. (2025). Elevated View of Marmalade Lane. [Online] TOWN. Available at: https://www.wearetown.co.uk/projects/marmalade-lane/ [Accessed 24 Apr. 2026].

Figure 25: Paget, J. (2025). Elevated View of Victorian Terraced Housing. [Online] Getty Images. Available at: https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/photo/drone-elevated-view-of-victorian-terraced-housing-royalty-free-image/2194200673 [Accessed 25 Apr. 2026].

Figure 26: Jenkins, P. (2016). Industrial Wales, Pontymister Works, Risca. [online] Industrialgwent.co.uk. Available at: http://www.industrialgwent.co.uk/b14-pontymister/index.htm [Accessed 11 Jan. 2026].

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Figure 28: Ginzburg, A. (2022). Type-F Walkway.

Figure 29: Cuciureanu, H. (2026j). Diagram showing the ‘Common Areas at Heart Pattern’.

Figure 30: Cuciureanu, H. (2026k). Routes from Residential to Car Park.

Figure 31: Cuciureanu, H. (2026l). From Public, to Commune, to Private in Appleby Blue.

Figure 32: Cuciureanu, H. (2026m). Circulation in All Case Studies.

Reference List

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Appendix A: Case Study: The Narkomfin Building, Moscow, Russia

The Social Condenser

The October Revolution of 1917 brought the Bolsheviks to power under Vladimir Lenin. Creating the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (RSFSR). Continuing this, the Bolsheviks fought the anti-communists in a civil war, which they won in 1922 (Marxists Internet Archive, 1923). On December 29, delegates from the Russian SFSR, the Transcaucasian SFSR, the Ukrainian SSR, and the Byelorussian SSR met in Moscow. The union approved the treaty, which was ratified the next day, December 30, 1922 (EdFromEarth and Time Graphics, 2020).

Before the Party began building new structures, they tested out their theories in the existing urban fabric. So, they started by condensing people into the large, aristocratic mansions and dividing them into Kommunalka (communal apartments). Every family would be given one room to live in, then kitchens and bathrooms were shared by five or six families. (Narkomfin building, 2024) Forcing people to come face to face with the Party's classless ideals.

The core philosophy of a Social Condenser was to dissolve old habits, such as privacy, religion, and traditional family units, by forcing different social classes into shared, condensed space. Using spaces to influence social change, enforcing social engineering for all citizens (Movilla Vega, 2020). While utopian modernists in the West, such as those associated with the Bauhaus or the Weimar-era Siedlungen, also imagined new communal living patterns and used architecture to shape society, the Social Condenser was uniquely radical in its ambition to use spatial design as an active instrument for breaking down class divisions and private life, making the Soviet project more direct and uncompromising in its drive toward engineered collectivism (Buchli, 2017, pp. 387-402).

The OSA Group (Organisation of Contemporary Architects) was a state funded architectural association, active from 1925 to 1930, considered to be the first group of constructivist architects. Architects like Moisei Ginzburg and the Vesnin brothers used architectural devices such as overlapping spaces, meaning the elimination of isolated rooms in favour of expansive hallways and open common areas to force social interaction. Taking domestic tasks like cooking, laundry, and childcare into their own zones, as public, communal facilities. As opposed to traditionally being within each household, isolating the resident to that space. Idealistically, buildings also included wider community facilities such as libraries, gyms, and theatres to keep citizens engaged within the collective. (Buckler and Cross, 2015)

As the USSR stabilised further, the Party funded the new architecture, leading to specific social engineering prototypes within the Dom-Kommuna (House Commune). Industrial scale kitchens and dining was designed to liberate women from their isolated, traditional roles in the home and turn that into a village-like group activity of feeding and eating together. Workers' clubs were used for political education and other recreational activities, as well as providing children's colonies where children were raised more by the state than by their parents. The state sought to inculcate communist values, reducing the family's role in children's education. Therefore, encouraging women to join the workforce within the condensers or for the union (Koriakovskaia and Mizono, 2020). A primary example of a Social Condenser, designed by Moisei Ginzburg, is the Narkomfin Building in Moscow, completed in 1930 (Archibald, 2013). This was slightly different to the other Social Condensers at the

time, as it was purpose-built for a specific group of people, whilst recognising that societies and the communities within them will not change overnight, meaning this was a building designed to bridge the gap of the old life, and the new Soviet one (Wolfe and Cathcart, 2015).

By the mid 1930's, the Social Condenser era was suppressed due to a shift in leadership. Joseph Stalin rose to power and favoured Socialist Realism, a style of art more official and state-sanctioned, designed to promote communist goals through idealised, realistic depictions of Soviet life. It served as propaganda, portraying happy workers and the state and its leaders, such as Stalin, in a positive, heroic, and accessible manner to inspire the proletariat. Architecturally, this took the form of monumental, palace-like buildings that projected state power. On a human scale, the state also had to recognise that citizens resisted the total loss of privacy and the psychological strain of constant communal living (Movilla Vega, 2020).

Moisei Ginzburg

Moisei Ginzburg was closely involved in the strategies of the Soviet Constructivist movement and was the primary theorist behind the Social Condenser. Ginzburg viewed himself more as a social organiser, believing that the built environment was a scientific tool capable of influencing human behaviour and accelerating the transition to a socialist society (Fröhlich et al., 2017).

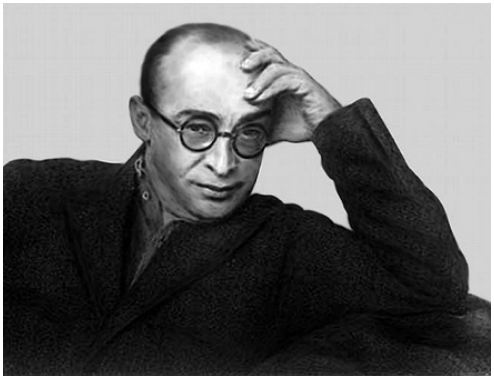


Figure 1: Moisei Ginzburg (Blizznakov, 2005)

In 1924, Ginzburg co-founded the OSA Group and wrote the text Style and Epoch (Moisei Ginzburg, 1982). He argued that architecture must abandon decoration in favour of its function as social equipment. As head of the Stroikom (Building Committee), he conducted data-driven sociological surveys to determine the minimum spatial requirements for a person to function easily within (Movilla Vega, 2020).

Ginzburg's philosophy was rooted in the idea that form dictates behaviour. By stripping away private domestic functions such as the kitchen and laundry, he aimed to dissolve the traditional family unit and replace it with a unified consciousness akin to a community. For Ginzburg, 'unified consciousness' meant a collective mindset in which individuals saw themselves foremost as part of a shared social body rather than as isolated private families. He believed this could be realised through daily collective rituals built into the architecture: for example, instead of preparing meals alone, residents would start the day with communal breakfasts in the shared dining hall, exchanging news and plans across long tables. Chores such as laundry would rotate among dwellers, bringing people together for scheduled, cooperative tasks. In this way, social boundaries would blur, and daily life would be coordinated with the collective, integrating individuals into a communal way of life. For Ginzburg, the architect's role was to design the rhythm of a new communal existence, turning the home and community into a laboratory for the new soviet citizen (Murawsky and Esakov, 2021).

"The solution to the housing problem will come not through private, individual structures, but through the collective effort of society." – Moisei Ginzburg (Pokrovskaya, 2024)

The Narkomfin Building

The Narkomfin Building was not designed as a static apartment block but as a Social Condenser of the second type (purpose-built rather than retrofit). Unlike the original Social Condensers at the time, which were retrofitted within the existing building fabric, the Narkomfin was designed specifically for this new purpose. It was used as a pedagogical tool intended to transition residents from bourgeois isolation towards a socialist future (Murawsky and Esakov, 2021).

The construction was commissioned by the Commissariat for Finance for the RSFSR (1924–1929), Nikolay Milyutin, who was therefore the client. From 1928, Nikolay Milyutin also chaired the Commission on New Town Planning again with Moisei Ginzburg and theoretician Mikhail Okhitovich on planned housing and development policies. The Narkomfin Building was designed to house Soviet officials and elites, including the Commissars of Justice and famous artists such as Alexander Deineka (Archibald, 2013). The project was a transitional experiment, providing shared laundry, childcare, and leisure spaces to slowly integrate residents away from isolated domesticity without stripping privacy entirely (Buchli, 2017, pp. 387-402).



Figure 2: Moscow, Narkomfin Apartments, Winter (Byron, 2015)

This project was ideal for understanding the possibility of Social Condensers, given the freedom to design from scratch rather than the retrofit previously implemented. By framing the architecture as transitional, Ginzburg acknowledged that social habits like private cooking and childcare do not change overnight (Movilla Vega, 2020). Understanding this, Ginzburg designed the spatial layout to gradually lead you from the front door of your apartment, past the communal quiet areas, potentially to the building exit or to the communal block, where the flurry of commotion would take place. For example, the resident begins the day surrounded by the calm of their compact, private room, steps into the sunlit corridor warmed by radiators and the energy of passing neighbours, and crosses the glazed bridge, where the reverberations of conversation along with the aroma of communal meals signal arrival within the vibrant centre of shared dining. This daily journey makes tangible the shift from individual privacy to collective life, embodying the transition that the Social Condenser set out to achieve.

Volumetric Interlocking

Moisei Ginzburg and Alexander Pasternak utilised research from the Stroikom committee to create interlocking apartments that maximised space, understanding what the smallest space one would need to live in a calm, functional setting (ArtLark, 2022). Utilising the double height rooms gave the

residents a sense of a larger space through volume rather than square metres on the floor. There were two types of cells/apartments designed by Ginzburg and Pasternak. The F-Type cell and the K-Type cell both served different purposes for different types of residents.

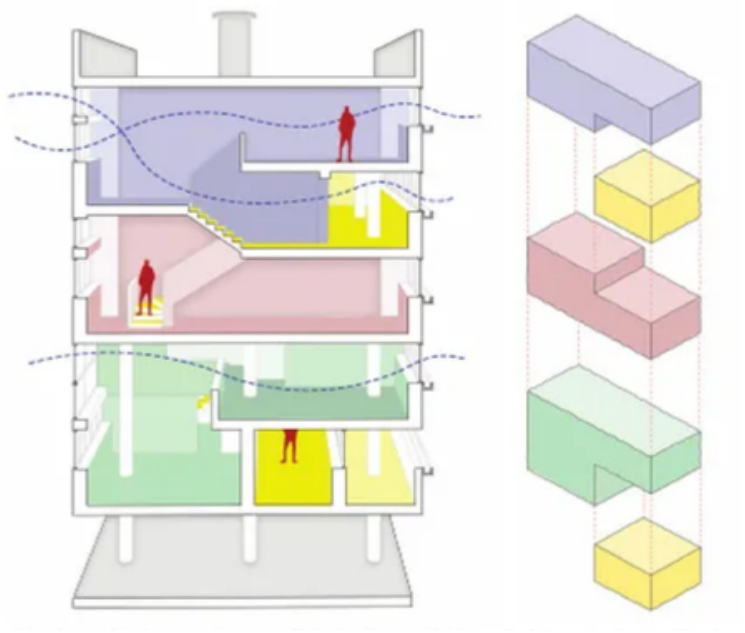


Figure 3: Section of Narkomfin Showing Interlocking (Hopeful City, 2025)

The Type F unit was a duplex, or split-level apartment (Moisei Ginzburg, 1982, p. 5). Floor plans show the 'bedroom' on a separate level from the main living area, which created a physical and psychological separation between rest and daily activities (Seo and Sohn, 2016, p. 40). This split-level design was an innovative way to maximise the utility of a small footprint while creating distinct functional zones (Fontenele, 2019).

F-Type

Since the restoration, walking along the F-Type hallway, there are black-and-white doors in pairs, next to each other, leading to each apartment. The black doors have stairs leading up to the living room areas, and the white doors have stairs descending into the lower living area of the interlocking volumes. Upon entry, before the resident is guided up or down the stairs, all apartments have small washing machines, a small sink, and a utility space with a small worktop and a cupboard or two. This is because, even though there is a laundry room. Domestic tasks are encouraged to be communal. Ginzburg was highly aware that this kind of radical change would not happen overnight. Some smaller, more personal domestic tasks still required some privacy. The apartment's overall footprint is 37 square metres (Eliseeva, 2021). The F-Type cell, designed for smaller families than the K-Type, a maximum of a family of three, features a double-height living room measuring 3.6 metres high and a sleeping area with a lower ceiling height of 2.2 metres (Buchli, 1998, p. 172).

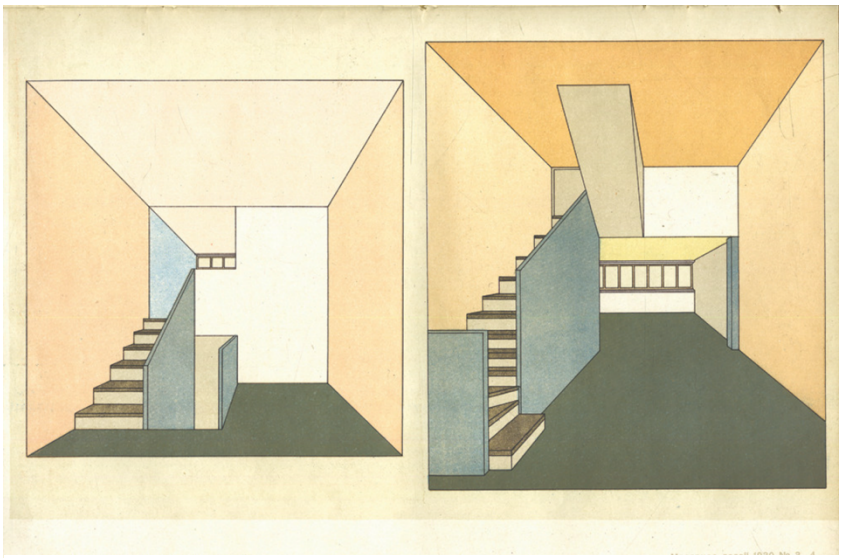


Figure 4: Hinnerk Scheper's F-Type Colour Scheme, (University of Minnesota, 2017a)

Due to the building's orientation, the sun casts a beautiful light into the bedroom areas, and you can see the walls' colouration slightly changing tint, as designed by Hinnerk Scheper, who worked with Moisei Ginzburg (Bauhaus

Foundation Tel Aviv, 2017). Scheper taught restraint in colour and the importance of its relation to the architecture. In Dessau, he developed a course for students that was called ‘Colour’.



Figure 5: Well Maintained F-Type Flat before restoration, (Vassiliev, 2016)

In July of 1929, Hinnerk Scheper was invited to Moscow by the Construction Committee of the Supreme Economic Council, tasked with organising the establishment of Maljarstroj, a central colour advisory centre for the entire Soviet Union’s architecture. Recognised as a skilled colour specialist in modern architecture, Hinnerk was granted a one-year leave from his duties at the Bauhaus (Chunking Books, 2023).

Scheper was entrusted with the overall supervision of the painting work within the Narkomfin Building. The apartments' colour scheme was tested beforehand in experiments on the effects of colour on human well-being. Based on the ceiling colour, the walls of the small apartments were painted in warm shades of pink and yellow. In contrast, the staircase, which served as a space-defining element, was painted in warm blue-like grey tones (Bauhaus Archiv Museum, 2021).

Part of Hinnerk’s colouring of the building, he utilised the ledges of the windows in a very light blue; this was also reflected in the service trunking and the large ventilation above the kitchen, which formed a single panel on the wall. The lighting was crucial to the colours he had designed, so the hallway and the apartments have panoramic views. There are no high rise buildings in the vicinity of the Narkomfin Building, so there is adequate, bright lighting always. The windows were timber framed ribbon windows on a double set system. The external glazing was painted white, whilst the internal system, which would be the first layer a user would open and close from the inside, featured exposed timber framing and ergonomic brass handles that slide open. On the external facades where windows had openings, Ginzburg designed supported areas for residents to place window box planters (Eliseeva, 2021). Not only was this to give the residents their choice of floral flair, but also to make the exterior elevation, featuring rows of greenery standing out against the stark white rendering, curating a personalised and lived in frontage.

The apartments were open-plan, and the finishes were unadorned, light-filled and clean. Intending to prevent the accumulation of ‘petit-bourgeois’ domestic clutter (Pokrovskaya and Kolganov, 2020). Although the political party sought to ban personal items such as religious icons, which were considered relics of the old pre-communist society, this was never enforced, and the decoration was left entirely to residents' interpretation. The residents did not simply treat the F-type flat as a cell for sleep and study. Instead, they reconfigured the space to accommodate traditional family needs, storage, and personal expression, proving that the residents’ autonomy showed its true opinion and intensions that Ginzburg was correct in designing layers of privacy within the apartments and the building as a whole that still aligned with the USSR’s ideology, as the attempt to enforce an entirely

communal standard of living would have experienced more forceful push back from the residents (Pokrovskaya and Kolganov, 2020).

However, the kitchen units in the F-Type Cells were standardised across the apartments. The kitchen was not a full-scale domestic space but rather a rudimentary kitchenette situated in the smaller wall spaces of the open-plan living, dining and kitchen room (Kopp, 1985, p. 71). Architecturally, these were designed as temporary fixtures, typically positioned near the unit's entrance but tucked away from direct view (Seo and Sohn, 2016, p.40). The architects sought to educate and prepare residents for collective life without making it immediately compulsory (Kopp, 1985, p.71). While communal kitchens, dining rooms, and other shared facilities were provided to encourage a collective lifestyle, specifically aiming to liberate women from the heavy burden of domestic chores, the small, individual kitchenettes served as a pragmatic concession to existing habits during this transitional period (Fontenele, 2019, p.672), (Kopp, 1985, p.71). Consequently, these kitchenettes were treated as provisional spaces, intentionally designed with the expectation that they might eventually be removed or become redundant as the society progressed toward total collectivisation (Kopp, 1985, p.71), (Seo and Sohn, 2016, p.40).



Figure 6: Grete Schütte-Lihotzky's Frankfurt Kitchen from the Ginnheim-Höhenblick Housing Estate, (Museum of Modern Art, 2016)

Moisei Ginzburg deliberately created a contrast between the volumes of the open plan common room and the sleeping quarters to influence the occupants' psychological state and daily rhythms in each space. The bedroom was designed as a sleeping niche, intentionally intimate, with a low-slung ceiling height compared to the rest of the unit (Buchli, 1998, p.172). Ginzburg believed that the design of the space would help regulate the occupants' mood and activity levels (Kopp, 1985, p.80). The bedroom zones faced east, so they received natural morning light that filtered through the trees of the surrounding park. Although this was not just a volumetric space saving measure, it created the perception that if volume was smaller, the quieter and more enclosed the space was, meaning it was researched and hoped that the bedroom area would feel like a separate, private and slower mode of life, encouraging sleep and restorative behaviours (Moisei Ginzburg, 1982, p.9). In contrast, the open-plan common room was much taller, making it brighter with natural light, as the windows were stacked to double height in these spaces, intending for more vigorous activities during waking hours (Buchli, 1998, p. 172).

The design intentions of constructivist architects were to create healthy, clean living environments; their designs were to be bare, light, clean, and easy to maintain. Enabling ample air, light and sun to enter each of the units (Kopp, 1985, p.81). The design of the sleeping and washing areas, therefore, was part of a broader functionalist approach to ensure residents' well-being (Bibhaka, 2025, p. 19). The bathroom was more of an ensuite to the apartment; it was intentionally kept to the bare

minimum, providing essential private hygiene (Bianchi and Pardini, 2017, p. 43). It consisted of a small sink, a shower and a toilet. Outside the ensuite, there is a much larger sink integrated into a vanity unit, with a hinged wooden cover that conceals the basin and faucet when closed (Eliseeva, 2021). The cover likely serves to create a clean, minimalistic aesthetic when the sink is not in use or to provide additional counter space in the compact sleeping space. Having toned back, simple, minimal facilities were intended to encourage residents to use the communal facilities more, not because they had no other options, but because the building's communal block offered better and more extensive facilities, including a gymnasium with showers and dressing rooms (Moisei Ginzburg, 1982, p. 5).

K-Type

Within the Narkomfin Building, the K-Type cells were the larger, family-oriented duplex maisonettes (Buchli, 1998, p. 172). There were eight of these apartments, and they had an extra bedroom, as well as a terrace and a separate small kitchen from the main living space. The two bedroom spaces were 19.9 and 12.1 square meters (OleLukoe, 2008).

When entering the K-Type apartments, a principle like the F-Type's interior street, there is a dedicated four-meter-wide hallway spanning from one end of the building to the other. These arteries (Vega, 2020, p. 10) were lit by ribbon windows and heated by large radiators linking the piloti to the edge of the facade's interior. The transition from a resident's own house into the hallway was a move into a semi-public space, acting as a social connector, done purposefully to blend the communal principles with the residents' apartments, as the porch turns into the corridor, part circulation, part meeting place but not just a circulation space.

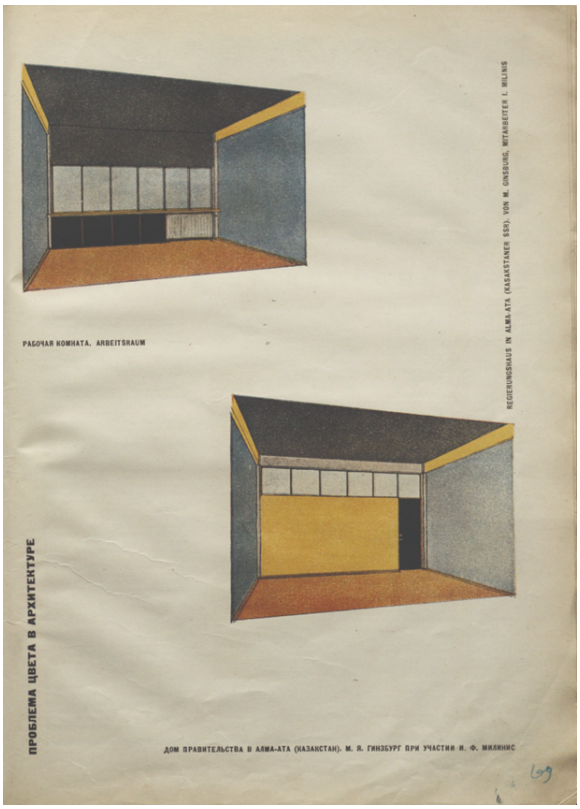


Figure 7: Hinnerk Scheper's K-Type Colour Scheme, (University of Minnesota, 2017b)

The K-Type units are in the bottom hallway, connecting to the entry on the ground floor from the exterior, as well as to the bridge that spans between the residential and communal blocks. Buchli notes that there are two different variations of the K-Type cell. There are articulated K units along the southern end, which were larger and more elaborate versions of the standard K-Type apartment (Buchli, 1998, p.172). These are identifiable by the semicircular balconies on the southern elevation. The K-Type apartments don't utilise volumetric interlocking in the same way as the F-Type apartments do; instead, they have taller double height spaces leading up to more private areas like sleeping and washing, giving the same volumetric effect within the main family living space. These apartments had separate kitchen areas of just 4 square meters, again providing space to cook and clean separately while still encouraging residents to use the communal kitchens and dining space.

For the K-Type apartments, Hinnerk Scheper designed a different colour scheme to the F-Type's. They are not painted as decoratively as the F-Type apartments; they are in much cooler tones with a restrained palette, but it is tightly coordinated with the room's geometry and orientation, in accordance with the daylight and usage. The colour scheme employed a Léger-like palette of contrasting primary colours and black (Bauhaus Archiv Berlin, 2017). The volumes in the main spaces within these apartments were 5 meters, so the ceilings were painted black, and the external wall was also black, adjacent to a bright yellow wall. The two remaining walls were painted a softer, dustier shade of blue. In the articulated K-Type apartments, the colour schemes were a lot lighter and relaxed due to the residents in these apartments specifically not working under any intense pressure and often conducting recreational activities.

Due to the building's orientation, Buchli and Movilla both highlight the K unit's double height living room with large windows that faced the park; in the articulated K units, the semicircular balconies amplify exposure to sunlight and river views (Buchli, 1998, p. 172), (Bianchi and Pardini, 2017, p. 43). In contemporary neuroarchitecture, it is discussed that colour and luminance distributions in interior spaces modulate emotion and cognition; cooler palettes and everyday lighting tend to support lower arousal and more stable spatial navigation (Abbas et al., 2024, p. 2). Chromatically, Scheper's design, paired with the grey stair and balustrade, stabilises the light as it dissipates through the dual-aspect flat, beaming at its best into the family living room, slowing as it gets deeper into the sleeping quarters. This avoids harsh contrast, which supports a sense of composure in family life, at night, and during child-rearing.

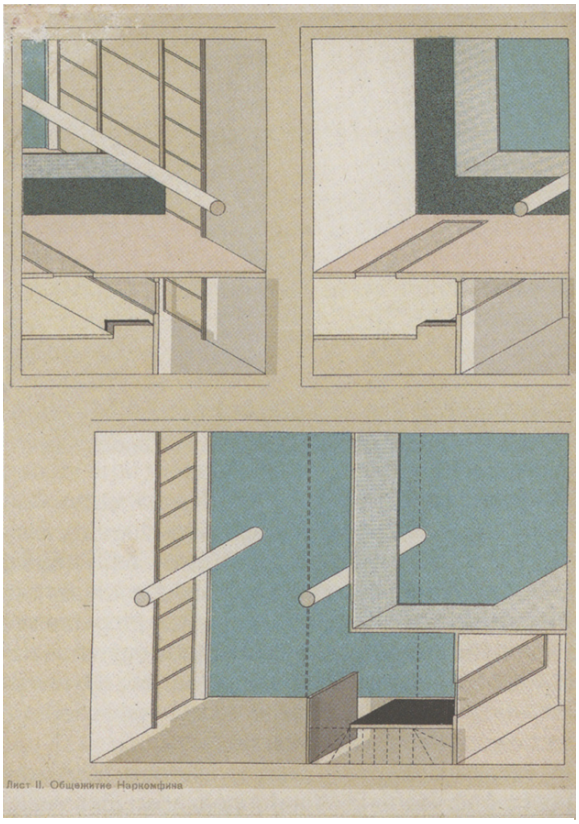


Figure 8: Hinnerk Scheper's Articulated K-Type Colour Scheme, (University of Minnesota, 2017c)

Entrance to the K-Type flats on the lower level is from the heated street hallway, bringing residents into the domestic space (Buchli, 1998, p. 172), guiding the resident into the grand, two-story space, with the intended use as a living and dining room. Near the long ribbon window, in the corner nearest to the entry of this common room, was a large piloti. This feature established the fixed point for how the unit was placed within the building's structural scheme, whilst functioning aesthetically as the focal point of the room. It showed structural honesty, allowing the resident to see how the space's volume is held up (Buchli, 1998, p. 172).

The kitchen was an enclosed room, adjacent to the entry space and common room. Despite its small 4 square metre area, it provided a sink, stove, work surface, and storage, conceptually close to Grete Lihotzky's Frankfurt Kitchen, a laboratory like minimum kitchen optimised via time motion studies to reduce domestic labour (Museum of Modern Art, 2019). In Miliutin's rooftop K penthouse, he designed the kitchen so that it opens through a serving cabinet directly into the two storey dining area (Buchli, 1998, p. 180). The K kitchen was still transitional, symbolically preserving the right to cook,

but materially restricting its scale so that residents are nudged towards communal kitchens and dining (Vega, 2020, p. 9) (Kopp, 1985, p. 71).

To access the upstairs of the apartment the resident goes up to a doorless entryway to the largest upper bedroom, opening onto a gallery overlooking the living room, the bed placement acts like it is in a recess between two pilotis, creating a semi-open parental area, visually and audibly connected to the family life taking place in the living room below, challenging the typical secluded main bedroom layout (Buchli, 1998, p. 174). Neighbouring the main sleeping quarters is the spare room/children's bedroom. This is a fully enclosed space from both the conjugal bedroom and the living room. The fully walled enclosure is said to bridge the gap of the petite bourgeois families' propriety and attention to children's sleeping or welfare, and their studying needs (Seo and Sohn, 2016, p. 39). The other space upstairs was a small bathroom with a full bathtub and sink, maintaining a separate W.C. on the same four square-meter footprint as the kitchen below. This aligned with the 1920s reformist emphasis on hygiene and provided the family with more privacy, as this was the only bathroom facility in the apartment (Bibhaka, 2025, p. 17).

Kopp describes this organisation of the floor plan as deliberately reworking bourgeois domesticity. This is because the family still has distinct bedrooms and a proper bathroom, but the conjugal room's openness to the living space and the smallness of the kitchen subtly undermine the closed family fortress of domesticity (Kopp, 1985, p. 71). The K-Type apartments and the Narkomfin building structurally and spatially open up towards the collective facilities and the park, fulfilling the building's role as an experimental Social Condenser rather than a simple apartment block.

Volumetric Interplay

The interlocking, scissor-like interplay of the apartments enabled dual-aspect ventilation for all units. Minimising corridor space to maximise private apartment space, the entire six storey block used only two horizontal corridors on the second and fifth floors (Pokrovskaya, 2024). This organisation of the low ceiled bedrooms and tall living rooms was not just a matter of aesthetics, but a deliberate psychological tactic to make small, space-efficient floor plans feel modern and expansive. (Buchli, 2017, pp. 387-402)

Aside from the aesthetic feel of these spaces, they were tested and designed like this for deeper reasons. As a resident, moving from compressed sleeping niches to soaring living room volumes functions as a sophisticated instrument for psychological self-regulation (Buchli, 1998, p. 174). The design leverages environmental psychology and neuroarchitecture to bridge the gap between private domesticity and the concept of the new socialist collective.

Christopher Alexander's pattern, Ceiling Height Variety, posits that humans instinctively read ceiling height as a proxy for social distance (Alexander, Ishikawa and Silverstein, 1977, p. 881). Low ceilings induce a feeling of intimacy, withdrawal, and introspection; ideal states for personal or functional tasks. Conversely, high ceilings facilitate abstract, associative thinking and openness, reducing feelings of confinement (Newsdesk, 2026). By providing both of these spaces in a continuous volume, Ginzburg granted residents a repertoire of psychological strategies: they can retreat to the compressed niche to remain unseen and private, in the most traditionally domestic area of the building. Or step into the double-height living zone when ready for social engagement.

Modern neuroscientific research confirms these effects are processed by the brain's visuospatial networks, including the hippocampus and the parahippocampal place area (PPA) (Abbas et al., 2024, p. 1) (Abbas et al., 2024, p. 10). These brain regions build cognitive maps of volume, which directly influence arousal, stress, and exploratory behaviour (Abbas et al., 2024, p. 11). The stark contrast between compression and expansion is critical; the tight scale of the bedroom intensifies the sense of release when the resident enters the light filled living area.

This clear spatial hierarchy within each flat directly echoes the social philosophy behind the building. The bedrooms, intended to be the most private and functional spaces, are compressed and practical. Moving from these private zones into the living room provides a deliberate sense of release, highlighting the transition from the individual to the collective. The design elevates the communal areas, both literally and figuratively, making the living room the heart of shared domestic life and the most inviting space, guiding residents from seclusion toward participation and aligning with the building's broader intent to encourage communal living through spatial means (Buckler and Cross, 2015).

The Heated Street, Horizontal Circulation

Moisei Ginzburg designed the residential block to utilise space where it would be appreciated most. By having only 2 corridors for the whole block, there was high footfall; hence, Ginzburg designed them to be at least 4 meters wide, flanking one edge of the building, fully glazed, and heated by large cast-iron radiators between the piloti and the window edge. This was done to provide an alighting area for residents to be able to essentially pull over and engage in further conversations. Turning this space into a socially active zone, by making the entry/exit point to the apartments, tight, and the corridors wide, sunny and warm, the architecture made the private act of walking to one's front door into a public act of potential neighbourly encounter.

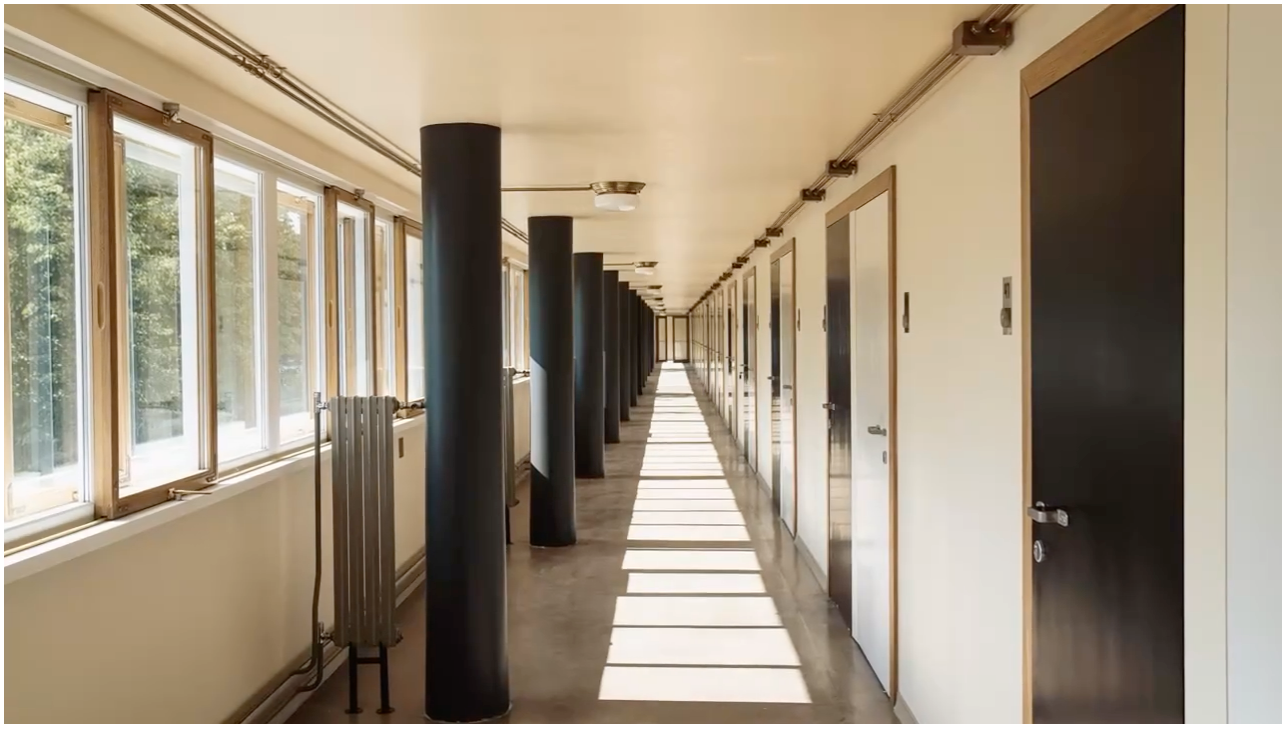


Figure 9: F-Type Corridor, (Ginzburg, 2022)

International Style & Constructivism

Moisei Ginzburg applied international style techniques to facilitate the goals of the Narkomfin Building. While these features reflect Corbusian modernism, in the Soviet context, they serve clear ideological aims. Lifting the structure on piloti not only enables communal gardens and pathways beneath but also physically and symbolically frees shared space for the collective, erasing barriers between people and their environment. The ribbon windows do more than provide technical daylight; they are a statement of democratic equality, making sure that every resident receives the same quality of light and blurring distinctions of individual status (Sayer and Muraenko, 2020). The walls are small and light, as the load-bearing duties are transferred to the columns, allowing spaces to be double-height and more open-plan, supporting the ideals of transparency, openness, and communal participation at the heart of the Soviet project (20th Century Architecture, 2021).

Constructivist architects believe that modern housing must provide residents with maximum daylight, fresh air and contact with nature. Ginzburg explicitly saw this as “indispensable human environment: air, sun and greenery” (Kopp, 1985, p. 71). The building is orientated north to south so that all the flats get morning and evening sun, the roof completes this environment's strategy as a sun-exposed recreation zone. On the roof, the project originally provided communal gardens, a solarium, outdoor leisure areas, and, weather permitting, a space used as a summer dining room (Kopp, 1985, p. 71). The roof, together with the internal street corridors, was thus part of a deliberately designed social infrastructure that encouraged neighbours to meet, exercise, and relax together rather than retreat into their private interiors (Pokrovskaya and Kolganov, 2020).



Figure 10: Commune Block looking at Residential Block, (Vassiliev, 2020a)

The flat roof and garden complied with Le Corbusier’s “five points”, signalling the Narkomfin Building as a technologically advanced, international-style prototype for future collective housing. It was 1927 when Le Corbusier coined the term "five points of architecture," which are: piloti, free plan, ribbon windows, roof garden, and free façade. Le Corbusier visited this building and discussed that it had heavily influenced him in the design of the Unite d’Habitation (1946-1952), which utilises a similar principle of volumetric stacking of apartments (Seo and Sohn, 2016).

Social Infrastructure

The Narkomfin Building was visually honest concerning its layout and how you could move around the spaces. The building was physically split into two volumes: the residential and the communal, creating a clear distinction between the labour or work that may have taken place in the communal areas, and your residential home. The two blocks are connected by a heated bridge that

protects you from the harsh Moscow winters. Entry to the communal block led to a large kitchen and a double-height dining room, much like the apartments but on a larger scale. These spaces were designed to industrialise domestic tasks.

The bridge serves as a ritual space for residents; crossing it signifies a shift in identity from the individual to the citizen. Early Soviet theorists liked this shift in identity, from private inhabitant to socialist citizen, but for some residents the psychological effect could be double edged. Empowering when communal life functioned well but felt slightly disciplinary when it did not (Buchli, 1998, p. 160).

On the communal side, the bridge delivers the resident to the second floor of the building, on the gallery side, looking over the food hall, lined with long tables lit by continuous glazing facing the gardens. Along one wall runs the kitchen, separated from the dining space by a long suspended serving counter, where the food was prepared by members of the community who were paid a living wage (Lucarelli, 2016). The space is loud when it's full, the clatter of crockery, overlapping conversations, the smell of different dishes. The space reinforces this sense of a shared ritual of collective eating, all at the same time of day as your colleagues and neighbours.

Figure 11: View of Glazing and Dining hall from Gallery, (Vassiliev, 2020b)



Elsewhere in the communal block, smaller and more intimate rooms supported other aspects of collective life. One floor housed a gymnasium with changing rooms and large showers; another, a library and a reading room where residents could work or attend meetings; and a mechanical laundry space where washing was done by machine rather than in individual tubs (Vega, 2020, p. 9). These spaces were quieter and more specialised than the dining hall: a library session might be hushed and concentrated; the gym noisy and physical; the laundry steamy and pragmatic. Succeeding in their social aims by providing access to culture, hygiene and leisure that a small flat could not.

Holistically, the variety of communal facilities makes Narkomfin's social infrastructure feel almost like an extension of the residents' homes, with varying degrees of privacy. The wide corridors and stairwells, because they are wide and well lit and overlook the park, become semi public living rooms where you can pause to chat, observe, argue or feel that others are nearby. (Vega, 2020, p. 10) (Kopp, 1985, p. 67, 71 & 75) The communal block offers concentrated spaces for eating, exercising, washing and reading additional to the roof terrace above the residential block which offered an escape from both the smallness of the apartments and the discipline of the canteen, the roof terrace was a place where the collective is experienced, less as an obligation and more as a pleasure.

For residents, these spaces have always been double edged. They could support friendship, mutual help and a sense of belonging that ordinary Moscow tenements seldom provided. Still, they also exposed people to constant observation and to institutional routines that not everyone wanted. (Kopp, 1985, p. 146) (Buchli, 1998, p. 160-161)

The Narkomfin Building, after Stalin.

By the early 1930s, the Soviet regime under Stalin declared Constructivism an import and began suppressing its avant garde projects (Sayer and Muraenko, 2020). The Narkomfin programme was dismantled: the communal dining hall was closed, the kindergarten shut, and a conventional communal kitchen was installed on the fifth floor; the original piloti were capped with plaster ionic capitals, the continuous ribbon window façade was broken up into smaller, more traditional panes to hide its modernist aesthetic and fit the socialist realism style favoured by Stalin (Moskvich MAG, 2017). During World War II, in 1942, the original residents were evacuated, and many new occupants illegally added bigger private kitchens. In the post war decades, the building's collective facilities continued to be repurposed for ordinary housing and office use; by the 1980s, less than half of the apartments were occupied, and the structure was described as in a critical state of decay (Sayer and Muraenko, 2020). Only after the Soviet Union's collapse did heritage campaigns emerge, culminating in the 2017 2020 restoration led by Alexey Ginzburg, which reinstated the original colour schemes by Bauhaus designer Hinnerk Scheper and the distinctive oak sliding windows.

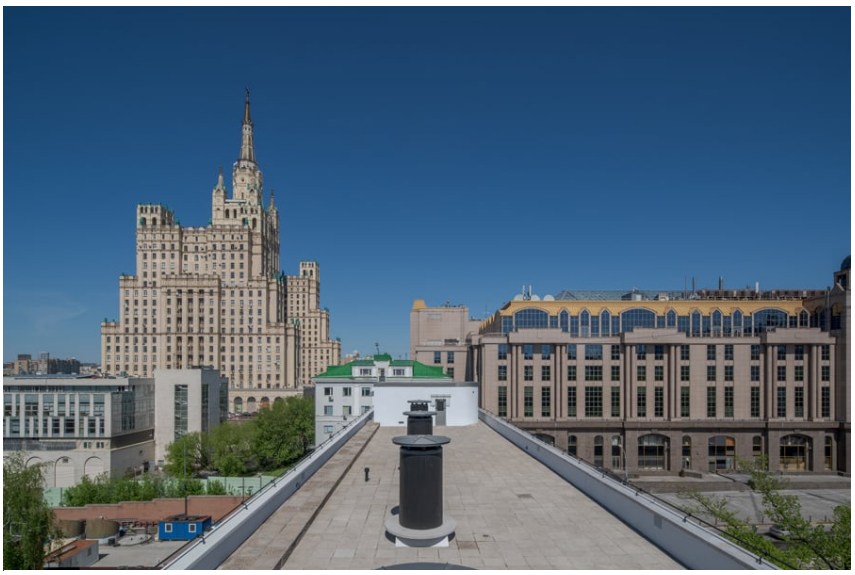


Figure 12: View from the roof terrace looking at the Kudrinskaya Square Building, (Sayer and Muraenko, 2020)

Figure List: Case Study: The Narkomfin Building

Figure 1: Blizznakov, M. (2005). Moisei Ginzburg. [online] Architecture-history.org. Available at: https://architecture-history.org/architects/architects/GINZBURG/biography.html [Accessed 29 Mar. 2026].

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Figure 3: Hopeful City (2025). Narkomfin Apartments Case Study. [online] Scribd. Available at: https://www.scribd.com/document/867224824/Narkomfin-Apartments-Case-Study [Accessed 29 Mar. 2026].

Figure 4: University of Minnesota (2017a). Color Plates | Architecture of Life | Manifold@UMinnPress. [online] Umn.edu. Available at: https://manifold.umn.edu/read/architecture-of-life/section/14b7f1c0-ffb5-4862-8b2a-8cd1aa99d441 [Accessed 12 Feb. 2026].

Figure 5: Vassiliev, N. (2016). Interior of F-Type. [online] Flickr. Available at: https://flic.kr/p/EGiixi [Accessed 29 Mar. 2026].

Figure 6: Museum of Modern Art (2016). Grete Lihotzky. Frankfurt Kitchen from the Ginnheim-Höhenblick Housing Estate, Frankfurt Am Main, Germany. 1926-1927. [online] The Museum of Modern Art. Available at: https://www.moma.org/collection/works/126451?installation_image_index=4 [Accessed 29 Mar. 2026].

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Figure 8: University of Minnesota (2017c). Color Plates | Architecture of Life | Manifold@UMinnPress. [online] Umn.edu. Available at: https://manifold.umn.edu/read/architecture-of-life/section/14b7f1c0-ffb5-4862-8b2a-8cd1aa99d441 [Accessed 12 Feb. 2026].

Figure 9: Ginzburg, A. (2022). Online Tour of the Narkomfin Building.

Figure 10: Vassiliev, N. (2020). Inside the Communal Block after Restoration. [online] Flickr. Available at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/qwz/49887912931/ [Accessed 29 Mar. 2026].

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Appendix B: Case Study, Ty Darren

Pentan Architects

Pentan Architects, based in Cardiff, have achieved award winning designs in the housing and care sectors. Often utilising the relationships with the clients and users of their projects by working closely and collaboratively throughout the design and construction processes. The practice evokes social consciousness with a steadfast commitment to people, place and the planet.

Ty Darren

Within Risca, a town situated within Caerphilly County Borough, also within the historic boundaries of Monmouthshire in south east Wales. With a total population of 15,126 (Brinkhoff, 2026), and an over-55 population of 5,410. Meaning 35% of the residents are included in the user demographic. Before the Caerphilly Council and Pentan's design proposal, a care home called Ty Darren was located on the site. After 10 years of being derelict and shut down (O'Neill, 2021), demolition plans were put in place, and the new project began (Gurner, 2023). The community seemed to have deep connections with this original care home (Owen, 2025).



Figure 1: *The Former Ty Darran Care Home in Risca. (O'Neill, 2021)*

The surrounding context comprises vernacular two-storey housing, with a local surgery on the south side and an ABHB healthcare facility on the north side. The existing landscaping and vegetation provide a good degree of privacy to the residents on the scheme whilst highlighting the expansive views up the valley (Caerphilly Borough Council, 2024). As the scheme developed through analysis of the site, the general idea was to achieve public gardens, blending into community only gardens, and private parking at the south-western corner of the site.

In focal point A, the most eastern node, proposed are 4 storeys, including the main entrance, a 'residents' lounge or shared space, a library/reading room, and IT-provision workspace for residents to interact, learn from each other, and work from home or connect with family (Tzika and Sentieri-Omarrementeria, 2025). As well as including a workshop or craft space to expand on skills and teach others, therefore creating a communal space for people to flow in and out of at ease, acting as a communal pillar of the community.

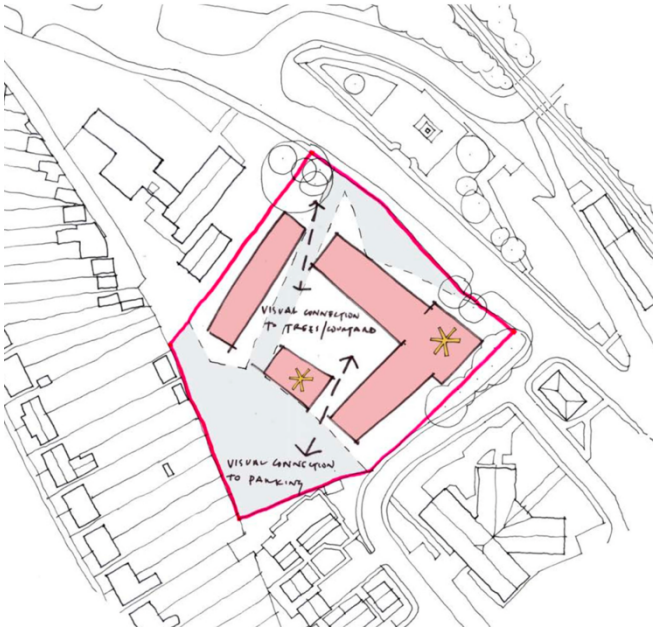


Figure 2: *Commune Areas. (Pentan Architects, 2022a)*

Focal point B is at the more public edge of the courtyard, as it is adjacent to the community allotments and parking areas. The large hall will provide a flexible community gathering space for the residents of the community, as well as a space that can be hired out by the wider community, serving more than just the direct residents of the complex. The overall design synthesis of the hall is to foster a very open relationship with the courtyard and the allotment side, encouraging people to meander between indoor and outdoor spaces, drawing the public in from the southern side and residents from the northern side and encouraging intergenerational engagement. Hypothesised uses for the space include coffee mornings, yoga or exercise classes, pottery and/or art classes. Encouraging intentional intergenerational activities, such as local school visits, performances, and seasonal shows. Watching sports events, attending a chess club, and playing darts and snooker.

Circulation is generally a neglected concept in buildings, but the consensus in Ty Darren is to utilise these spaces to encourage social interaction and a sense of community (Driver, 2023). Using the main lift and stair core (Focal Point A) as the inter-floor connection to all residential areas, leading to an external deck access. Consisting of a 2000mm-wide walkway, it is intended that the thoroughfare can be occupied, decorated, and inhabited by residents, becoming a place of interaction as if it were a traditional pedestrianised street.



Figure 3: *Pontymister Ironworks. (Jenkins, 2016)*

The existing landscape provides buffers between the Ty Darren complex and the surrounding highways to the North and East. But the scheme aims to further soften the building's edges by partnering perennials with pavements meandering between the sunny, southern edge of the site to the community allotments, the raised kitchen garden beds providing the residents and locals with an opportunity to grow their own food, whilst providing an additional Pontymister Ironworks, Risca. (Jenkins, 2016) opportunity for social engagement with the wider surroundings.

Using the historical context of the areas, such as the industrial buildings in which the scheme is built, and the iron and steel works and their buildings, which were once the focus of Risca's town and community life. The buildings seen in the photo were erected during a redesign and reconstruction of the works in the late 1870s and 1880s to make production more efficient (Risca Industrial History Museum, 2016). Using these buildings for the strong vertical features of the chimneys as a reference. It is proposed that Ty Darren will also be a focus for community life, using the prominent corner feature as a beacon and visual cue that this will be 'home' for our residents.

The Apartments

The homes themselves, the apartments, seek to provide accommodation that allows residents to move into a space that supports ageing in place as opposed to 'downsizing', potentially freeing up larger family homes to the market or housing waiting lists, whilst providing a decent home and community village feel that everyone requires and deserves (Norouzi, Swenson and Shahid, 2026).

Whilst it is difficult to predict what residents may or may not need, Ty Darren has been designed to be flexible enough to accommodate most changes in circumstance, from a very active lifestyle, which could include grandchildren staying or working from home, to needing sleep-in carers.

The dual-aspect apartments aim to support normal, healthy living regardless of circumstances, with plentiful daylight, sunlight, and fresh air, which are essential for physical and mental wellbeing (Solomon, 2025). There are three apartment variants, each with the same attributes but offering different versions depending on the apartment's orientation and what the resident would value most.

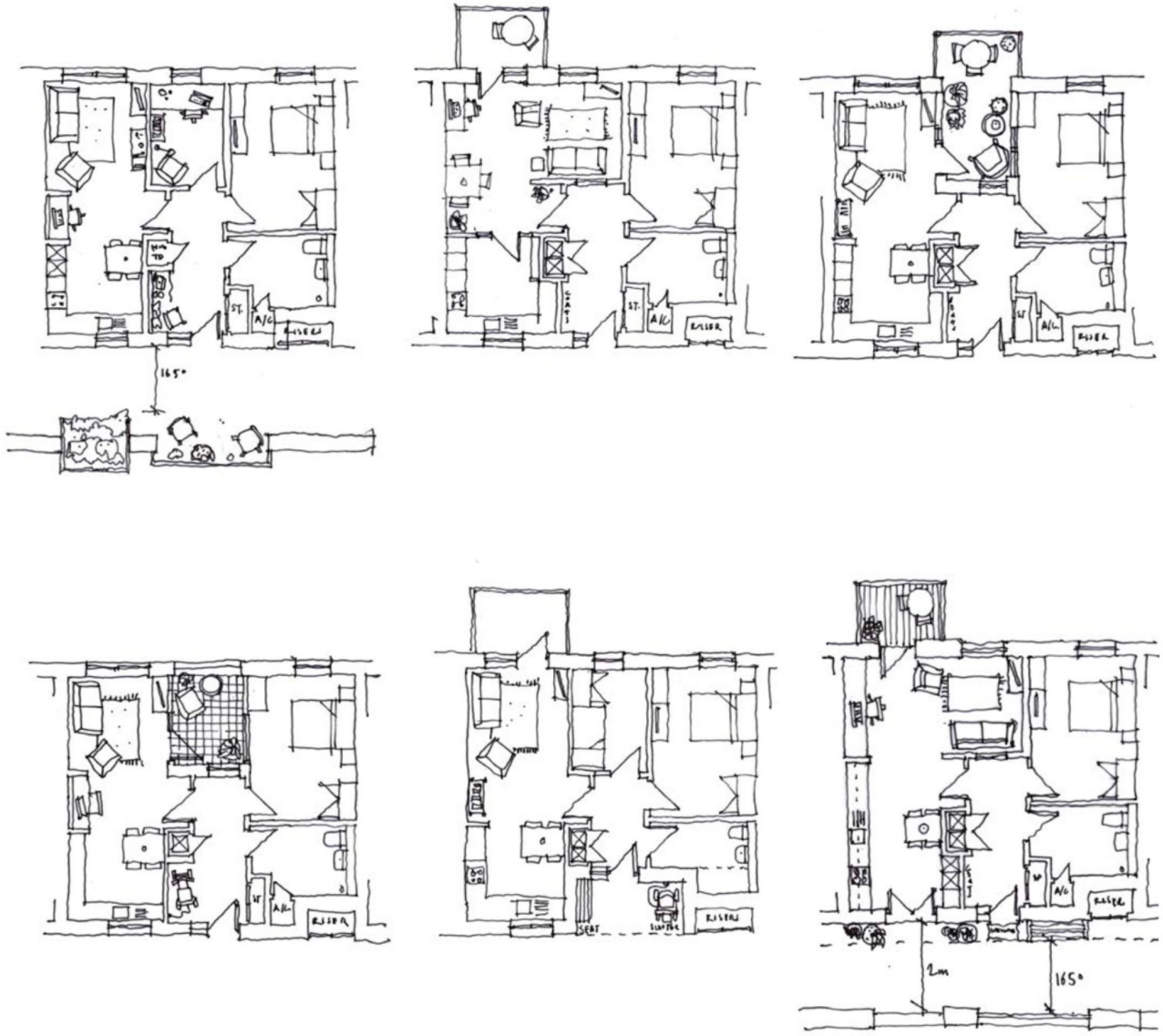


Figure 4: *Floorplan Variations. (Pentan Architects, 2022b)*

To access an apartment, one walks down a personalised, wide residential corridor, without passing through an institutionalised reception space, which retains the sense of independence and belonging for the resident. Upon entry, one is greeted with some sort of seating arrangement, like a bench or small table and chairs and greenery. On a practical note, access to the riser cupboards is outside, so services can be easily maintained and updated with minimal disturbance to residents.

Once inside the apartment, the user is greeted with a place to sit and store shoes, jackets, outdoor wear, etc. Providing seating and a proper place to organise oneself gives a sense of relaxation and ease, so as not to be bursting in the door, struggling to take shoes off, etc. To the right is the bathroom facility/wet room, future proofing for any bathroom accessibility a resident may require. The

bathroom, hallway, and other spaces have a 1500mm turning circle to accommodate the potential need for a wheelchair.

Included in the entry ways are a washing machine and a tumble dryer. Placing them here instead of the kitchen means it is a shorter distance from the bedroom or threshold and can be closed off for reduced noise. All apartments have the flexibility to accommodate working from home or hobbies in a decent study space. All layouts are approximately 61 square meters, allowing a genuine 'other' space or spare room. This also includes a generous dining table and seating for friends and family to stay comfortably. Dual-aspect homes provide natural cross-ventilation, allowing easy access to fresh air. Natural light and ventilation strategies will ensure the space-heating and mechanical ventilation requirements are minimised, reducing carbon use (Wei et al., 2024).

The homes are well connected to the surrounding landscape through views from every space in the scheme, and the location provides easy physical access to public and private external green spaces.

Fostering a Sense of Community

To foster a sense of community without force, left to grow organically, is difficult in a day and age of digital connection and declining social skills, but the use of architectural devices throughout in the Ty Darren scheme provides different opportunities for social contact in shared spaces everywhere in the design and in different formats (Caerphilly Homes, 2026).

From neighbourly connections in the social thresholds to community development in spaces with clear functions, designed to facilitate social gatherings at a range of scales. Including intergenerational and wider community spaces/activities is a great way of integrating the existing residents into the space, providing a scheme that the whole of Risca can enjoy.

Figure List: Ty Darren

Figure 1: O'Neill, R. (2021). A Former Care Home Which Has Lay Derelict for Ten Years Is Finally Being Knocked down. [online] Wales Online. Available at: https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/ty-darran-care-home-demolished-19634596 [Accessed 10 Jan. 2026].

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Appendix C: Case Study: Appleby Blue, London, England

United St Saviour's Charity (UStSC)

The United St Saviour's Charity (UStSC) was founded in 1541 by an Act of Parliament during the reign of Henry VIII, and the association was originally called the 'Corporation of Wardens of the Parish of St Saviour, Southwark'. They are a charity that mostly operates locally in North Southwark, specifically in Bermondsey and Bankside, providing almshouses for older generations, and Appleby Blue is their latest evolution (United St Saviour's Charity, 2025b).

The initial purpose of Appleby Blue was to shift the conversation on ageing and how it is dealt with, from an individual to national level. They realised that sheltered housing often made people feel like the step to the latter part of their lives. The charity's brief to the architects was to create a space so inviting and wonderful to be in, that people would want to move there. The charity worked alongside research partners at Bournemouth University to explore how intergenerational, socially inclusive activities, such as food growing, cooking, and meal sharing, can improve residents' wellbeing and social connection (Housing LIN, 2025). UStSC aimed to prove that high quality architecture can solve the downsizing problem with older generations, whilst freeing up family sized council homes by providing a superior alternative for the older residents.

The 'Appleby' from the project name 'Appleby Blue' commemorates one of the charity's original 17th-century benefactors, Dorothy Appleby (JTRE London LTD, 2020). The 'Blue' relates to the local Blue Market in Bermondsey; by including this in the name, the charity anchored the building to the local identity of the neighbourhood (United St Saviour's Charity, 2025a).

"Our vision is to make our new almshouses part of the community, rather than refuges for older people." — United St Saviour's Charity Manifesto. (United St Saviour's Charity, 2025a)

Witherford Watson Mann Architects (WWM)

The practice that designed Appleby Blue was founded in 2001 by Stephen Witherford, Christopher Watson and William Mann, and is a local, medium sized practice based in London (Stathaki, 2025). As a practice, they choose to spend significant time deeply understanding the site, the client's needs, and local history; this resonated with what the United St Saviour's Charity wanted to achieve with Appleby Blue (Architecture Today, 2023). They had won an RIBA Stirling Prize before this project, which was in 2013 for Astley Castle, where they curated a modern home into the ruins of a 16th-century castle, proving that they could be respectful of existing surroundings whilst designing beautiful spaces (Gras, 2025).

Witherford Watson Mann Architects were ideal for the project because UStSC were tired of specialist elderly care architecture that resulted in clinical, boring buildings. Therefore, in 2014, when the charity was looking for a new firm to work with, they chose WWM as they had a deep understanding of urban life and social history (Reeves, 2026). WWM had already worked on public spaces and housing in Belgium and London that emphasised sociability, paying attention to how people bumped into each other, whilst respecting the industrial weight of Southwark and the vernacularity of the Victorian and industrial surroundings, which was exactly what the charity wanted.

For Witherford Watson Mann, this was an opportunity to address a social design flaw; they were frustrated by the standard model of elderly housing, which commonly used double-loaded corridors, and explicitly wanted to change it and prove that circulation space could be a social space (Slessor, 2025). Stephen Witherford has expressed that older people shouldn't be hidden or segregated to a separate island-like building, so having the chance to create a high quality ‘hall for all’ on a busy street, whilst expressing dignity through the architecture, whilst working with lots of light, air and solid wood, was a great opportunity (The Developer, 2025).

Appleby Blue Almshouse

Locationally, the site was previously occupied by a derelict 1970’s care home, which had fallen into disrepair and was no longer fit for purpose (Open House Festival, 2025). The site is on a busy high street in Bermondsey, ideal for today’s older generation who want to lead an active life in the heart of the inner city. With a bus stop on its doorstep, and local shops and cafés nearby, the design blurs the boundary between private and public life, enabling residents to remain active participants in the neighbourhood (Skerl, 2026).



Figure 1: Ground Floorplan of Appleby Blue. (Witherford Watson Mann Architecture, 2023a)

Conceptually, the project offers a dignified refresh of the UK’s centuries-old almshouse typology: modest, low terraced buildings operated by charities for poor or disabled residents, where feelings of isolation are common. Beyond traditional almshouses, RIBA notes that WWM’s design offers an

alternative to the uninspired, dreary nature of contemporary housing for residents aged 65 and over (Hickman, 2025).

Located in the dense, characteristically brick built southeast London district of Bermondsey, Appleby Blue Almshouse includes 59 spacious apartments arranged in a U-shape around a bright central courtyard (Architect Projects, 2025). The apartments range from 55 m2 one-bedroom to 79 m2 two-bedroom, with 11 wheelchair-accessible apartments and 2 studio units for research assistants, many of whom will be incorporated into the Appleby Blue community during their work (Architecture Today, 2023). Social spaces meant to ward off loneliness and foster social interaction, including a shared roof garden and a community kitchen.

Architectural Devices

Witherford Watson Mann utilised several architectural devices to enhance the sense of community within the spaces, whilst understanding the residents' requirements and how best to encompass connectivity, dignity and privacy for all.



Figure 2: Wide Walkways Are Designed to Promote Sociability. (Vile, 2023a)

WWM designed single-loaded, unheated, glazed walkways that wrap around a central courtyard, serving as a porch area for each resident and a potential space for human connection. These spaces are additionally used for personalisation, where residents can place chairs and plants, turning a circulation space into a social one.

The building uses extensive glazing throughout the internal façades. Still, it makes an important appearance on the main external elevation as a two-storey glazed extrusion, allowing residents to feel connected to the high street and to see when the bus is coming, whilst remaining in a safe environment. The ground floor is slightly raised above street level, creating a podium effect. Allowing the residents to be able to sit in their bay windows and look over at the bus stop and city life. The rear, south-facing wing of the almshouse is two storeys high to allow maximum solar gain for the private garden and roof terrace.



Figure 3: Entry View to Appleby Blue. (Vile, 2023b)

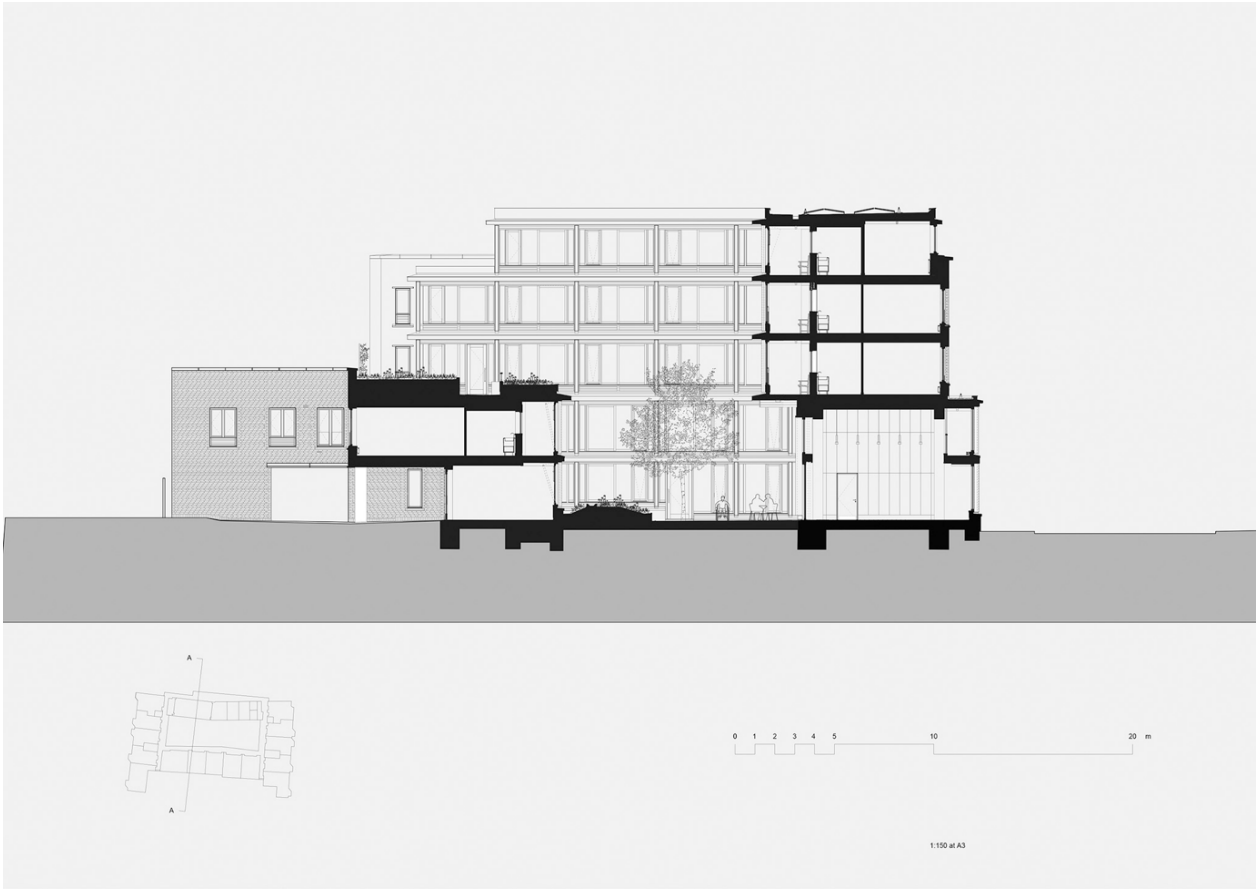


Figure 4: West Facing Section of Appleby Blue. (Witherford Watson Mann Architecture, 2023b)

Materiality & Massing

The choice of materials for the building is intended to convey permanence, warmth, and calm throughout, avoiding the plastic or sterile finishes of more clinical later life accommodation schemes (Flatman, 2025). The local surroundings were also considered, giving a vernacular acknowledgement and connection to the Victorian terrace housing surrounding the site. Ketley quarry tiles are used on the floors of the galleries and communal spaces, as they are long lasting, durable and a typical rendition of traditional Victorian kitchens and scullery areas (Ketley Brick, 2025). The quality of durability makes these spaces feel more like a public square, encouraging more active or outdoor behaviour and creating a clear distinction between social and private spaces.



Figure 5: Internal of South West Courtyard. (Vile, 2023c)

Solid oak is used for joinery, handrails and window frames, offering tactile warmth and a low stress, organic feel. The use of large amounts of glazing flanked by timber gives the sense of wooden trees holding up the facade, regulating circadian rhythms, improving mood and cognitive performance (Fierro-Newton, 2025, p. 6). Colour psychology suggests that warm hues stimulate energy, while cooler tones encourage

relaxation. Texture and materiality, such as soft furnishings or specifically, exposed, natural wood, contribute to sensory comfort and overall wellbeing.

The timber framing and structure was designed to represent a colonnade of trees, with kinks in them to represent natural growth and to mitigate clinical, repetitive lines. The irregular, kinked wood feels smaller scale and handcrafted, showing the complexity of the carpentry skills, making the residents feel special and worth the architectural investment.

The external envelope of the structure blends with its surrounding brick built terrace housing, stepping down to meet it at the same height as the two storey Victorian terraces behind and the semi-detached villas adjacent to the site.

The brickwork and terracotta tones provide a sense of security and mass, creating a quiet acoustic environment from the bustling high street (Architecture Today, 2023). Whilst referencing the local Victorian schools and the Blue Market area, grounding the building in the neighbourhood's historic identity (United St Saviour's Charity, 2025).

Communal Facilities

The building acts as social infrastructure for the entire community. Its facilities are not just for residents but are offered as a gift back to the surrounding community (Architecture Today, 2023). Upon entry, there is a garden room and a community kitchen, a double height space used for multigenerational cooking and other classes. Breaking the feeling of segregation among older people, inviting the local neighbourhood in to interact, make friends, and to learn new skills.

The residential roof terrace, situated on the south facing two storey side of the almshouse, features raised beds for residents to grow vegetables, the height of the beds allows for people of all levels of accessibility to participate. Promoting physical activity whilst enabling private, elevated, outdoor spaces with views of London over the terraced house skyline (Housing LIN, 2025).

Politically, Appleby Blue represents an incentive to downsize. But by providing a superior alternative to the potential residents' current family council homes, it has successfully released over 100 bedrooms back into the local Southwark housing stock (Housing LIN, 2025). The project has shown that downsizing doesn't have to be a dreary, negative concept; therefore, high quality architecture for the elderly can solve broader housing issues.

The Stirling Prize Nomination

The jury nominated Appleby Blue and ultimately awarded it the Stirling Prize because it addressed two of the UK's most pressing crises: the housing shortage and the loneliness epidemic (Ali, 2025). They described the project overall as "provision of pure delight" (Ketley Brick, 2025), praising it for being aspirational social housing. It was seen as a clarion call for a new model of communal living that keeps people rooted in their communities rather than separated into remote and out of site care facilities (Architecture Today, 2023).

Resident Interaction



Figure 7: Community in Photographic Essay. (Ebeling, 2025)

According to the one year on report conducted in 2025, the building has had a transformative effect (United St Saviour's Charity Southwark, 2025). The residents have reported that the wide, light filled hallways have become social hubs where they naturally bump into one another, spontaneously chat, enjoy seeing others, and be seen themselves (Architect Projects, 2025). The residents have reported a high sense of ownership, often personalising the spaces outside their front doors with record collections of plants. The building is a far cry from the quiet retreat of the original almshouse; visitors frequently note the banging reggae and shrieks of laughter coming from the community kitchen, a testament to a building that encourages living loudly rather than fading away (Reeves, 2026).

Figure List: Case Study: Appleby Blue

Figure 1: Witherford Watson Mann Architecture (2023a). Ground Floorplan of Appleby Blue. Witherford Watson Mann. Available at: https://www.wwmarchitects.co.uk/projects/almshouse-southwark [Accessed 3 Apr. 2026].

Figure 2: Vile, J. (2023a). Wide Walkways Are Designed to Promote Sociability. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2023/nov/01/retirement-home-alpine-spa-appleby-blue [Accessed 1 Apr. 2026].

Figure 3: Vile, J. (2023b). Entry View to Appleby Blue. Dezeen. Available at: https://www.dezeen.com/2023/12/01/witherford-watson-mann-appleby-blue-older-peoples-housing-london/ [Accessed 5 Apr. 2026].

Figure 4: Witherford Watson Mann Architecture (2023b). Section of Appleby Blue, West Facing. Witherford Watson Mann. Available at: https://www.wwmarchitects.co.uk/projects/almshouse-southwark [Accessed 3 Apr. 2026].

Figure 5: Vile, J. (2023c). Internal South West of Courtyard. Architecture Today. Available at: https://architecturetoday.co.uk/appleby-blue-almshouse-wins-the-2025-riba-stirling-prize-witherford-watson-mann/ [Accessed 2 Apr. 2026].

Figure 6: Vile, J. (2023d). Terrace Houses Surrounding Appleby Blue. Dezeen. Available at: https://www.dezeen.com/2023/12/01/witherford-watson-mann-appleby-blue-older-peoples-housing-london/ [Accessed 5 Apr. 2026].

Figure 7: Ebeling, P. (2025). Community in Photographic Essay. WWM Architects. Available at: https://www.wwmarchitects.co.uk/projects/almshouse-southwark [Accessed 5 Apr. 2026].

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Appendix D: Interview Transcript: Chris Wilkins from Pentan Architects, 23/01/2026

Helena: So, I've read, you guys spell on the website Ty Darren with an E.

Chris: If it's if it's like that on the website, then that's wrong.

Helena: So, it's supposed to be A, is it? Darran. Right?

Chris: I'm going to look for an email that the client sent to me.

Helena: Because some people seemingly spell it as Darren or Darren, it changes from what I've seen. Is that because the previous care home was Darran?

Chris: I think so, and I think it should be Darran. Have a feeling the Google Earth, if you go onto Google.

Helena: Yes. Does that call it Darren?

Chris: Yes, that's wrong. Yeah, so Caerphilly Homes, the client, the client who owns the building. Oh, there we go. So, Caerphilly County Borough Council. So it says Ty Darren, A.N. name to stay after community vote. Yeah. So, yeah, it has been to Darren and it will continue.

Helena: Okay, right. Cool. And is that just because the previous care home was called that or is that like something to do location on the site?

Chris: So that was an out for community consultation? So they held a vote on. What should we call the new scheme? and everybody went well, same as it was the old scheme. To Darren. Why not?

Helena: No one gave any new. Okay.

Chris: No, I think there were options like the brickworks or something else. Okay, yes. But yeah, people stuck to what they know, so.

Helena: Well, yeah, I suppose it's easy, isn't it? So we have, in my in my set questions, I have 3 3 sets of 3 questions. And the 1st set of 3 is about designing for autonomy for people living in the scheme. *“So how does the architectural layout specifically support a resident's sense of ageing in place without the environment feeling institutional or medicalised?”*

Chris: So, okay, so you're talking layout specifically?

Helena: Yeah, like floor plan or yeah, how you move through the building, what facilities are there?

Chris: Interesting. Okay. So can the question expand into because essentially, it's that desire from us to step away from the institutional feeling is through everything, from the approach, the building, the layout, the arrangement of space is how residents interact with each other, right the way through to materials, finishes, fixtures, things like that. So it is, I suppose, if to broaden it, it is through every aspect of the project that that idea is considered. In terms of layout, if we're true to your question, we sort of consider the layout. I'll get that document to share with you up, so...

Helena: I really liked looking at that. Thank you.

Chris: Okay, it was helpful, of course. I'll bring that up just so it's easier to talk around. Drawing isn't it?

Helena: Did you have like any so I looked on your obviously Pentan generally from what I can see has done other over 55 types of schemes and care home. What's the difference? I wrote this down on the train. What's the difference between an extra care of 55s and then like something like Ty Darran, which is over 55.

Chris: Oh, yeah, so, um, So there is, there is a, there is a kind of a defined difference. And I suppose people, depends on who you talk to, will define it possibly differently. In our world. Welsh government, who give the funding for lots of our, any local authority or highland association funding scheme. The definition that is kind of attached to extra care is the more they're of, they're typically much bigger schemes, so more numerous, uh, apartment numbers, uh, they would come with uh, like catering on site, so they'll be like a canteen.

Helena: Okay, yeah.

Chris: Commercial kitchen offering meals. care as well. So more you might experience a higher level of care need in those environments, and it can be provided for you. Um, so like nurses call. Yeah. calls and things like that. Well, when we did when we used to do extra care, they would come with like a hairdressing salon, sort of hairdresser.

Helena: Okay, so you can go in there.

Chris: What else? Yeah, little gym, often. yoga studio, you know, little sort of spaces for yoga studios and crafts and things like that. So, yeah, so more recently, the extra cares have sort of diminished in number, certainly for us, and I think generally, and local authorities and housing associations now are much more typically providing later living, which is at the very basic level sheltered housing. So collection of, you know, fit for purpose apartments. Um, if then the sort of stepping social, that's often there's a little lounge attached for residents to gather. Ty Darran is a slight step up from that. So we've got the lounge, we've got the sort of craft room, IT, flexible room.

Helena: Yeah.

Chris: And we've got the sort of lounge, library, sort of snug and game space on the top floor. So that sort of... Makes it.

Helena: Yeah, it is.

Chris: Yeah, so that's the difference, I'd say. Where's that material?

Helena: Do you find that people, because I've found since trying to research this this dissertation? Obviously, people ask you what you're doing for this station and things like that. Do you find that people have like a stigma thinking that an over 55s scheme, intentional community. You know, it's like an old people's home. I've had someone recently, like sort of have a pop at me saying that 50 people were 55 on old and I'm like, I know. It's a planning thing. Um, and, and, but I think, I think when you say

it, because it's not conventional or traditional. I think people, I don't know, I seem to gauge a vibe that people find it weird.

Chris: Oh, no, no, you're right. And people do find it confusing because there is, there's over 55s, but not everybody uses 55s that some clients will, it will be 65 now.

Helena: Yes, yeah.

Chris: Some people call it extra care. Some call it later living. Some people call it sheltered housing. So there's all these broadly all the same stuff. Yeah, really. And then some people have absolutely baffled that because you could take, you know, half of our consultant, a client, give us 55-ish.

Helena: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Chris: But it is remarkable. I remember when we used to go and do some like post-occupancy research on some of these extra care schemes. You'd go into the schemes, and you'd be talking to what I think now you would think has looked like old, you know, old people, you know, they were retired, they weren't working anymore. They looked like they had health conditions in, right? But actually, they were maybe 60.

Helena: Wow.

Chris: They grew up in Welsh Valley mining communities, they didn't put them in hard lives and they'd aged.

Helena: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Chris: Whereas you can, yeah, there's 75 year olds who look. No, I know. That's true. It's very strange. So yeah, I don't know whether age is a good definition to put on a scheme.

Helena: No

Chris: I think most frankly, I think anyone could live there and they're asking because I don't know if you know the Levitt Bernstein scheme in London. That actually some of the principles of Ty Darran was based on, they've done a model there, whereas, where there's later living elements mixed with like masters and PhD student housing as well. So you've got that intergenerational relationship going on.

Helena: One of my case studies is on marmalade lane. So I've investigated that as well. I think lots of people, I spoke to one of my lecturers about it because we were talking. I think people generally are quite touchy about age too and I also think coming from a young person when I am saying it. They might think I'm being insensitive.

Chris: Yeah.

Helena: So I think they'd like sort of strikes a nerve twice. But he said that he would, I asked him if he would live somewhere like that because he said he seems to see no issue with it and he said he'd prefer it to live in like an intergenerational, like more like marmalade lane or what you've described, I think. I think that's more digestible for people because it is also not traditional as a housing setting. You know, you don't buy your house and pay it off for 40 years and then sit there.

Chris: Yeah, yeah. No, you're right. And in a way, I mean, there are examples of schemes like this where actually a younger person has greater needs in terms of accessibility in terms of scale and yeah, sort of access to their apartments that younger residents will go in there.

Helena: Yeah.

Chris: Yeah. So, it's, I don't know that. I quite like the concept of it, really. definition is helpful at all. But frankly, it's just... It's just apartment living.

Helena: Well, this is it.

Chris: Great apartment living because they're good sizes with lots of shared space, lots of communal kind of opportunities for interaction, lots of landscaping. Yeah. Yeah, so it's just, I mean, there's the old sort of saying, if you can, if you can design well for kids or dementia. Then that's a great place for everybody else.

Helena: Yeah, absolutely.

Chris: So I suppose back, yeah, back to your question. Yeah. So there's some principles that we've adopted on the scheme that potentially help that kind of spirit and maybe diverge from the norm that you see sadly. I mean, one for Ty Darran is the gift that the site is, it's a relatively prominent site in the community. It's on a main-ish road, running up the right hand side screen there, and then there's sort of the spur road coming in at the south of the scheme there, but into the sort of doctor's surgery and pharmacy. It's a relatively busy kind of site. So it has a presence in the community. So immediately, I mean, we could have turned our backs on it from like screened it and planted it and done a very human looking scheme, but actually it felt like, no, this should be an outward looking part of the community kind of scheme. So that's one flip. It's not to sort of withdraw these residents from the community, to hide them because of the fear that, oh, it's a frightening world out there. It's to say, no, this is a great building. and people should kind of be able to see and engage with the world as it passes by there. We know and go out and enjoy the facilities and immunities that are on offer outside their door as well. So if the scheme looks out to the community, then the residents living there, see what's going on and see the life, see the bus going past and think, wow, I can't move to town really easily.

Helena: Yeah.

Chris: So you immediately flip that idea of like going into a sort of an environment which is farmed off from the outside world where you just sit and wait. Yeah. So whilst we didn't actively say we need a site that does this, the site did that and our choice to respond to it with a scheme that very much faced out. Yeah. to it was intentional. It's a choice and that the landscape boundaries with the surroundings are relatively open as well. We haven't screened it and fenced it off the high fences. It's going to be quite open to those surrounding roads. Yeah, and you've got like the, you've got trees, which were original to the site where they... Yeah, so there's a big whopper at the top of the screen.

Helena: Yes, okay, the dark. That's it.

Chris: And then there's that series down there.

Helena: Oh okay.

Chris: All the rest are sort of new, could be newly planted. Okay. So yeah, I suppose that was one, that was our 1st sort of move, except that this is an outward facing part of the community.

Helena: And do you with that? I mean, one of my questions, which you've sort of answered, um, this one is how does the, how does the, how does the architecture facilitate the residents integration with the wider neighbourhood to prevent the community from becoming an age segregated island? So you kind of answer that. I know that the plan is to kind of bring the community in and do like events and stuff. I was going to ask with the community garden in the centre. Is that gated or is that fully permeable so like someone from the health centre could walk through it to the other health centre? For example.

Chris: So... So, I suppose an asking question. Yes, they could. But our expectation is that they probably wouldn't, and it's not because I think necessarily we want to resist that, but I think you'll see the label at the centre of the drawing there. That, for us, is the residents community garden. We don't want to gate it often say, look, you know, no, you can come in. We don't want...

Helena: I mean, I think you'd kind of get the vibe anyway that you wouldn't want to.

Chris: it exactly nice. controlling those thresholds, those hierarchies of like, if you if you were walking towards that site, I don't think I don't think you'd think to use it as a...

Helena: No, well, you've got I'm just looking at, you've got a sort of path going round between the kitchen, garden beds. I know it's still through the thing, but if hypothetically if you were walking from there to there.

Chris: And I say that was that's a much more acceptable loop for a non-resident to take and particularly because those garden beds the along beds to the south are meant to be that kind of bridge between resident and wider community. So in a way, you can see the sort of the external kind of limits of the built form, our is our sort of threshold. Anything, anything within that is sort of, well, this is more resident than wide public.

Helena: Yeah, you can feel like you're working into something because that is, you know, form of a sort of square courtyard.

Chris: And I think that's the same with if you think about that as because all the apartments are accessed off of that sort of inner courtyard wrapped there. That's in the big in someone's front gap.

Helena: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Chris: So that was the sort of thing.

Helena: I would feel like that too.

Chris: Yeah as well. So, and in terms, yeah, so obviously we've got the, then we've got that sort of shared, shared space in sort of forming one side of the courtyard there where local community groups can come and, you know, local nursery can come and use it. things like that. There's the landscape element. So if the wider commuting wants to come contend to the to the plots, then that's great. Yeah. We've then got lots of, so the residents meeting space down on the kind of prominent corner location there. That, I think it would be absolutely encouraged for other groups to come in and

use those spaces if the scheme manager thought, well, that's going to be a nice thing for residents to feel as part of the scheme. So the ultimate sort of threshold is sort of lifters their call there in that sort of re-adore, I suppose. That's the sort of safe point, really. So, you know, visitors can be encouraged into that corner there.

Helena: Yeah.

Chris: That space there and the wine and the landscape. But then I think everything beyond that is... more private, but not gate, not sort of... Yeah. Yeah. So I think that's, yeah, so so so gently kind of controlling me through the architecture and the layout to bring up community involved.

Helena: With the scheme manager thing. So I've been intrigued about this with different types of scheme buildings. How is that? How is it managed? And is it like, uh, is it just like um, there's like someone at a reception desk or is it like heavily managed in a more serious way? Is that the?

Chris: It was really good. So, um, the latest iteration of the scheme is in that corner down there. Is a manager's office. Yeah. which obviously has a really good kind of view over coming and coming, skiing residents coming and going, visitors coming to the scheme as well. So that's where they would base themselves. Now, it varies in terms of how client groups manage a scheme. More and more often, though, there's not a full-time manager on site, they might manage like 3 or 4 similar schemes within like a few square miles or something. Yeah, so they're there occasionally and there's always like video link.

Helena: Yeah, easy to contact.

Chris: Yeah. So yeah, so that's how this scheme will be that there won't be a permanent manager on site all day every day.

Helena: And they're employed by Cearphilly Council? Yeah. Okay, cool. Right. Cool. Yeah, I've wondered that about different, because it depends on how much managing goes on. Yeah.

Chris: I don't know. Do we answer? So question more. I'm just reading it. I want to read if we kind of answered other things too. institutional or medicalised? Oh, yeah, so another thing we were desperate to get away with all this, get away from the school was lots of other examples of this school. You see a double loaded corridor. So you'll see an internal corridor or department attack test off of that on each side. Yeah, I feel like at your window at the end. So there's no natural light coming into that corner.

Helena: Oh, you see what you mean? Yeah.

Chris: Yeah. And so for us, that just that has a, you know, they're always really kind of desultory environments that, yeah, there's natural light about natural ventilation. And they feel like just dead spaces.

Helena: Do you know, yeah, I've in for my 1st year. Like student halls, I used to hate the corridor because it was all fire doors as well. Oh, so the air was so stagnant with no window. It used to drive me nuts. On like a Sunday, I'd get everyone to like open their doors and open all the windows to get air in it. I couldn't. It was always warm.

Chris: Yeah. So, yeah, so there is that sort of feeling. So when you open your front door, if you're flat here, in comes fresh air in that.

Helena: Yeah, yeah.

Chris: Which I think for health and well-being is amazing because there's so many schemes we'd go and visit in, you know, decades gone by where residents would just be sitting in these airless environments that are really warm and you just think, yeah, your motivation. Yeah, I find it hard to get up and do something with that mind. So, yeah, that was a big, and it's a costly thing to do as well to adopt that approach of a single loaded corridor. wrapped. But what that means is aside from fresh air and daylight and good, like, dual aspect. Cross ventilation. Out of your kitchen window. So everyone has a kitchen window and the front door onto the kind of courtyard. You can see your neighbours there. And if you're sort of, if your neighbour is only 2 metres away, even if you have a window, you're likely to kind of put the curtains up and like stop someone looking in. But if you're in, if your neighbours are sort of an acceptable distance away, that actually you feel okay to leave that window unscreened, you can see their comings and goings and they can see you and you can give them a cheery wave across the courtyard, that sort of thing. So that, I think, is one of the fundamental things about stepping away from something that feels like an institutional building. is that approach?

Helena: Yeah.

Chris: It also means that, and this is, this is a sort of, um, you have to weigh up this decision because we don't want residents feeling like they can't leave their apartments to go to some of the community space is because it's a chilly day outside. On the flip side, we want people to remain in that kind of that pattern of everyday life, whereas you and I now want to go visit the shops for our friends or be sociable. We put shoes on, go out and do it and a coat. And it's one of those routines of like get yourself up, get self-dressed.

Helena: Make you feel like you're getting outside.

Chris: That is fundamental, I think, to remaining... to retaining independence and just that sense of routine. Like you lived in your family home in all likelihood for decades past. So there's that sort of you keep the same models of life that you came from in your home and you keep doing them here. You don't just sort of regress and think, well, I'm not just going to shuffle the along corridor in my dressing game. Yeah. and go and go and sit in there.

Helena: No, I didn't really consider that, but I think it's a really good point to like make you feel like you are exiting your house even if you're staying in the facility and going somewhere else because you would put different clothes on and proper shoes. Yeah, I think that's a really good idea.

Chris: I think there's something psychologically quite sort of fundamental about that. Yeah, keeping your faculties about you. Yeah, things like that.

Helena: Yeah, I think so. And then your, the threshold. Wait, wait, wait, wait. Oh, that's good. *"In your view, how does the design of the threshold impact a resident's confidence in managing their own daily life?"* Because I know that you have designs kind of an area to potentially sit and like takes you off and do things like that. Is that still?

Chris: No, so absolutely. that's true. And this, that still stems from those, the strategy to the scheme, so those dual aspect of happens where you can see the street on one side. you can see the rest of the scheme on the other. Some residents get like get quite scared and fearful about coming out. But our intention here is that they can see the street beyond. You know, there's no fear about that.

Helena: They can kind of look, you know,

Chris: Yeah, yeah. within the scheme. There isn't that idea of, well, I can open the door into a dark corridor. Don't know who's there. That doesn't exist for them. They can look at their control window. There's a little window to the side of the door. They can see what's out there. It's day and it's open. And so I think that the threshold starts from being able to see out of your apartment, what is what lies beyond. So that's the 1st thing. You're absolutely right. Those sort of the tiny bit of generosity just inside the front door, flair, again, there's natural light because we've got the, it's not just a front door, it's a front door and it sounds like really, like, that's not exciting.

Helena: No, I...

Chris: There's fundamental life. from the, like from the, sadly, the base level that we so often see. But in doing that, it's like, oh, again, I can see out. got some natural light to put on my shoes and to do the fiddly buttons on my coat and put my scarf on. That's all part of that sort of threshold for my using, you know, start to get dressed to go out and you get ready and you feel brave enough to open the door. Then we've got that big wide deck that sits photos of the scheme, which you probably saw the...

Helena: I, yeah, your, I wanted to ask, but I presume it was. There was an image on the document you sent, which took like a, you know, like a Photoshopped collage of the hallway with the corridor and like you had the timber frame design. from what I could see. I mean, obviously these are like your preliminary documents. I know all the date it said 2022.

Chris: Yeah, something like that. Yeah, yeah. Um, So, yeah, you probably saw a few of the scheme images kind of together. I mean, it looks kind of unwelcoming and really sort of repetitive and monotonous and it does in a way. Um, but because I've been the full knowledge and expectation that these places need life. Yeah, they only work, whether it's life in them.

Helena: I think it's really hard designing, because I design, well, for my buildings in uni, I try and always include and use the concept of like the people using the space or kind of decorate this space and do I want them, whoever they are, to do whatever they want with it. And like spray paint a big ladybird on the wall if you want or do whatever. And I think it's really hard to portray that when you're not the person then doing it. So it's really hard to like be like, yeah, people will do it.

Chris: Yeah. Yeah. And we were like, we have to, we have to, like, have that toss up when, when to go and turn the photography to go and take photos of a scheme as well. We would never send them to an empty building.

Helena: I always think when you see them in the, you know, in Dezeen or in the AJ, they look so stark and...

Chris: I mean, well, I think I don't know why anyone will present their scheme like that, really. Unless it was, I don't know. Like, you, actually, or what they care about is the building, not the fact that it's a

home for someone. Yeah. Um, So yeah, I mean, if you look at the um, the sterling prize money scheme from this year. Yeah. All the photos. Yeah.

Helena: Yeah, absolutely.

Chris: And they look great for it. And so when we've got those sort of, obviously, this is ground floor, the deck access walkways above as well. So we can't encourage residents to do it. We just hope they do. Yeah. because of fire and that, you know, people put some timber bench outside, then...

Helena: Oh, so you guys aren't allowed to put a timber bench there?

Chris: No. Okay. We could probably... Yeah, we could like put metal ones, noncombustible ones, but then it just feels a bit like municipal in institution, I guess. So we kind of hope that what happens there. So kitchen window on the right-hand side there, that people put a load of plant pots. and there's a welcome back outside the front door and a little seat and there's a umbrella stand or something.

Helena: What's that? What's the signal material? Is the ceiling there?

Chris: So it's a wood fibre, cement board. The product's called troll, troll decked, which, again, is what, so when I, when I sort of your 1st question about stepping away from the institution, I say material, I was, you know, fundamentally on that. That's one of the things. So often you'll just see a rendered ceiling for internally because we've got the same finish internally as well. You'll see the, like, the pendant, like the ceiling tile grid. like you see in schools. Yeah, okay. Yeah. yeah. So again, that's another of those things which, well, we're not doing that because it feels like you live in there.

Helena: Do you know why they even use them aside from the fact that it might be cheap? Because I don't I don't understand why... Yeah, I think so, so it goes wrong. push a tie up. Because I've only ever seen those tile roofs broken. They always, all of them are like slightly broken or the tiles cracked or the metal like thing that holds the tiles is like peeling off. I've never seen one actually intact.

Chris: Yeah, they look awful. And that's that's like the base the most basic version as well. There are some, there are some better ones that aren't the sort of, they're called laying grid ones at the top. Okay, yeah. But yeah, that was another one of those small, small changes that we were keen to make.

Helena: So what else for materiality to make it not fear? I mean, you've got the brick and it's quite, it's a, I quite like the brick. It's not like a typical red terracotta or something. It's like soft.

Chris: For us, it was important that that brick. Oh, so those spaces, they're quite deep, so they need to be, so, you know, that walkways are that wide because they're great because it layers people to have like, you know, up to a metre of, you know, we're not giving them a metre, but there's a zone there where they can kind of appropriate that space around there. flat and still allow access past. The kind of the base level driver for that is that if you've got 2 of those big sort of...

Helena: Oh, yeah, of course. You can get past each other. Uh-huh.

Chris: But then you'll see that that creates quite a shadow, you know, in against the sort of the flat entrance stores in the kitchen. So if we'd got off a dark brick in there. I think it can be quite oppressive.

Helena: Yeah.

Chris: So that was part of the choice. The 2nd one was we've got the brick needed to have a certain sort of softness to it. A bit of warmth in its tone, a bit of variation in the texture, so it wasn't this kind of foreboding, like, the norm, solid sort of scheme.

Helena: Yeah.

Chris: So yeah, that all playing into slept in the rain, even as in the mortar colour, so the watercolours are nice, you know, there was a... So you can.

Helena: It's very light. It's very light.

Chris: So, to, there was, there's an extra cost of that. It was £40,000. Extra to not have just your box and gray. mortar on them. But it matters so much just because it means that as you look at the elevation, you see a sort of a soft hole, kind of in holes inside missing. rather than a collection of bricks. So if you have a much darker water around a line brick like that. the brick, the line, the brick and wall. whereas if you if you tone it, It's soft again. Again, it softens. Yeah. And then, yeah, so you can't really see the brick detailing, but some brick detailing on there, just to sort of break up horizontal. Yeah. So yeah, so you can see the sort of in every decision we make on the project. There's a there's the right thing to do with a building of this type of that scale, but there's a there's the sort of continuous thought of how does the resonant feel about that? So now that's softness and warmth and time.

Helena: Yeah. Yeah. When does it when does it open? Because I know you said that it's opening or ready to?

Chris: It is. So Monday, next Monday. There's a like a walk around for the client is doing for, so me and a Jordan colleague of mine who's done all the interior design on the scheme are going up. So that's when like other, um, associations and RSLs registered social landlords are being taken around. And then the hour later, the perspective of the future residents, I mean, the tour as well. So we're going to go and walk around with that.

Helena: Is it fully like booked up, if you know what I mean? Like, is it a, because I know too, obviously it's from the council. Yeah. I know to get in there, you have to register through the council. So is it like at full capacity or?

Chris: Do you know what? I don't know if they've all been allocated yet. The reason this building is existed is because they are closing for at least 3 of their other schemes that are like 1960, 70s. no longer kind of fit for purpose. So there's a lot of resonance in them that are being moved. Obviously, there's a few of them and we started because they haven't been putting new residents into those old schemes and some of them died. So there's a lot coming from of those other schools, whether it's full capacity. I don't know.

Helena: Do you know, I mean, I mean, I know you're not like, um, I don't know, like the gods all knowing everything, but do you know how, like the average age of the residents that they're looking to put in there? So obviously it's an over 55. But it'd be intriguing to know that if the average age was like 72.

Chris: Yeah. What, like, you know? Do you know what? I don't know. and I've learned that it would be wrong to assume having been to residents consultation events in all the schemes that they're closing, my perception would be that the residents that are in the existing stock are a lot older than 55. Um, But like I say, someone could just have really tough lives.

Helena: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

Chris: So yeah, my hunch is, they're probably a little older. But I suppose the intention is, is that we often see in our housing schemes, there are lots of people who have retired, still living in three, 4 bedroom family homes. The local authority have been kind of, you know, they've rented from local authority. And actually, that's a real waste. But also, there's families that need housing. So this makes sense in the kind of the unlocking of the housing kind of need. for local authority.

Helena: Obviously, the project generally emphasises having the difference between your private, your nice private space and then having the shared spaces. How do you have you thought maybe, you combat, you know, you have loneliness and social isolation. But how can you also? How does it work, you know, if people don't want to talk to anyone? Because often I find that older people anyway quite usually I don't want to do it and how do you do it with this observation without obligation. How is that?

Chris: Yeah, you're right. You can, there's a, there's a fine line that you, you tread as a designer that is sort of, you can't, you can't force people to go out and engage with the world. Yeah. Kind of, there's the, there's the hunch, the expectation that if they do, then they'll retain their independence for longer, they'll be happier, healthier. Less kind of burn more than health and social care and facilities. For me, like I said, at the start, the conversation around that flip from these schemes being isolated, tucked away, not in a community, not visible. I think that's one part of it. If residents of this scheme, like I said, they're going to see the world passing by outside their window. Yeah. might encourage him to get out and enjoy it. If you're sitting just tucked away in the back of a suburban estate or something, there's nothing going on. That's my motivation to go out and see it or engage with it. The way that I think if you if you don't want to, kind of leave the scheme, I suppose you don't have to. But yeah, I mean, typically all these residents will still be cooking and providing for themselves, so they will go to the shops and get there, get their prescriptions, I know. So, but if you if you don't want sort of... force, socially, if you don't want to go to the communal space, you can have that kind of force, social engagement. And I think at the very least, when you're in your apartment here, again, you've got a view to the front of the scheme that is engaging and you see the kind of wider community beyond it. You've got a view when you're standing, you're sitting washing up to the courtyard where you see the life and that's going on within the scheme. Which I think will give that if you don't want to go out, it gives comfort that you're sort of... there.

Helena: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Chris: Whereas again, you flip that back to the old double stamped corridors where you don't have view onto that corridor and you just got an internal front door into it, then you have no idea? Yeah, if Mrs. Evans has just walked past, you know? Jones has gone out to walk the dog, that sort of thing. So I think that's a...

Helena: I think that the dual aspect concept anyway is nice and really good and with for cross ventilation, things like that. But the more that we've talked about stuff, I see that it has a bigger effect than people think it does, like in everyday life, like we've said, like with the community, you can still

see. People that also live there hanging about doing whatever. And it just makes you feel, yeah, less alone, definitely combats loneliness without having to, even if that person annoys you, you can still see that they're there. So I think that's really nice. Yeah. I really... I've written a question here about that you're the social corridors is what I've called them and how did you balance the need for efficient building circulation with the goal of creating social corridors that facilitate spontaneous unplanned interaction? So is there is, did you find when you were designing it, like any issues with the amount of circulation space that people had or budget wise? I don't know.

Chris: So... Do you know what, it would, other time groups would have would have been more questioning of it, but I mean, in all credit to Jane and her colleagues at Caerphilly Borough Council, they said, we want we want a different model. We think we can do better and this will set the sound for what the authority does. So at that point that's like, well, well, this is how you would do this. These are the all the good things that you might do on the scheme. And so yes, it's you could build, you could house, well, 40 plus apartments there, you could do it more cheaply. undoubtedly. But there's, there's lowest cost and there's that and there's value and cost are different. And so if, and we can't kind of attach a number to it, I'd love it if somebody did a study, but the argument is, if you make well lit, well, ventilated homes where people feel safe, secure, have social connection, feel part of a wider community, then they'll live longer, they'll have less mental health concerns, they'll have less physical health concerns. So the burden that goes on those other services will be reduced. Yeah. Now, I mean, as Jane and the housing department, she can't claim that money back from the NHS, so it's a leap of faith to go along with that.

Helena: Did you do you? I mean, I presume would, but do you reference like the happy guides and the happy principles? So which spatial solution in this project do you believe has had the most significant positive impacts or will have the most on the residence, mental health? Like if you had to pin one.

Chris: I, yeah, so it will be a toss up. between the gift of having. Of, of not being that institutionalised double loaded coral. the gift of essentially having the courtyard wrap and access, you know, deck access, wall pay access onto it for all those things that we've discussed already. Fundamentally, I suppose, then when you're in the apartment, those apartments, a generous light, sort of they're well day lit, they're well ventilated, but they're also they're more generous than the minimum spatial requirements should be. So every apartment, either house, if you have the top floor apartment, you get an inset terrace balcony. which I think is a total gift for them because they're definitely quite a long way from the ground. So going out to the garden space might feel like it's a bit of a chore. So I can just open my living room door or my bedroom door and those 2 spaces talk to each other across those tiny little courtyard and get some fresh air. Most amazing views off and down the valley. So I think, and if they're not the top floor spaces, then that space, that sort of secondary space is the spare room. Unless you go into private, privately paid for accommodation, which the rents are enormous. Then that is, that's the, I think that's one of the biggest gifts really, because it's really hard coming from a family home that you've lived in for, you know, decades. With all your stuff and all your memories. And sometimes we go back and visit these schemes and they are just absolutely jack-packed with furniture and plates and photos on the walls and books and photographs and things like that. Yeah, with stuff because it's so hard to let that go. So that sort of 2nd space, which you could have your grandparents, grandchildren to stay. You put a bed in it, you could have your carer to stay if that happens to you. You're wider family. You can work from it. You can study from it. You can do your art food. So that was a, that was a sort of an extra over on the scheme that, again, the client came along, you know, on the journey with us, and agreed to do that I think is fundamentally different from most schemes.

Helena: With the with the rent pay, like how does that work? I don't know, anything in a way, like how that would work with the councils, like, is it?

Chris: So it's not a bedroom. We don't call it a bedroom. It's not a bedroom. Because if it was an actual bedroom,

Helena: Oh it would be more.

Chris: Yeah, I don't know, you're probably too young to remember the thing when the bedroom tax came in. So if you were living in a property where you had more bedrooms than you needed, you'd pay more for, yeah, for that. yeah. So this is just an additional kind of. Okay.

Helena: Yeah, I know that on the presentation you sent me is, you know, it's an extra room. Is there, do you know how much the rent is? Do the residents pay rent because it's with the council? Like, I don't know how does that work?

Chris: So A, no idea how much the rent is. No, not got too. And obviously not, not, because it might be on. Well, they'll probably, yeah. Most of them will be pensionable age. And lots of them might have housing benefit as well. Yeah. Which goes towards paying their rent.

Helena: If you were to develop a phase 2 or do this again.

Chris: Yeah.

Helena: Which architectural device or like element would you evolve or change to further enhance resident identity and autonomy? Or independence is probably. Like if would you? Develop it of anything more.

Chris: I suppose, you know, I think that it it's hard to think about it now because it feels like the things we managed to do on the scheme. Well, sort of when you're into delivering the project on site, there's lots of like, oh, we could do that better a fairly fine details. The fundamentally of the scheme, I feel, we're so lucky to have been able to do them on here that absolutely, I'd love to repeat that. It might not be repeated because it's a relatively inefficient, expensive way to deliver housing of this sort. All you care for institutions care about is cost that they might reflect on that. So yeah, I'd be delighted to do a lot of those things again. I suppose what do I envy about the other projects that I see of this ilk who have been able to go further than we have? I suppose you look at the sterling prize winning scheme. Appleby blue recently. Their ability to, I suppose, spend some more money on those threshold spaces. So those circulation spaces will make corridors. They had a beautiful kind of joinery package where they're integrating seats and places for plants and things like that in their corridors. That's just another little kind of, you know, I'd love to turn the dial upon that just because at the moment ours feels quite uninhabited and quite cold as a consequence.

Helena: Yeah.

Chris: So, I have no idea how they got away with it in terms of fire and timber in the circulation zone. We can't put a plant pot in, you know, to the last phase of stuff.

Helena: Is it because of the, like, um, is it because of how timber is treated and stuff? So is it like potentially that they just have more money and then they treated it and then it's okay?

Chris: Yes, possibly say you can need to apply in an incandescent coating to determine like that. Often it often it then looks sort of highly varnished and a bit sort of gummy, but yeah, no doubt budget has helped them. Yeah, definitely. So that would possibly be one thing. The other, the other thing that I, the, or sort of saw that there was the intention to do in that other, the Bernstein scheme that I referenced, we've sort of taken a bit of a model line for our apartments, is that that secondary space, so the bonus space that I'm not calling a bedroom that sits between the bedroom and the living room. In their, in their scheme, there was, there was sort of a series of partitions, panels, where there was the flexibility to sort of grow the bedroom into that room, I don't know if you wanted a little dressing room. Yeah, you want that space to engage more wholeheartedly with the bedroom or vice versa with the living room as well. So there was a bit of kind of flexibility. I think that would that will possibly allow a sort of a better fit for a wider group of people. But I don't, yeah, it's kind of, I'm not sure whether the cost of detailing and delivering that would fundamentally change, I think, in those spaces. But I sort of thought, well, that's nice. Yeah, I guess I struggle to think of like other, yeah, it feels like we've pushed more.

Helena: I think it's really great. I think maybe you could, it would be more likely to be able to answer that costume like after you've seen people living in it for a while. Oh, always, yeah, because then you'll see like where, yeah, exactly. and you'll see kind of where gaps may be. Yeah. Um, but yeah, I really like that.

Chris: what you've probably looked at lots of iterations of these types of schemes that are things you've seen that this is not doing.

Helena: Uh, I'm not sure. I think I really like the scheme, generally, a lot, but I think I don't know. You could have. I think maybe. Like we've said with with the materiality with brick versus timber timber could feel lighter. Slightly softer. You know? But I think, I think aside from, but again, that's quite difficult to do. So I really like it. I really like that there's like designated properly designated little hallway spaces. I like the, I agree with Germans. I, you know, I like that the washing machine told dry isn't in the kitchen and it's, I, I don't understand why we do that as a country and they, I don't know. I just don't get it. But I really like that and like for noise and stuff and it's less to carry. I think all of that's really well thought out.

Chris: Yeah. It's because it costs money, exactly. So that land value is so, so high in the UK typically it's like, you're squeezing every last kind of penny out of it and to separate, to dedicate a separate little cupboard or room, it sounds pathetic, doesn't it? But it's literally a cost thing.

Helena: Yeah.

Chris: And it is cost. Again, it's coming back to that idea of value. If you can sit in your kitchen or dining room or living room and not hear the washing machine.

Helena: Yeah, it annoys me.

Chris: Tumbling away, then you're so much happier as a complicated, I would say. It sounds ridiculous.

Helena: Yeah, yeah. No, it doesn't because it is the little things when you live somewhere and all of those things change. Maybe I would say, um, because we've, you I mean, you just touched on land value, potentially having some sort of like, I know enough will be blue. They have the, you know,

you've got your simple story thing. They've kind of got this C shapes and then they have over that. They have a roof terrace. Yeah, yeah. So something like that could be nice, but I mean, that's we're just...

Chris: There's a very early version of the scheme. That linked. So it could be sort of made the continuous loop over that building. and that had a rich terrace on it. But yeah, I mean... So that's shrunk down to a sort of a very slightly pre-fabricated timber out building there.

Helena: I really like that little building. I think it's a really nice touch and I think in summer, it's a really nice... And I like that it opens on both sides. So you have it, we're facing the allotments and like the wider community, but you also have the inside side. I think it's really...

Chris: I'll be delighted whether my planting has grown. Yeah. I suppose, yeah. So I suppose there's not many things that I think, final of engineering is really like hard to scheme. There's there's a there's a fair chunk. We're looking at lots of shots of the atrium. That communal thing. So that was all supposed to be lying down in timber. So there's the oak frames around the windows, which are a bit clumsy and I would have loved. And then all all of those 4 walls were meant to be timber lined, but like kind of fluted from the panel. That would have been lovely. Fundamentally, I think it's probably more lovely for me and the architects journal.

Helena: Yeah, well, this is the thing as well because I don't know how much sometimes when I talk to my family, obviously none of them do architecture. And I say things or I point things out in buildings and I'm like, oh, and I'm like really appreciating something. And they're like, what. Yeah. So I don't know.

Chris: Yeah. The other, Yeah, so I suppose the other thing was it's a big building. and within the courtyard. I know, probably perfect. It's a big building. Within the courtyard, there's a lot of repetition. And I guess there's a sort of an austerity to it that I maybe reflect on that we could should have done something differently on. I don't know if I truly believe that.

Helena: Well, I think once you have, I think once you do have, like, it's grown in a bit and there's more greenery and people and benches, hopefully, and plants, you know, you get those, plant pots that like sit on a railing or sit on a fence, kind of got, things like that on the edges would be really nice.

Chris: You can see some of those spaces around here. So this was a kind of a VE, value engineered landscaper's layout that we didn't necessarily have much input into I can get a picture looking back to the building.

Helena: When you just said, what do you say? VE?

Chris: VE, yes, value engineering. Okay, yeah. So, I'm not sure if you can see. So there's a sort of beyond the, there's the main sort of wrap of how I was connecting round. So that space in there, and that space in there, they were meant to be raised planters, so to like 450mm high. So not much, but I just sort of felt like that would reduce, reduce the scale of the building. bringing a planting up out of the ground. It would be somewhere to sit and perch on. It would just sort of ground the building a bit more gently into its landscape, but it disappeared.

Helena: Do you, is that because, I mean, obviously there's budget constraints and different types of clients and things like that. And I know, is that because you're working with the council or is it just

because of the budget or the people they had as the landscapers or? Why, I mean, I'm not, I didn't, won't, this isn't for a dissertation. I'm just generally intrigued.

Chris: Yeah, no, so, so I think budget played a fairly big chunk. Yeah. and just not doing that kind of, like, they felt that was the loan.

Helena: How much is it more or less? I mean, I know this is like, I'm asking you really niche questions.

Chris: So they probably they probably have saved. just all building all that work and lining them out and importing the soil. They'd probably save 10 grand in doing that. It's £10,000. That's not a lot of money in the context of a multimillion pound building. You know, we're upwards of £50, £2,000,000 yeah. That's not much and I would say well for that not much money then. It would be significantly better had you done it, but I don't like sort of. I don't not even sure if I think it just happened. We weren't even asked the question, what do you think about if we don't do this? Because that's how schemes are typically delivered. You don't always get trying to re-engaged with as the architect for all of those decisions around. You know, what happens on the site. We've been really lucky that that project has been delivered. pretty much just a partnership between the contractor and the local authority where we've been lucky enough to still retain like input, really. So yeah, and that's not always the case. And so yes, it's, there's a, There's a sort of a, what's the opposite of perfect storm? There's a, there's a nice happening. We've been lucky again that those relationships have been there and there's a very willing client and a contractor who can execute these buildings really well as well. So, yeah, so all that said is still good. There's always those little things.

Helena: Yeah, yeah, no, I know. you can't not have them in a way.

Chris: No, no. But just like, you know, this is that's the view from the residents, like little top floor terrace. Just the view back down the valley.

Helena: Oh, see, that's so nice.

Chris: Imagine just sitting up there with your cup of tea or gin or whatever you... Yeah, no, I know, it's really, really lovely. And then you look up. So then you turn around and you look up the valley that way and views are just staggering.

Helena: Yeah, so nice. You know, I really value outdoor space personally and the flat I live in this year doesn't actually have any. Yeah. And I do, I didn't think it would really affect me. I was just like, oh, I'll be fine. Like, it's not a problem. Yeah. And luckily, I live on, I live in Swansea on Mount Pleasant, which is like this really big hill, so I have a view over Swansea. It's very nice. And the cross ventilation is really good. So that's a bonus for the lack of outdoor space. But I do always think, like, if there was some sort of balcony, even if the view wasn't that nice and it was at the back. I think I would probably, even though the weather is terrible, I would probably still sit out there sometimes.

Chris: Yeah, I mean, as sort of part of Welsh government funding having a terrorist balcony is a sort of a, you know, that's your, that's 1st preference. If you can deliver that, you really should be delivering that, essentially. So yeah, if nothing else, though, residents would be able to sit inside their apartments and look at some stocking views.

Helena: Yeah, really nice.

Chris: Oh, yeah, so. So if I'm, I'm stood in a, which way round it is, I'm stood in a bedroom or living room now. So it's a top floor apartment. There's your tear us out there, which means lots of plants and stuff to sit to sort of ping against that cladding.

Helena: Yeah, yeah.

Chris: See through to a nice sofa and a lamp over it. We have to get over the fact that people have really bad tasting furniture, I think. Hey, ho. But yeah.

Helena: With the cutting, is it slightly reflective? It looks like it was...

Chris: Yeah, so that one there, again, that was all meant to be brick wrapping in. because of bringing that wrap in where there's not necessarily structural bearing walls below that that was challenging, so they went for a light lightweight climbing.

Helena: I don't... It's okay. I'm thinking it's...

Chris: There were worse options put to us. Yeah. Yeah. So, yeah, that's sort of the release.

Helena: I quite like that it, I'm, well, I'm imagining that it's like, you know, you've taken like a chunk out because it's in this internal, I quite like it.

Chris: Um, so yeah, and then that's, I suppose, as you do things like construction, thicknesses swell and spaces out that get a bit smaller. So I think that photo makes it look way worse than it is you can do.

Helena: Yeah, I think it's a height as well, actually. But I understand, I think.

Chris: But again, I'd probably sit there and watch the sun going around on it.

Helena: Yeah, they feel so private as well. Yeah, like in internal.

Chris: Yeah. Well, that's sort of why we did the inset terrace is a top floor level because you're at 4th floor, you're a long way up, like popping out onto a balcony up at that height can be a bit like, ooh, especially if you like incorperate a balancing as an older person.

Helena: No, I think that's lovely. And when you look at it, like if it was raining or something, you can see the rain, but you're dry. as a concept, I think it's really nice.

Chris: So... I stood on the water, terrible photos, was actually worried, but I'm still on the walkway there. Yeah, and you can just look straight through. That's pretty nice. Really nice.

Helena: I'm intrigued? Which is, is there a pink kitchen?

Chris: Unfortunately not, oh, that should be a picture. I thought one of the photos, it looked pink. Oh, well, so we didn't get any input on the apartment. Yeah, so kitchens are fine, gray or something, you know, boring and some slightly grey flooring on the whole. Oh, upstairs. That's upstairs. In the communal. Yeah. So there are in the community areas, Jordan, my colleague and I managed to get away with a much more inspiring poet, she would say. So we've got some really nice set of iron-mongery brassware going on. Yeah, and some sort of bolder choices, should we say? Yeah. And

again, just that sort of, so often the case that you go to schemes like that and there's just either horrid carpet tiles or vinyl, sheet flooring, and so they're all, they're all in the, at the time when I was taking these pictures, they're all sort of hidden under floor protection. So in the winter garden space, we got a really punchy sort of red terracotta tile there and then on the other side of the screen is some decent oak, you know, actual oak flooring... lots of communal spaces. That's quite really in the space on the left-hand side, so that you can see the tower flooring in there. That's the winter garden, so that's kind of 2 stories high, big windows, amazing views out. The sill is 400mm too high because you should be able to sit on the sofa there and see out the window. I'm so annoyed by that. For me that is a catastrophic error.

Helena: What did that happen? Was it the contractor or?

Chris: Yeah, so essentially. we drill a lot of sail. the window manufacturer will have said to them, we can't do a window that high. I mean, you had to choose the window manufacturers. They don't think we know how that high. Sort of what they've done is, well, we'll keep it high up there, we'll just move this up. Yeah, because I know on... reduced to height.

Helena: Yeah. Because when you do stuff, I know what you mean. Because when you do stuff on revit and things like that, it measures the top of the, it hangs the window.

Chris: Oh, yeah. like in the software itself. It might be something we've drawn. It's sort of, they're just taking the choice. So yeah, on the, so that's the winter garden on the left-hand side. So I stood in the sort of library, snuggy space here looking across to the... Oh, no. So I stood in a little TV space, looking across to a set of like shelves and covers there, which would be the line breed to them. Yeah, full of books, basically. I like the ceiling a lot. It's the same stuff, yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, what's this? Oh. Yeah. And in fact, yeah, lots of our... Yes, it is. Yeah. That's what's well, like sort of interiors, test their boards behind their wall.

Helena: Hmm, really nice.

Chris: And then on the ground floor, just covered in dust, so it's not really pinging. So in the atrium and lobby space, we've got, again, sort of quarry tile. So that the attention is that feels like when you walk in the front door of the scheme, you see straight through to the garden. So it's, it's sort of that sort of, just continuation of outside in. You step into the residence lounge and it's that much tarazzo tile.

Helena: I like your differentiation with materials and flooring throughout. Like you can see even on the ground floor external corridors, you've changed the flooring, so you can, even though there's no fences or anything. Yeah. You can, you get a sense of where you are and what's what space you're in and things like that. And I think, like we touched on at the start with, can residents just walk.

Chris: Yeah, so the intention was that there'd be a top line of like frame running along the other hand is now. And then above that would just be all the fluted panel. It wasn't supposed to be sort of framed out in that kind of. Yeah, bitty thing and that so that wasn't meant to carry on as a flat. And the annoying thing is we'd actually detailed and drawn all of that.

Helena: How does that work when you when you detail it and you, you know, you explicitly say it goes like this, what happens?

Chris: So it's not design and build, so it's not the worst version of a building contract, but as partner in contract, we're putting those sort of drawings out there. The contractor then gives them to a subcontractor because they're engaged to do the joinery and the detailing. And they'll look at them and think, well I see what you're doing, but this would be easy for us. But there's no point of recourse for us, apart from sneakily going to the client and saying, well, that isn't what was drawn. And frankly, the client probably would say, oh, looks fine.

Helena: Yeah I suppose if the client doesn't put up a fight. You can't really do anything.

Chris: Yeah. I don't care. Yeah. But still, I mean, it's, you know, it's great to have his...

Helena: I like being able to see the green. The green is really nice.

Chris: Yeah, I mean, yeah. Again, this is this is amazing for a scheme like this from local authority. And you'll see, if you see the sort of the unpainted sections there, so more of that panelling will exist under the windowsills.

Helena: Oh, okay. It's kind of giving reference to traditional homes and things. Yeah, that's what I feel like a home.

Chris: Old fashion dish panelling, yeah. Yeah, and then that runs into, so there's a set of shelves that run around the corner there. So, I mean, sadly, a TV will sit up there. But we'll get some art walls and things like that. Yeah.

Helena: Yeah, really nice. Thank you.

Chris: So if I get any better photos on Monday. I'll send them on. Yeah, absolutely.

Helena: Thank you so much for talking to me. But everyone's talking to me for so long as well. I feel like I know everything.

Chris: Yeah, there could be weeks of conversation on this project. Yeah, it's been I mean, if it's been so this was pre-COVID, we started this 2020, 2021. Wow, okay, yeah. Yeah, so five, 6 years to deliver a scheme is just, I mean, frankly, ridiculous. Yeah. It's kind of life in... in architecture and planning and...

Helena: Would it be possible to have like a site visit around it at some point with you guys or is that?

Chris: Oh yeah, maybe. So it's not. So it's probably gonna, so the fall opening is early March. Okay. So I'm not, so we'll go up for the formal opening. I mean, I don't know how far they'd extend the invitations to. Certainly after that, we all we often have other clients, you know students going to visit our schemes essentially he's just getting in touch with the scheme manager. Yeah, well, we'll take them round. I was just sort of thinking of, yeah, those opportunities for for doing it with us would be the opening event. Um, probably being dragged by and housing minister and things like that, say, we'll get a talk to you.

Helena: Yeah, no, no, no, no, of course.

Chris: We will the intention is we'll hopefully get some professional photos done once the residents are in. Yeah. And I kind of think that you, well, we always try and go back and visit the scheme after

the residents have been in for a little while to see how see if it works. So I don't know if that is helpful or interesting to you that you might arrange with the scheme manager's going to go and have chats with.

Helena: Yeah, I could do.

Chris: do a walk around. for that purpose. But, um, Yeah, I, yeah, I think I, I, I guess the best thing to do, because essentially it was sort of a mid-handover at the moment. Yeah. Um, so I'd say, post-opening late early March. then either get back in touch with meal or approach the screen manager through local authority and around your visit.

Helena: Yeah. Cool. Thank you. Yeah, it will do.

Chris: So it was worth going to see them, like how it feels.

Helena: Yeah, exactly, I think so.

Chris: Yeah, it's always surprising. remarkably different than in photo. You don't get a sense of the scan. spaces or yeah, the same, yeah. Yeah, awesome, is it?

Helena: Yeah, no, I do. I think I'll enjoy that. Cool. Thank you so much. Very welcome. I feel like I've got loads of stuff, information.

Appendix E: Questions & Quotes from Interview: Chris Wilkins from Pentan Architects, 23/01/2026

Quotes taken from transcript and applied directly to each question that I had laid out in my question framework.

Theme 1: Designing for Autonomy

1. How does the architectural layout specifically support a resident's sense of "aging in place" without the environment feeling institutional or medicalised?

- "So can the question expand into because essentially it's that desire from us to step away from the institutional feeling is through everything, from the approach, the building, the layout, the arrangement of space is how residents interact with each other, right the way through to materials, finishes, fixtures, things like that."
- "Another thing we were desperate to get away with all this, get away from the school was lots of other examples of this school. You see a double loaded corridor. So you'll see an internal corridor or department attack test off of that on each side. Yeah, I feel like at your window at the end. So there's no natural light coming into that corner."
- "So when you open your front door, if you're flat here, in comes fresh air in that. Which I think for health and well-being is amazing because there's so many schemes we'd go and visit in, you know, decades gone by where residents would just be sitting in these airless environments that are really warm and you just think, yeah, your motivation."
- "It also means that, and this is, this is a sort of, um, you have to weigh up this decision because we don't want residents feeling like they can't leave their apartments to go to some of the community space is because it's a chilly day outside. On the flip side, we want people to remain in that kind of that pattern of everyday life, whereas you and I now want to go visit the shops for our friends or be sociable. We put shoes on, go out and do it and a coat."

2. What specific "architectural devices" were used to ensure that private residences feel like primary sanctuaries of autonomy while still being part of a larger collective?

- "Everyone has a kitchen window and the front door onto the kind of courtyard. You can see your neighbours there. And if you're sort of, if your neighbour is only 2 metres away, even if you have a window, you're likely to kind of put the curtains up and like stop someone looking in. But if you're in, if your neighbours are sort of an acceptable distance away, that actually you feel okay to leave that window unscreened, you can see their comings and goings and they can see you and you can give them a cheery wave across the courtyard, that sort of thing."
- "Every apartment, either house, if you have the top floor apartment, you get an inset terrace balcony. which I think is a total gift for them because they're definitely quite a long way from the ground. So going out to the garden space might feel like it's a bit of a chore. So I can just open my living room door or my bedroom door and those 2 spaces talk to each other across those tiny little courtyard and get some fresh air."
- "That sort of 2nd space, which you could have your grandparents, grandchildren to stay. You put a bed in it, you could have your carer to stay if that happens to you. Your wider family. You can work from it. You can study from it. You can do your art food."

- "We've got the brick needed to have a certain sort of softness to it. A bit of warmth in its tone, a bit of variation in the texture, so it wasn't this kind of foreboding, like, the norm, solid sort of scheme."

3. In your view, how does the design of the "threshold" (the transition between private and shared space) impact a resident's confidence in managing their own daily life?

- "The threshold starts from being able to see out of your apartment, what is what lies beyond. So that's the 1st thing. You're absolutely right. Those sort of the tiny bit of generosity just inside the front door, flair, again, there's natural light because we've got the, it's not just a front door, it's a front door, and the glazed signscreen"
- "There's natural light to put on my shoes and to do the fiddly buttons on my coat and put my scarf on. That's all part of that sort of threshold for my using, you know, start to get dressed to go out and you get ready and you feel brave enough to open the door."
- "That walkway there. Yeah, and you can just look straight through. That's pretty nice. Really nice."

Theme 2: Fostering Community and Mental Health

1. Your project emphasises shared spaces. How do these spaces specifically function to combat loneliness and social isolation?

- "Ty Darran is a slight step up from that. So we've got the lounge, we've got the sort of craft room, IT, flexible room. And we've got the sort of lounge, library, sort of snug and game space on the top floor."
- "We've got that sort of shared, shared space in sort of forming one side of the courtyard there where local community groups can come and, you know, local nursery can come and use it."
- "The residents meeting space down on the kind of prominent corner location there. That, I think it would be absolutely encouraged for other groups to come in and use those spaces if the scheme manager thought, well, that's going to be a nice thing for residents to feel as part of the scheme."
- "In the winter garden space, we got a really punchy sort of red terracotta tile there and then on the other side of the screen is some decent oak, you know, actual oak flooring... lots of communal spaces."

2. How did you balance the need for efficient building circulation with the goal of creating "social corridors" that facilitate spontaneous, unplanned interaction?

- "Yes, it's you could build, you could house, well, 40 plus apartments there, you could do it more cheaply. undoubtedly. But there's there's, there's lowest cost and there's that and there's value value and cost are different."
- "Those walkways are that wide because they're great because it layers people to have like, you know, up to a metre of, you know, we're not giving them a metre, but there's a zone there where they can kind of appropriate that space around there. flat and still allow access past."
- "I've been the full knowledge and expectation that these places need life. Yeah, they only work, whether it's life in them."

3. To what extent does the design allow for "observation without obligation"—the ability for residents to see community life without feeling forced to join in?

- "If the scheme looks out to the community, then the residents living there, see what's going on and see the life, see the bus going past and think, wow, I can't move to town really easily."
- "You see the kind of wider community beyond it. You've got a view when you're standing, you're sitting washing up to the courtyard where you see the life and that's going on within the scheme. Which I think will give that if you don't want to go out, it gives comfort that you're sort of... there."
- "You flip that back to the old double stamped corridors where you don't have view onto that corridor and you just got an internal front door into it, then you have no idea? Yeah, if Mrs. Evans has just walked past, you know? Jones has gone out to walk the dog, that sort of thing."

Theme 3: Principles and Evolution

1. Reflecting on the HAPPI principles, which single spatial solution in this project do you believe has had the most significant positive impact on resident mental health?

- "I, yeah, so it will be a toss up. between the gift of having. Of, of not being that institutionalised double loaded coral. the gift of essentially having the courtyard wrap and access, you know, deck access, wall pay access onto it for all those things that we've discussed already."
- "Fundamentally, I suppose, then when you're in the apartment, those apartments, a generous light, sort of they're well day lit, they're well ventilated, but they're also they're more generous than the minimum spatial requirements should be."

2. If you were to develop a "Phase 2" of this project, which architectural device would you evolve or change to further enhance resident identity and autonomy?

- "Their ability to, I suppose, spend some more money on those threshold spaces. So those circulation spaces will make corridors. They had a beautiful kind of joinery package where they're integrating seats and places for plants and things like that in their corridors. That's just another little kind of, you know, I'd love to turn the dial upon that just because at the moment ours feels quite uninhabited and quite cold as a consequence."
- "That secondary space, so the bonus space that I'm not calling a bedroom that sits between the bedroom and the living room. In their, in their scheme, there was, there was sort of a series of partitions, panels, where there was the flexibility to sort of grow the bedroom into that room, I don't know if you wanted a little dressing room. Yeah, you want that space to engage more wholeheartedly with the bedroom or vice versa with the living room as well."

3. How does the architecture facilitate the residents' integration with the wider neighbourhood to prevent the community from becoming an age-segregated "island"?

- "It felt like, no, this should be an outward looking part of the community kind of scheme. So that's one flip. It's not to sort of withdraw these residents from the community, to hide them because of the fear that, oh, it's a frightening world out there. It's to say, no, this is a great building. and people should kind of be able to see and engage with the world as it passes by there."

- "The landscape boundaries with the surroundings are relatively open as well. We haven't screened it and fenced it off the high fences. It's going to be quite open to those surrounding roads."
- "Those garden beds the along beds to the south are meant to be that kind of bridge between resident and wider community."

Appendix F: Interview Transcript: Meredith Bowles from Mole Architects 30/01/2026

Meredith: Hello, Meredith speaking.

Helena: Hi, hi, it's Helena here.

Meredith: Hi, Helena.

Helena: Hi, yeah, hello. How are you?

Meredith: Yeah, good thank you. Good. I have it in my diary, although I stuck my head stuck in something else.

Helena: Oh, I can call you back later if you want?

Meredith: No, it's... the head is never not stuck in something. So...

Helena: Okay. Yeah, this is all an alright time and stuff, is it, yeah?

Meredith: Yeah, yeah, no it is. It is. So, what stage are you at? What are you working towards?

Helena: So, I'm currently kind of writing up case studies and doing interviews for my dissertation. But my dissertation is largely about what an over 55s scheme means and how can you create a place like a... because the thing is, I... it's really hard to summarize because I haven't finished. It's really hard to summarise a title. But I recently interviewed another architect from Pentan Architects and they have an over 55s scheme in Newport and I didn't really quite realize the difference of residence because obviously Marmalade Lane is an intergenerational place. I didn't really realise that when people say over 55s, like, I'm well aware it's a planning term, but I think, you know, they basically kind of concluded that all the residents in this place were over 70. And I think I think there would be... I think there's a real gap where there could be a space for like people 50 plus who, you know, they live alone and they're still working and they've got kids and things and stuff, but you have all these elements of like social isolation and, you know, it's hard to make friends as an adult and mental health and, you know, all these things and I think somewhere like Marmalade Lane is ideal. So, I'm effectively, yeah, I'm just kind of researching and I'm trying to patch it all together to create some form of conclusion.

Meredith: Yeah. Well, I'm not an expert, I'll say that to start off with. And I myself have been slightly confused about who various schemes are aimed at. And some of them are self-declared, so you know, we're working on another co-housing project that is for over 55s.

Helena: Yes, is that... where is that?

Meredith: It's in Wolverton in Milton Keynes.

Helena: Yes! I found this out this morning and I was looking at your website and I saw it.

Meredith: Yeah. So, it might have even been built six years ago or something we did that project, maybe more. And it got stuck during the whole pandemic thing and the financial consequences of the energy war and everything. So it's been re-tendered I think three times, so it's now owned by the

council now who want to develop it as affordable housing. And then there's a part of it which is one of the blocks which is for Still Green co-housing and which is retained by Town, the developers we worked with for the scheme. Anyway, so that one, you know, we worked with a group of residents who were… so it was their decision to make it an over 55s housing project. And they were probably mostly early retirees, so in their 60s.

Helena: Yes, yes.

Meredith: And I think there is a genuine… there is a genuine need. You will have come across the Older Women's Housing Cooperative, I imagine, in Barnet in North London.

Helena: Yes.

Meredith: For, you know, people… so there's a… women are better at finding social situations than men in general. And there is a big market for either couples whose… who have simply their children have left home and they had a busy life and they don't have one anymore. For divorced older people who, you know, no longer have the companionship of a partner. And downsizers, so the idea of moving out of what has been a family home and into a different situation is obviously one that many people are thinking about. And the other thing that I think, so I'm 62, so people of my age they're often looking after their elderly parents or have done so they've died. So, suddenly very conscious of what impending old age might bring and the difficulties of living entirely alone.

Helena: Yeah.

Meredith: So, all those factors I think are ones as to why it might be a demographic that has particular thoughts about living in a different way with greater support. I mean, the bit that I've never quite understood is that if the group of people move into it of a certain age, say mostly between 60 and 70, they're all going to get older at the same time.

Helena: Yes!

Meredith: So, to my mind, the Marmalade Lane model where everyone's at different ages and some of them are old people is, you know, is much more sustainable because you're not all going to become decrepit at the same time.

Helena: I yeah, I was just thinking this as you were talking a moment ago and I thought you kind of ideally want everyone to be staggered a little bit, staggered entry.

Meredith: Yeah, exactly. Staggered entry, that's what's required. And I suppose, you know, if people start dying in the… in some way that was set up in that way, I would have thought it's in some respects it becomes less attractive to move in as a younger person because you would feel like you're… if there's a place that comes available and most of the residents are in their 80s and 90s, you might feel, reasonably, that a lot of the responsibility of looking out for the older people will fall to you.

Helena: Yeah, I think so, I think that would be quite daunting actually, especially if you were going there kind of on your own, or you know…

Meredith: Yeah. And intergenerational, I always think that's a funny word "intergenerational communities". I might describe them as just as normal.

Helena: Yes! Yep!

Meredith: Where there's old people and young people and everything in between. What's unusual and abnormal is to have a community of only one type of person or one age of person. Generally, I mean aside from student accommodation, most places where you live there are all sorts of people living around.

Helena: Yeah, absolutely.

Meredith: However, I think when I first came across specific housing for older people, which I'm guessing you have come across the Housing LIN? Have you come across that organization and website?

Helena: Hmm, not sure actually.

Meredith: If you haven't, it's I'd say the best place to go for design advice and case studies. It's Housing Learning Information Network (LIN).

Helena: Aha, yes.

Meredith: And they were, I'm not quite sure what the relationship is, but you've come across the HAPPI guides?

Helena: Yes, yes.

Meredith: So the Housing LIN have a very close relationship with the HAPPI guides that gave... they used to give awards which I think are now absorbed into the Housing Design Awards for housing for older people. But on that website you'll find huge amounts of information and probably they do lots of talks which I imagine they've got videos of, I'm not quite sure. Anyway, that's where I first came across the HAPPI guides and case studies that at that point, 10, 12 years ago, were mostly from abroad where there's I think better learning as to how to make places that are thoughtful in the way that they're designed to encourage safety and security and communality.

Helena: Yeah, yeah.

Meredith: Which, you know, that is the core... that's the core of it really, aside from thinking about design moves that make it easier for people who have or will already have limited mobility. It's about encouraging chance social encounters really and giving people the space and the opportunity to meet each other and have a chat so that it will in time make it more likely that you form a community and not be lonely.

Helena: Yeah, yeah. I think the concept of your... of the lane, the street through the middle, and I was just looking at the one in Wolverton and that's got seemingly like its own little lane street in the middle too. I think is really nice because not only does it kind of give like kids and stuff a nice place to interact and play, but it does mean that you kind of stumble across people a bit more and have an informal little chat like we all used to do with our neighbours and stuff. But it might just feel a little bit less alone. Why do you think that is that we don't just talk to our neighbours anymore? Like, this is a side note, I was just thinking.

Meredith: Yeah. I mean, I think there's a bunch of reasons. I mean, people... it's unusual for people not to move away from where they grew up now.

Helena: Yes, that's true.

Meredith: So, there was a great deal more continuity in where people lived and an extended family network and so, you know, those networks of friendship groups and what acquaintances actually that you've known for a long period of time simply don't happen as much as they used to because people move around more. That's definitely one reason. I think there has been an unfounded growing fear of strangers that is fuelled by the media more than anything. The number of murders by strangers has not increased over 100 years. But you wouldn't believe that if you read the papers.

Helena: No, yes, it's this constant awareness, isn't it, in society of everything that's going on.

Meredith: Yeah. So, I mean I think you know, the last 10 years that gets supercharged by social media and anxiety. So, you know, I mean when I was a kid an 8-year-old, I used to walk a mile to school, you know. Parents wouldn't dream of that now.

Helena: No.

Meredith: And because I walked a mile to school, I bumped into all the other people who were walking to school. So I think that's all about fear of strangers which has increased and so people don't hang about as much as they used to. And then I think screen, you know, screen entertainment is absolutely a reason why people are not out as much as they used to be and that's whether that's children playing out, and when children play out their parents meet each other.

Helena: Hmm, yeah.

Meredith: Or whether it's going to the pub to watch the football, but you don't do that anymore because people you know buy beer and watch it at home and when they're big screens. You know, that kind of home entertainment has massively changed. So they're all factors.

Helena: How... how would you say aside from the lane, is there anything else that you've done in either of the projects that you think have you know really encouraged this like a sense of community and this kind of... what's it called... bumping into your neighbour? I have a little like a phrase but I can't remember what it is. Bumping into your neighbour and having like a chat with them that's a stress-free interaction like.

Meredith: Yeah. Well, obviously the co-housing is a, you know, is a particular... yeah, it's an easy... it's easy to make the design work in co-housing because I mean my favourite description of co-housing is intentional community because everyone moving there is intending to get on with the neighbours and wants to have a more social life. So you're off to a good start. And then the common house, the location of the common house is critical. It needs to be central, it needs to be the best spot to be because so people want to gravitate to it, so pretty in the area that has the sun and has the best view and the nicest place to be and then people will be more likely to go there. You know, and then there's a place in the entrance there where parcels can be delivered so people will always be going backwards and forwards to there. The entrance to the apartment is also the entrance to the common house, so all those things increase the chances you'll bump into someone on your way home. And then the common car parking area means that people are walking to the same spot and

there is a walk, you don't get out of your car and in three seconds you're inside, you know, everyone has a little walk somewhere.

Helena: Yes!

Meredith: Which means that there's a possibility they might say hello to someone.

Helena: Yeah, even that in itself is better for people's mental health, you know, because we all go in cars and then park right outside and go inside and then sit inside.

Meredith: Yeah, no, there's been... there's been a study I can't remember where I read it now, but a study looking at the effects of saying hello to people, not having a what we might think of as a meaningful relationship with someone but actually saying hello to someone in a shop on a regular basis that you feel you know even though you don't really know them. That is significant in terms of countering a sense of loneliness. So, you know, even if you don't know your neighbour just saying good morning to them and knowing that they're about is significant.

Helena: Yeah, absolutely, is enough. Yeah, absolutely. I have a... you know with your... with the one in Wolverton which is an over 55s one, how do you... how would the... could the architecture facilitate the resident integration with the wider neighbourhood and prevent the community from becoming an age-segregated like bubble? Or is that kind of more you leave that more up to the community? I know there's Love Wolverton which is probably included in the Wolverton one, but...

Meredith: Yeah. I mean I think that's an interesting one and that's going to be down to the degree to which people want to integrate, do more for their... do more for their community or be more of a part of the wider community. I mean it has been talked about in co-housing schemes as to what benefit the co-housing scheme is going to bring to the wider community. I mean, I think you don't ask that of any other development, so why put the responsibility on the people who decided to do things differently and invest more in their own community? Why should they have to do something for the wider community as well? I mean, I think it's a funny kind of expectation that good people should be even better. However, I mean, they are the kind of people who think about the broader society and doing, you know, doing better. So at Marmalade Lane they do do quite a lot for the community and you know they do community litter picks and they have a... they have a hedgehog rescue service that they use and they host some events there. So, you know, they are actually doing trying to do things that will change people's perceptions and a wider way. But I certainly don't think that there should be an expectation. No, I mean, Still Green one is around their own communal garden which which they all have access to, so it's one of the enclosed blocks.

Helena: Okay, yeah.

Meredith: And, you know, they have their own common house which is facing onto the street. But yeah, there's no particular thought that they might ask people in or organise for them. It's their own living room in effect.

Helena: Yeah, absolutely. Oh, which one was my other... we've kind of... we've kind of discussed like all of my other little questions, I think. I wanted to ask, but there may not be an answer and that's fine. But with the actual design of the flats and the houses, was there anything like niche or different that you did to those spaces, or was the general concept the concept of the wide of the community as a scheme?

Meredith: Yeah, I think there's nothing different about the houses to any other you know good housing development where you might have to design them well with some degree of flexibility. I mean, they were marketed as custom build so there were lots of options as to how people could configure their houses. So whether you had a kind of separate kitchen or you had an en suite bathroom or you had two bathrooms or you know various things. But there are other good developers who are offering those kind of choices. I mean obviously the most significant difference is in relation to the back gardens and the lack of privacy that they have, the openness to the street or the openness to the communal garden at the back. I mean, that's fundamentally different to pretty much any you know standard developer housing. I mean, there's a scheme on our website you can see which is Girtin Almshouses, so that's an over 55s housing scheme with a communal garden which has similar aspects to the Marmalade Lane scheme but isn't a co-housing scheme, it's just a housing scheme to encourage sociability.

Helena: Okay, yeah, I'll definitely have a look at that. I wanted to ask you just on a side note, what was your first kind of scheme that incorporated this like intentional community point?

Meredith: Yeah, it was Marmalade Lane.

Helena: Was it?

Meredith: Yeah, that was the first… well, it's the first housing scheme that we finished, yeah.

Helena: Oh, wow.

Meredith: I know, what a bonanza that was. We got off to a good start.

Helena: Yeah, absolutely. I really like the scheme, I'd quite like to visit there. I actually… I had an interview this morning with one of the residents.

Meredith: Great, yeah. And Alice said she'd set up a few people to talk to you.

Helena: Yeah, yeah. So that was really great, it was really good to understand to just speak to like a non-architect about the scheme, you know? And then they can just talk how they want to talk and it was really interesting to see kind of like her perspective and what she uses the most or what she doesn't use and all these extra bits.

Meredith: Yeah, no, you need the lived experience for sure.

Helena: Absolutely. Great, well I don't want to take up too much of your time. I know you were you were in something.

Meredith: The other one that's worth looking at is Anne Thorne's Cannock Mill housing in Colchester.

Helena: Okay, one second let me look it up. Anne Thorne's Cannock Mill housing in where? Colchester?

Meredith: Colchester, yeah. It's another co-housing scheme. We visited it, it's really good.

Helena: Oh yeah, yeah I found it. Yeah, I like that the colour… I like that it looks quite like personable, doesn't it, with the different coloured housing?

Meredith: Exactly, exactly. No, there's lots that’s good about it, I think.

Helena: Hmm. Yeah, cool, I'll definitely have a look at that.

Meredith: Good luck with finishing it off.

Helena: Yeah, thank you. Yeah, thank you very much.

Meredith: No worries. Okay, Helena, bye.

Helena: You too, thank you so much, bye-bye.

Appendix G: Questions & Quotes from Interview: Meredith Bowles from Mole Architects 30/01/2026

Quotes taken from transcript and applied directly to each question that I had laid out in my framework.

Theme 1: Designing for Autonomy

1. How does the architectural layout specifically support a resident's sense of "aging in place" without the environment feeling institutional or medicalised?

- **Design for mobility:** Meredith mentions focusing on "design moves that make it easier for people who have or will already have limited mobility".
- **Flexibility in housing:** He notes that houses should be designed "well with some degree of flexibility" and, in the case of Marmalade Lane, were "marketed as custom build so there were lots of options as to how people could configure their houses".

2. What specific "architectural devices" were used to ensure that private residences feel like primary sanctuaries of autonomy while still being part of a larger collective?

- **Private vs. Communal balance:** Meredith highlights that the most significant difference in these schemes is "the back gardens and the lack of privacy that they have, the openness to the street or the openness to the communal garden at the back".
- **Alternative models:** He points to the Girtin Almshouses as an example of a scheme with a "communal garden which has similar aspects to the Marmalade Lane scheme... to encourage sociability".

3. In your view, how does the design of the "threshold" impact a resident's confidence in managing their own daily life?

- **Dual-purpose entrances:** Meredith explains that in some designs, "The way to the apartment is also the way to the common house, so all those things increase the chances you'll bump into someone on your way home".

Theme 2: Fostering Community and Mental Health

1. How do shared spaces (Common House) specifically function to combat loneliness and social isolation?

- **Intentionality:** He describes co-housing as an "intentional community because everyone moving there is intending to get on with the neighbours".
- **Centrality of the Common House:** "It needs to be central, it needs to be the best spot to be because so people want to gravitate to it... the area that has the sun and has the best view".
- **Functional draws:** He suggests placing services like parcel delivery in the common house entrance so "people will always be going backwards and forwards to there".

2. How did you balance building circulation with the goal of creating "social corridors" that facilitate spontaneous interaction?

- **Encouraging "Chance Encounters":** Meredith states the core of the design is "encouraging chance social encounters really and giving people the space and the opportunity to meet each other and have a chat".
- **The "Walk" from the car:** He notes that a common parking area creates a "walk" where "you don't get out of your car and in three seconds you're inside… which means that there's a possibility they might say hello to someone".

3. To what extent does the design allow for "observation without obligation"?

- **The Lane/Street concept:** He mentions that "the lane, the street through the middle… does mean that you kind of stumble across people a bit more and have an informal little chat".
- **Low-stakes interaction:** Meredith emphasises the mental health value of "saying hello to someone… on a regular basis… That is significant in terms of countering a sense of loneliness".

Theme 3: Principles and Evolution

1. Reflecting on the HAPPI principles, which single spatial solution has had the most significant positive impact?

- **Learning from abroad:** Meredith notes that HAPPI guides and case studies from 10–12 years ago showed "how to make places that are thoughtful in the way that they're designed to encourage safety and security and communality".
- **The "Lane":** Throughout the transcript, the central lane/street is highlighted as a primary tool for facilitating these interactions.

2. If you were to develop a "Phase 2," which architectural device would you evolve?

- **Demographic Staggering:** Meredith suggests that for older-age schemes, a "staggered entry" is required so that the community doesn't "all become decrepit at the same time" or leave younger incoming residents with the sole responsibility of care.

3. How does the architecture facilitate integration with the wider neighbourhood?

- **Limits of Architectural Responsibility:** Meredith questions the expectation for these schemes to serve the wider area: "Why should they have to do something for the wider community as well? … I think it's a funny kind of expectation that good people should be even better".
- **Organic Integration:** He notes that at Marmalade Lane, residents choose to do "community litter picks," use a "hedgehog rescue service," and "host some events there".

Appendix H: Interview Transcript: Resident 1 at Marmalade Lane 30/01/2026

Helena: Hi! Hello! How are you?

Resident 1: I'm okay. Sorry I'm slightly late. How are you?

Helena: That's all right. I'm all right, thank you. You live in Marmalade Lane. How long have you lived there for?

Resident 1: Yes, I do. We moved in—we were the first lot who moved in. Bought off-plan.

Helena: Right, okay. Cool. I have some questions for the interview, but obviously because we're chatting, I imagine that we might go off on a tangent. I was going to ask if it's okay if I can record our conversation so I can have a transcript?

Resident 1: Yeah, absolutely. I know what it's like to do research. If you can get a transcript automatically, then that's great.

Helena: It's a lot easier. Then you can reference it and show my lecturer that it's real. My dissertation as a whole is about—I wanted to research the—in architecture, there's a planning term, which is "over-55s living." Now I know Marmalade Lane is an intergenerational thing; it's not for over-55s. But there's a big gap where things are marketed as over-55, but essentially it's just sheltered housing for older people. It's a planning term thing. So I wanted to understand from different people in different types of intentional communities what you like about living in these spaces and how that can be applied to different things.

Resident 1: I should just say, okay, I'm 57, but I kind of did things a little bit of a stranger way round. I had my son when I was 45, and so when we moved in here, he was five and I was 50.

Helena: Wow, that's cool.

Resident 1: So I'm not an older person in that—I mean, I am an older person, obviously, but, you know...

Helena: No, I know—this is exactly it. I don't mean it like that. It's really hard to describe without going into great detail. I haven't worked out a way yet to summarise it because, like I said, "over-55" is a planning application term, but a lot of people think that means the scheme is insinuating that it's for old people when it's literally not.

Resident 1: Well, I hope that my answers are helpful to you. That's all I can say.

Helena: Just the fact that you're someone that lives there is answers enough, really. Because I'm more questioning about social frequency and how much you enjoy bumping into other people and the community aspect of it, I think, is sort of my main focus.

Resident 1: Okay, yeah, sure.

Helena: My first question is: how often do you think you typically see or cross paths with your neighbours during a normal day?

Resident 1: It depends whether it's a weekend or a weekday. I just quit work last year because it was all too much and my son's not going to school. So on during the weekdays, I probably don't see people that much. But during the weekends I do, because people are around more. On a weekend, it's a lot. During the weekdays, if everybody's at work and I'm just staying at home in the house, I'd probably say a couple of times, maybe, on a really quiet day.

Helena: Yeah, okay. Cool.

Resident 1: Just sort of cross paths, yeah.

Helena: And out of interest, before you moved to Marmalade Lane, where did you live before? What was the structure?

Resident 1: When I had my son, I was living on the opposite side of Cambridge, the same distance outside of Cambridge, in a little cul-de-sac with loads of people. I had some friends there, neighbours who I was friends with, but I also had a lot of neighbours who had kids who just weren't sociable. So I just lived in a normal terraced house. And then I spent two years living in town in a sort of urban terraced street because I wanted to—I wasn't really sure what I was going to do. I hadn't made the full commitment to here, so I could have decided no. And I decided I wanted to be in town. So then I was in an urban Cambridge street.

Helena: Why did you decide to move to Marmalade Lane? Why did you decide to move to this different type of scheme?

Resident 1: I've got a really nice story about it, actually, which I'm really happy to share. My son was two, and I was feeling like some of my neighbors weren't very sociable and it was all a bit weird—not weird, but just I felt really disconnected. I spoke to a friend who said, "Have you thought about co-housing?" I'd never heard the term before, and I immediately Googled "Cambridge co-housing" and found this scheme, which I thought it was really strange that I hadn't heard of it before because I'm involved in Transition Cambridge, which is all about environmental concerns. I'm sure that they would have posted about it, but it just didn't register. As soon as I heard about it and I read about it, I was just like, "Well, it's happening in Cambridge, I'm going to sign up." And so I signed up within a week.

Helena: Yeah. Wow, okay.

Resident 1: But the reason is wanting to have people around us. For my son, for him to be seen by other people, because I don't have family in Cambridge. And for me, to be able to socialize when, as a single mom, that's not easy when you've got a young child—you have to be in the house with them and it's hard.

Helena: I totally understand that feeling.

Resident 1: Yeah, and it's come to fruition.

Helena: So do you feel like you're in that community now? This intentional community, do you feel like that sort of support, even if you're not besties with everyone, do you still feel like you have that space to be together?

Resident 1: Yeah, it's great. After I stopped work, I really appreciated it even more. For my son, things are a bit more complicated for him. Unfortunately, there are kids—the kids are all older or younger, a little bit older, a little bit younger, and sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. But for me, it's really great. Not only that I get social contact, but I can do things for other people and that we can do things together.

Helena: I think it sounds really great. I kind of want to live there as well. Has living here helped reduce any feelings of loneliness or isolation?

Resident 1: Absolutely, yeah. Definitely.

Helena: Do you have lots of spontaneous interactions with your neighbors? Bumping into them on the street and then you talk and do whatever. Would you say you have more compared to your traditional housing prior?

Resident 1: Yes.

Helena: I know that Marmalade Lane has shared spaces and communal spaces. How often do you use those? What's your general opinion of the spaces?

Resident 1: They're great. The Great Hall is used a lot. I don't go in there every day. Sometimes if I've got a friend coming round and my son's doing something in the house or watching TV, then we'll go in the Great Hall and just take our cups of tea and sit in there. But we have common house meals four times a month. It's about getting enough people to organize it and getting it at the right number of people so that it becomes manageable. I'm in one of those food teams and I go to most of the meals. We have meetings in there. We have a Saturday night film club—there's a few of us that have a similar taste and we're all quite happy to watch the same films. We do that, which is really nice—better than sitting on my own at home.

Helena: Yeah, I agree.

Resident 1: I don't do the gardening, but I sometimes wander around the garden, the veg patch and walk around the garden. I have my own washing machine, so I don't use the laundry, but that is obviously a way that people use it. There's a couple of exercise classes, a Pilates class once a week and a yoga class on Saturday morning which I don't go to, but that's another reason that people go in. People go in to play table tennis—there's a big table tennis table in there and the kids go in there to writhe around and get some exercise. They go around and throw the cushions and it's just a space for them to move around without being outside. There's two rooms upstairs, one is the South Room, which is a sitting room. And that's adults, mainly. The other one is the North Room, it's got desk spaces so people can work there.

Helena: Oh, that's nice.

Resident 1: A lot of people work from home and they want to do it somewhere else. Either because they've got a big family or because they just want the socialization or the separation. There's also a little area in that room which is a playroom. It's another space where the younger kids can watch TV and hang out. It's used a lot.

Helena: What's your favorite part of the Great Hall? What's the best bit?

Resident 1: I think the best thing is the fact that you can set up lots of tables for people to eat for meals. I guess the best bit is its flexibility. We have a Christmas meal and we manage to fit in 50 or 60.

Helena: Wow.

Resident 1: Normally we don't have anything like that and we haven't had that many people in there for Christmas meals. It's got capacity to really bring us all together.

Helena: Do you do that on Christmas Day?

Resident 1: No, it's a pre-Christmas thing. I think we do it on the Sunday before Christmas. It's just to bring everybody together. And then on Christmas Day, for people who are around, people do a bring-and-share, if they want to. There's usually about 15 people who come on Christmas Day with the aim of sharing their Christmas lunch.

Helena: That sounds really nice. Are you in Cambridge?

Helena: I've been to Cambridge.

Resident 1: Oh, I thought you—I got confused because we have so many people who want to do research with us, I thought you were at Cambridge University. Come and visit. You can be my guest. We'll arrange it when you fancy visiting.

Helena: That would be amazing. It sounds really good. I'm a tiny preacher for schemes like this and for Marmalade Lane to all of my friends and family. Loneliness and that sense of community, she works and she finds it quite stressful and hectic. I just always think you just need little examples of friendship to keep you sane. Generally just to keep anyone feeling grounded and more normal. I think schemes like this are really beneficial.

Resident 1: I agree with what you say. When you're working, when you have a busy working life, you don't always manage to stay in contact with your friends. If you've got people who are just around...

Helena: To chat.

Resident 1: It's so much easier, it's so much more likely to have those interactions.

Helena: Marmalade Lane has this commonly discussed pedestrianized street in the lane?

Resident 1: The lane.

Helena: The lane. And there are allotments behind at the back? Do you use those—how do you view those? Are they spaces to socialize or purely just routes from going A to B?

Resident 1: The lane is interesting because it's also a thoroughfare—it's a public path. People are allowed to walk through it. People outside the community are not supposed to cycle through it and it's car-free. For me, I would say it's incidental interactions. Occasionally somebody—there's the South Terrace, which I'm on, and I face the lane and the garden. The North Terrace people face on—the back of their houses faces onto the lane. Recently one of our neighbors had a birthday party and because the Great Hall was being used for something else, they had their party in the lane. It was unusual because we don't normally do it. And actually, it was really lovely. Everybody showed up and it was really lovely. The lane is more for incidental interactions. If you're going out at the same time as someone else or if someone's taking their rubbish. There's a rubbish block at the West end of the lane, and people in the West half of the terrace walk along the lane to put their rubbish in there. There's another one at the other end. That's how I guess I'd use the lane. I always envisaged that I'd sit outside my front door, which leads onto the lane, when it was really hot because it's shady. I never really do that. The garden and the allotments—I face onto that and I'm looking out on it a lot of the time. It's more protected because it's not public access to it. It feels like a safer space. I sit out on a terrace from the Great Hall that faces out onto the garden. There's an old oak tree and there's the copse near the flats. I'd sit out on the terrace. We've got chairs and tables out there. Generally wander around there.

Helena: How does the place as a whole—do you feel integrated with the wider community? Or do you feel like you're in your own bubble, which is Marmalade Lane?

Resident 1: We are in our own bubble, but we make an effort to interact with the general community. I wouldn't say there are people that I know. We've got a new block that was built. We try and arrange to have joint events. We have a party every year that we invite the neighbors to. Some of them come along. They have a public playground outside theirs and we do joint things like a joint barbecue there in the summer. There's usually more of us than them.

Resident 1: We are integrated. There's people on the Orchard Park Community Council. One of the councilors comes along and joins in with our stuff. A lot of people from here get involved with an orchard at the other end of Orchard Park. So he's one person who really joins in with our stuff. We invite him to events.

Helena: You said as well exercise classes or a yoga class—is that community-only?

Resident 1: It is. We use our Great Hall to host things that the public can come along to. We have an open day where people who are interested in co-housing can sign up and then we'll organize activities and lunch and give them a chance to ask questions. Sometimes there's a clothes swap, sometimes there's a repair cafe. It is very much our space. Quite a few of us know Bryony who has a community for parents for babies. She used it this last year to host a bring-and-share meal for them in the winter. We had to give permission for her to use that. Because a lot of people know her, we allowed her, but it's not a public space. We're not going to take the risk with that.

Helena: Generally, you live in one of the houses, not an apartment. Is there a specific part of your house that makes you feel most at home? Do you have a favorite feature of your home?

Resident 1: I guess the ground floor is open plan. The house isn't huge, but we've got an open plan living room which looks out onto the garden and a galley kitchen. I guess downstairs living space. I spend most of my time here and it's got underfloor heating, which is nice.

Helena: Aside from that, there's nothing deeply different within the home compared to where you lived before? It's the community that's the biggest aspect here?

Resident 1: Yeah.

Helena: Do you feel like it's easy to balance your private life with communal life?

Resident 1: I think it's a balance. Everything's—you join in when you want to, there's no obligation. Apart from community work mornings once a month. You really should get involved with that. But otherwise no. You come and go. It's like someone's had a party in the common house. You go along, you join in for a bit. They had a ceilidh last weekend and I don't really like ceilidh dancing. So I just came along for the bring-and-share and socialized and ate some food and went away. Nobody coerced me into dancing.

Helena: Is there any management of the facility or do you all just work it out like a community? If something goes wrong with the common house, what do you guys do?

Resident 1: We've got tons of working groups. We've got a food working group, an outreach working group, a community working group, a common house working group, an estates management, grounds, one for the E-block, which is the workshop and the gym, a transport working group, and a tech working group. Everybody has their responsibilities. So if something went wrong in the common house, it would either be the common house working group, who focus more on using the common house, or it would be estates if it was a maintenance issue.

Helena: Are the working groups just people like you in the community?

Resident 1: It's all—we all do it ourselves. We bring in contractors when we need to—like maintaining the dishwasher and the kitchen or the lift. But otherwise we do it all ourselves. Which is why we have a low management fee. Everybody pays in once a month or at the start of the year.

Helena: How much is your maintenance fee?

Resident 1: I'm not actually sure how much it is, but I put in £100 a month, but that also includes paying for meals and other things. It's definitely less than £100.

Helena: Based on your experience, would you recommend living somewhere like this to your friends or family?

Resident 1: Yes, yeah.

Helena: I've really enjoyed talking to you.

Resident 1: You're really welcome. Come and visit. Did you know that they're setting an older people's co-housing up in Milton Keynes?

Resident 1: XXXX lives here with XXXX. They lived in London and wanted to join an older person's community. In the interim, they moved in here. They're organizing the Milton Keynes one. I could put you in touch with her.

Helena: I would love that. That sounds fantastic.

Resident 1: Maybe your mom will be interested.

Helena: She may well be. I could send her to go and have a look around.

Resident 1: They're going to build it, I don't think they've got to the point of building it yet. I think they've got a plot. They did have a plot, but they lost it, so they had to find another one.

Helena: If you could put me in touch with her, that would be fantastic.

Resident 1: Did you know? There's a small community between Oxford and Milton Keynes. It's a different kind of model. It's small, households got together in an old manor house. I would say it fits more into the category of commune.

Resident 1: When my dad was a woodturner, we lived near Colchester. He found out about this place called Old Hall. He used to barter with people. He got us a visit when I was about 14. It really left an impression with me. That may also be another reason why I was open to the idea of co-housing.

Helena: If you have interaction with them when you're younger, it is less of a stigma when you're older.

Resident 1: People say to me, "I wouldn't want my privacy." But you can have it.

Helena: It's how you balance it. All right, thank you so much!

Resident 1: It's nice to meet you.

Helena: Nice to meet you as well. I'll update you with anything else. Thank you so much for everything.

Resident 1: Good luck with it all!

Helena: Thank you. Have a lovely rest of your day!

Resident 1: Thank you, you too. Bye-bye.

Helena: Bye, bye.

Appendix I: Questions & Quotes from Interview: Resident 1 at Marmalade Lane 30/01/2026

Quotes taken from transcript and applied directly to each question that I had laid out in my framework.

Theme 1: Social Frequency and Quality of Interaction

1. How often do you typically see or cross paths with your neighbours during a normal day?

- "On during the weekdays, I probably don't see people that much. But during the weekends I do, because people are around more. But I mean, on a weekend, it's like a lot. During the weekdays, if everybody's at work and I'm just like staying at home and like in the house, I'd probably say a couple of times, maybe, on a really quiet day."

2. Do you genuinely enjoy the daily interactions with other residents, or does the social aspect ever feel obligatory?

- "You join in when you want to, there's no obligation. Apart from community work mornings once a month on a Saturday morning... you really should get involved with that. But yeah, otherwise no."
- "They had a ceilidh last weekend and I don't really like ceilidh dancing. So I just came along for the bring-and-share and socialised and ate some food and went away. Nobody coerced me into dancing."

3. Can you describe a typical "spontaneous interaction" you've had with a neighbour this week? Where exactly in the building or grounds did it happen?

- "If you're going out at the same time as someone else or if someone's taking their rubbish. There's a rubbish block at the end, the West end of the lane... So yeah, there's that."

4. Has living here helped reduce any feelings of loneliness or isolation you may have felt in previous housing?

- "Absolutely, yeah. Definitely."
- "When you're working, when you have a work, a busy working life, you don't always manage to stay in contact with your friends. And if you've got people who are just, around... It's so much easier, it's so much more likely to have those interactions."

Theme 2: Architectural Devices and Shared Spaces

1. How often do you use the shared spaces and what specifically draws you to those areas?

- "The Great Hall is used a lot... sometimes if I've got a friend coming round... then we'll go in the Great Hall and just take our cups of tea and go and sit in there."

- "I think the best thing is the fact that you can set up lots of tables for people to eat for meals. I guess the best bit is its flexibility, so you know, I mean we have a Christmas meal, we manage to fit in - I think it's 50 or 60."
- "There's two rooms upstairs, which one is the South Room, which is like a sitting room. And that's for adults, mainly. Then the other one is the North Room, which it's got desk spaces so people can work there."

2. How do you feel about the "circulation" spaces like the walkways, lanes, or corridors? Do you view them as just a way to get around, or as a place to socialise?

- "So the lane is interesting because it's also a thoroughfare so it's a public path... so for me, I would say it's incidental interactions."
- "Recently, one of our neighbours had a birthday party and because the Great Hall was being used for something else, they had their party in the lane. And it was really unusual because we don't normally do it. And actually, it was really lovely."
- "I sit out on the - there's a sort of terrace from the Great Hall that faces out onto the garden... we've got chairs and tables out there."

3. Does the design of the building make you feel integrated with the wider neighbourhood, Cambridge, or does it feel like a world of its own?

- "We are in our own bubble, but people do make an effort to interact with the general community."
- "There's people on the Orchard Park Community Council. Oh, yeah, there's one of the councillors comes along and joins in with our stuff."

Theme 3: Personal Autonomy and Wellbeing

1. Which specific part of your private apartment or house makes you feel most "at home" and provides you with the most comfort?

- "I guess the ground floor it's like open plan. The house isn't huge, but we've got an open plan living room which looks out onto the garden... I spend most of my time here and it's got underfloor heating, which is nice."

2. Do you feel the balance between your private life and the communal life is easy to maintain? Why or why not?

- "No, I think it's a balance. You join in when you want to, there's no obligation."

3. Overall, do you like living here? What are the primary architectural or social reasons why?

- "The reason is wanting to have people around us. For my son, for him to be seen by other people, because I don't have family in Cambridge. And for me, to be able to socialise."

Theme 4: Management and Recommendations

1. What is your experience with the management of the facility? How much say do you have in how the community is run?

- "We do it all ourselves. We bring in contractors when we need to… but otherwise we do it all ourselves. Which is why we have a low management fee."
- "We've got tons of working groups. We've got a food working group, we've got an outreach working group… Everybody has their responsibilities."

2. Based on your experience, would you recommend living in a community like this to your friends or family members?

- "Yes, yeah."

Appendix J: Interview Transcript: Resident 2 at Marmalade Lane 03/02/2026

Helena: Hi! How are you?

Resident 2: I'm fine, thank you.

Helena: I presume you like living in Marmalade Lane? How long have you lived here?

Resident 2: Yes, I do. We moved in when it was first built. We bought off-plan.

Helena: I'm researching intentional communities for my dissertation. I wanted to understand what people like about living in these spaces. I'm focusing on social frequency and how much you enjoy bumping into other people. How often do you typically see or cross paths with your neighbours during a normal day?

Resident 2: It depends whether it's a weekend or a weekday. On weekends, I see people a lot because people are around more. During the weekdays, if everybody's at work and I'm just staying at home, I'd probably say a couple of times on a really quiet day.

Helena: Where did you live before you moved to Marmalade Lane?

Resident 2: We lived in London. We wanted to join an older person's community. In the interim, we thought we'd move in here.

Helena: Why did you decide to move to this different type of scheme?

Resident 2: We were feeling disconnected in our previous neighbourhood. We wanted to have people around us. Even though this is intergenerational, it's nice to interact with people.

Helena: Do you feel that living here at Marmalade Lane has reduced your feelings of loneliness or isolation?

Resident 2: Absolutely. It's very nice to interact with people. Not that I was lonely in London because I was doing lots of things and had lots of friends. But this is a much more full-on engaging with people all the time. As you get older and do less external things, you're definitely engaging here.

Helena: Do you have many spontaneous interactions with your neighbours?

Resident 2: Yes. If you're going out at the same time as someone else or taking out the rubbish, there are incidental interactions.

Helena: How often do you use the shared communal spaces like the Great Hall?

Resident 2: The Great Hall is used a lot. We have common house meals four times a month. I go to most of the meals. We also have meetings and a Saturday night film club. There are exercise classes like Pilates and yoga too.

Helena: What's your favourite part of the Great Hall?

Resident 2: Its flexibility. You can set up lots of tables for meals. We had a Christmas meal with 50 or 60 people. It has the capacity to really bring us all together.

Helena: Do you feel integrated with the wider community outside of Marmalade Lane?

Resident 2: We are in our own bubble, but we make an effort to interact. We have an annual party where we invite neighbours. We also have open days for people interested in co-housing.

Helena: Which part of your house makes you feel most at home?

Resident 2: The downstairs living space. It's open plan and looks out onto the garden. It has underfloor heating, which is nice.

Helena: Is it easy to balance your private life with communal life?

Resident 2: Yes, it's a balance. You join in when you want to; there's no obligation.

Helena: How is the facility managed?

Resident 2: We do it all ourselves through working groups. We have groups for food, grounds, tech, and more. We bring in contractors only when needed. This keeps our management fees low.

Helena: Based on your experience, would you recommend living somewhere like this?

Resident 2: Yes, I would.

Helena: I know you are organizing an older person's co-housing community in Milton Keynes. How is that going?

Resident 2: We're organizing it, but we haven't built it yet. We had a plot but lost it, so we're looking for another one. It's hard to find land.

Helena: Well, thank you so much for your time, Jenny!

Resident 2: It was nice to meet you. Good luck with your work!

Helena: Thank you. Have a lovely day!

Resident 2: Thank you, you too. Bye!

Appendix K: Questions & Quotes from Interview: Resident 2 at Marmalade Lane 03/02/2026

Theme 1: Social Frequency and Quality of Interaction

1. How often do you typically see or cross paths with your neighbours during a normal day?

- "It depends whether it's a weekend or a weekday. On weekends, I see people a lot because people are around more. During the weekdays, if everybody's at work and I'm just staying at home, I'd probably say a couple of times on a really quiet day."

2. Do you genuinely enjoy the daily interactions with other residents, or does the social aspect ever feel obligatory?

- "It's a balance. You join in when you want to; there's no obligation."

3. Can you describe a typical "spontaneous interaction" you've had with a neighbour this week? Where exactly in the building or grounds did it happen?

- "If you're going out at the same time as someone else or taking out the rubbish, there are incidental interactions."

4. Has living here helped reduce any feelings of loneliness or isolation you may have felt in previous housing?

- "Absolutely. It's very nice to interact with people. Not that I was lonely in London because I was doing lots of things and had lots of friends. But this is a much more full-on engaging with people all the time. As you get older and do less external things, you're definitely engaging here."

Theme 2: Architectural Devices and Shared Spaces

1. How often do you use the shared spaces and what specifically draws you to those areas?

- "The Great Hall is used a lot. We have common house meals four times a month. I go to most of the meals. We also have meetings and a Saturday night film club. There are exercise classes like Pilates and yoga too."

2. How do you feel about the "circulation" spaces like the walkways, lanes, or corridors? Do you view them as just a way to get around, or as a place to socialise?

- "If you're going out at the same time as someone else or taking out the rubbish, there are incidental interactions."

3. Does the design of the building make you feel integrated with the wider neighbourhood (Newport/Cambridge), or does it feel like a world of its own?

- "We are in our own bubble, but we make an effort to interact. We have an annual party where we invite neighbours. We also have open days for people interested in co-housing."

Theme 3: Personal Autonomy and Wellbeing

1. Which specific part of your private apartment or house makes you feel most "at home" and provides you with the most comfort?

- "The downstairs living space. It's open plan and looks out onto the garden. It has underfloor heating, which is nice."

2. Do you feel the balance between your private life and the communal life is easy to maintain? Why or why not?

- "Yes, it's a balance. You join in when you want to; there's no obligation."

3. Overall, do you like living here? What are the primary architectural or social reasons why?

- "We were feeling disconnected in our previous neighbourhood. We wanted to have people around us. Even though this is intergenerational, it's nice to interact with people."

Theme 4: Management and Recommendations

1. What is your experience with the management of the facility? How much say do you have in how the community is run?

- "We do it all ourselves through working groups. We have groups for food, grounds, tech, and more. We bring in contractors only when needed. This keeps our management fees low."

2. Based on your experience, would you recommend living in a community like this to your friends or family members?

- "Yes, I would."

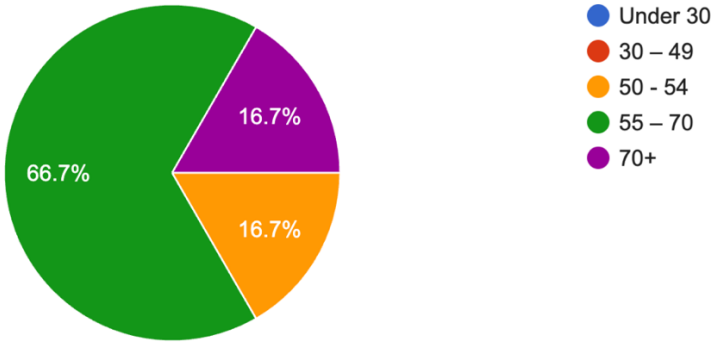
Appendix L: Pilot Questionnaire

Primary Research for developing architectural themes for community based over 55 living.

Hi! :) I am an Architecture student collecting primary research! I won't ask you for any personal details or anything like that! Thank you for filling out the questionnaire!!!

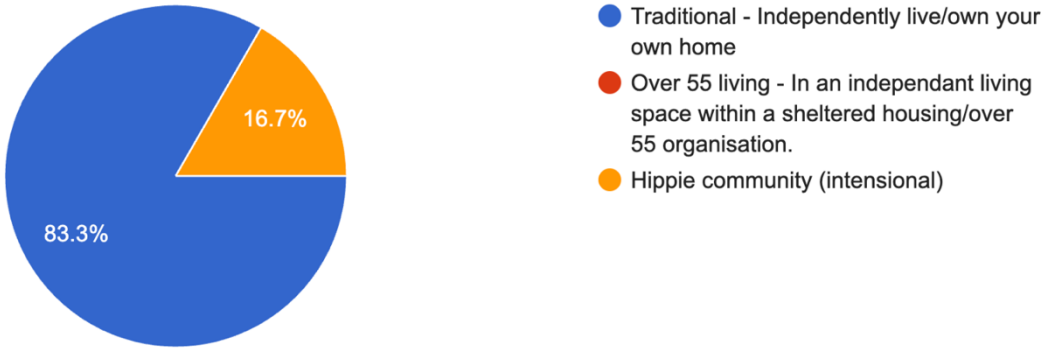
What is your age group?

6 responses



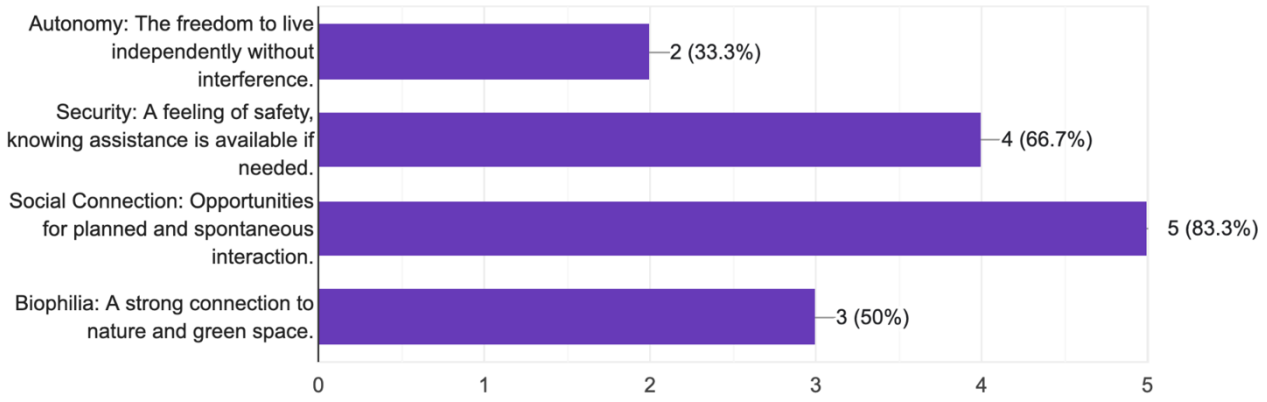
What is your current living situation?

6 responses



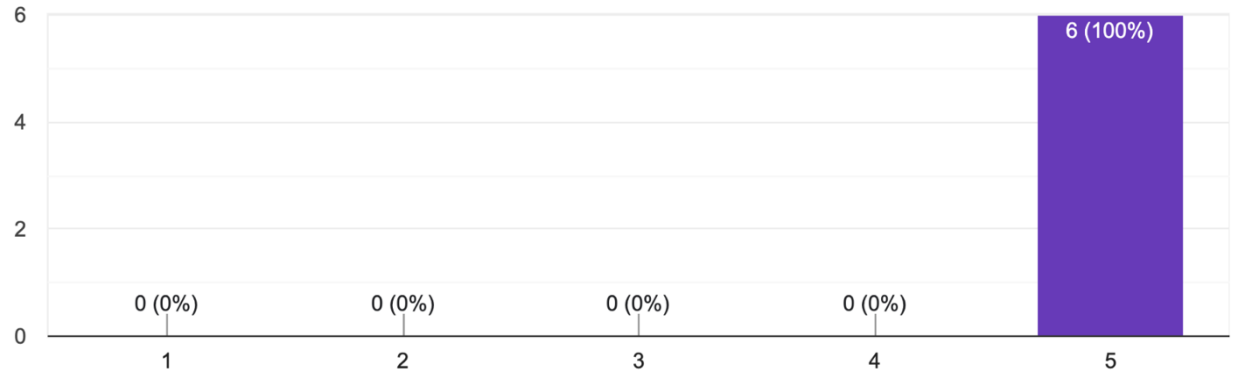
The most essential feeling my ideal community should provide is:

6 responses



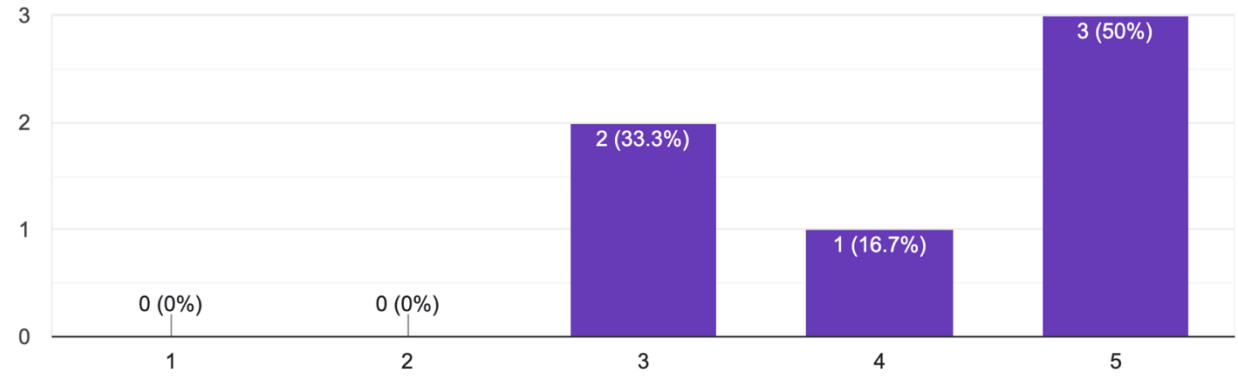
Rate the importance of this architectural element for your well-being: natural daylight and views.

6 responses



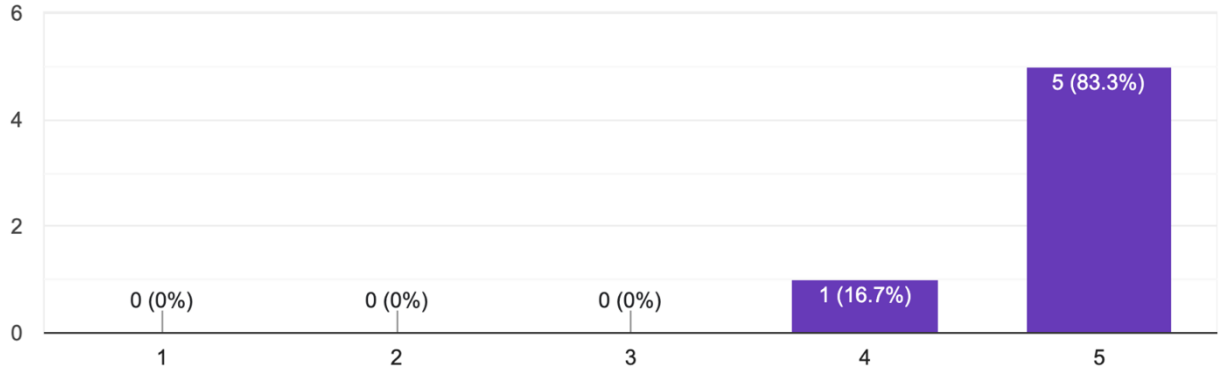
Rate the importance of this architectural element for your well-being: private outdoor space.

6 responses



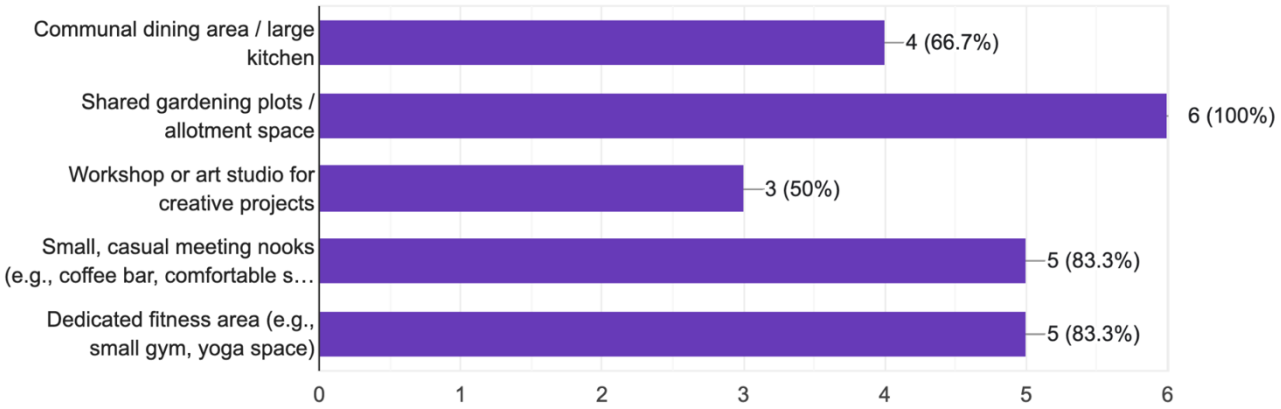
Rate the importance of this architectural element for your well-being: being able to easily navigate all spaces (accessibility).

6 responses



Which shared amenity would most encourage you to interact with your neighbours?

6 responses



The "Dealbreaker": What is one thing in a potential community living situation that would make you immediately say no to moving there?

6 responses

- Governing oraganisations
- Lighting! Add in want! /// don't consider yourself old, would like to live with younger people…
- Privacy-no private space
- feeling like im living in an old people convent
- Shared kitchens & dining
- None