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Designing to optimise mental health in care homes for older people

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The research

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- 1 year project
- Funded by NHS Estates
- Carried out at Oxford Brookes University and Warwick University
- An investigator and researcher at each university:
 - Bart Sheehan/Elly Gilbert at Warwick
 - Elizabeth Burton/Kristina Stockdale Juhlberg at Brookes

O I S D

OISD: WISE

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O I S D

- The WISE (Wellbeing in Sustainable Environments) research unit
 - Elizabeth Burton and Lynne Mitchell
 - Investigating the impacts of the built environment on people's wellbeing and quality of life
 - Generating evidence-based design guidance
 - Focus on older people, but extending to other ages and groups

OISD: WISE

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O I S D

- Neighbourhoods for Life concept
- New book out in March 2006
 - Burton, E. and Mitchell, L. (2006)
Inclusive Urban Design: Streets for Life,
Architectural Press, Oxford.

inclusive urban design
streets for life

Elizabeth Burton
& Lynne Mitchell



Background 1

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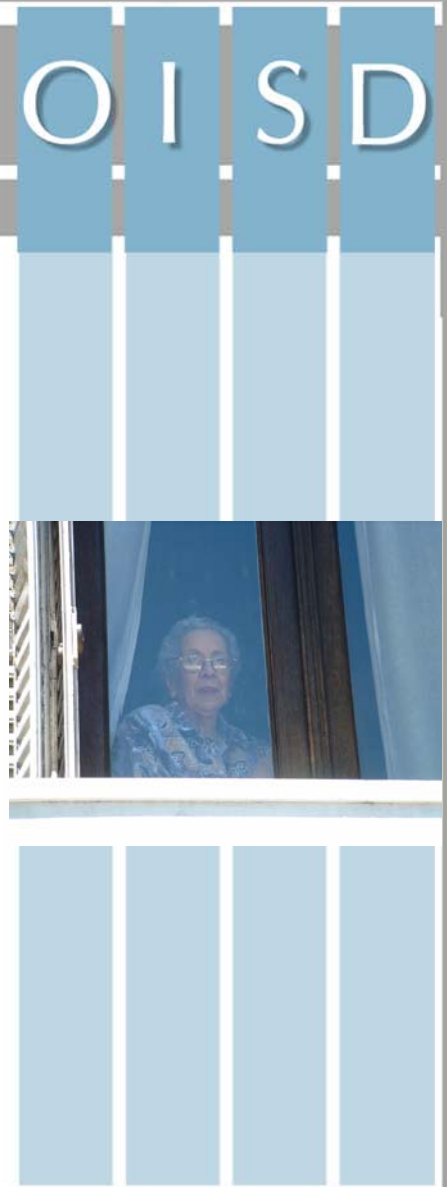
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- With proportion of older people in population rising, increasing numbers are likely to live in care homes in the future
- Mental health problems, including dementia and depression are common in this setting
- Rates of depression in care home residents often found to be 20-40%

Background 2

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- Depression in care home residents often not diagnosed or treated
- Interventions such as screening residents and training staff are effective but not easy to implement
- Improving the physical environment has the potential to reduce depression



Research aims

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- To investigate how the built environment in care homes for older people influences mood among residents
- To establish which built environment features are positive for mood

Research outcomes

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- A tool for measuring/recording the design characteristics of care homes (tested for reliability in 5 homes – over 90% items achieved perfect agreement)
- Preliminary recommendations on design characteristics of care homes likely to enhance mood

Research methods

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- 20 homes in Oxfordshire and Coventry took part in the study
- 81 residents were interviewed in depth about the design of their home and individual design features represented through photos
- The design characteristics of each care home were recorded using a checklist (to investigate relationships with resident data)

Resident interview data

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- Background data and rating of mood
- Preferences among sets of photographs in which single design characteristics were varied, and reasons for preferences
- Views about design of their own care home, which aspects were most +ve and –ve for mood and views in detail on individual spaces

Care home design data

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- Overall building
 - Location and nearby facilities
 - Type, height, form and size of building
 - Type of access
- Individual spaces
 - Décor, style, lighting, signage, flooring and furnishings
 - Size, shape, open-ness, ability to see outside
 - Ability to be private, to personalise space

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Individual spaces

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- Approach and external entrance
- Entrance hall
- Stairs/lifts
- Corridors
- Communal bathrooms/toilets
- Main lounge
- Dining room
- Kitchen
- Bedrooms (inc. bathrooms)
- Garden

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About the care homes

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- Most in urban settings
- 12 voluntary sector, 7 private and 1 housing association
- 4 in Victorian buildings, the rest are fairly modern (1960s onwards)
- Size ranges from 6 to 60 places
- 5 offer specialist dementia care

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About the participants

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- Average age was 85 years
- Three quarters were female
- Over a third were considered by lead carer to have dementia
- Half required assistance in at least 4 major activities of daily living
- Majority had visual impairment, half had hearing impairment and three quarters could still walk without a wheelchair

General responses

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- Residents, including very dependent ones and those with dementia, were keen to express views on the influence of built environment on their mood
- Vast majority of residents reported positive mood

Views of own home

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- Majority were satisfied with home, and would not wish to move home if could do so
- Most use very small number of rooms
- Features reported as very +ve for mood included gardens, general décor, bedroom design and furniture
- Moderately +ve for mood were communal rooms – lounges and dining rooms

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Views of own home

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- Entrance halls produced least +ve responses
- Own bedroom of key importance
 - Over half stated it was their favourite place in the building
 - Seen to provide privacy, comfort and opportunity to personalise

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Design preferences

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- Strong and specific preferences expressed for
 - Soft landscaping of gardens, with variety of planting
 - Accessible design of gardens
 - Single storey buildings
 - Assisted bathrooms
 - Grouped seating arrangements
 - Multifunctional spaces
 - Open, transparent design of internal spaces

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Influences on mood

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- Analyses of care home design checklist data with interview data suggests mood influenced by:
 - Satisfaction with design of bedroom
 - Group living (clustered in sub-units)
 - Pleasant outdoor views
 - Open, transparent design



Significant findings

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- Gardens of great value for mood but often not accessible
- Practical issues (ease of access) of greater concern than desire for 'homeliness' or familiarity
- Views of garden or greenery, especially from bedrooms and communal areas, important for mood

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Recommended design 1

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- General layout
 - Accessible (single-storey, self-operated lifts, easy access to outdoor space)
 - Residents clustered in small groups with their own communal spaces
 - Open-plan internal communal spaces
 - Views maximised, preferably to gardens and greenery
 - Outdoor space provided

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Recommended design 2

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- **Communal areas**
 - Open, clear internal views between rooms
 - Grouped seating, partitions and clusters of seats
 - Views out, preferably to gardens and greenery
- **Bathrooms**
 - Assisted, including grab rails, alarms, assisted baths with height adjustable seat and space for assistants

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Recommended design 3

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- Bedrooms
 - Plenty of space
 - Bright rooms with maximum natural light
 - Views to gardens or greenery, preferably that can be seen from seated position or bed
 - Familiar or personalised décor
- Outdoor spaces
 - Easy to access (e.g. path around garden)
 - Soft landscaping and varied planting



Reflections

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- Bigger study needed
- Expectation of residents low, but this likely to change as baby boomer generation ages
- Many recommendations easy to implement
- Implications for urban renaissance – more space needed, preferences for greenery?

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