

Taking care by design

A new care home has been designed to create a luxurious environment for residents and to help those who suffer from dementia. Mark Smulian hears how Sanctuary Care did this

How do you build a home adapted for elderly people who may suffer from dementia on a constrained site on a narrow road in a residential area, while meeting the highest standards of design, fixtures and fittings?

Any care home needs to be carefully designed, but the requirement to accommodate residents with dementia makes it essential that the architecture reflects their needs.

That was the challenge facing Sanctuary Care when it decided to build a new 29-room care home named Haven at Hatch End, near Pinner, in north-west London. The land was already occupied by an older care home that did not fit modern standards.

It was decided that the site, in a very quiet suburban street, was to be retained, the old home demolished and replaced with another whose design and construction would reflect best practice in caring for residents who were infirm and in some cases also living with dementia.

The new Haven home is on a road otherwise largely occupied by large semi-detached houses, and the London Borough

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Haven's traditional frontage makes a transition to a modern rear section; The frontage of Haven has been designed to blend with the adjacent building



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‘Considerable research now exists on the optimum colour schemes to use in homes where some residents suffer from dementia’

Phil Lewis, director,
KWL Architects

of Harrow’s planners were keen that its frontage should be in keeping with the adjacent buildings.

They were less concerned about the design of rear of the building, and thus Haven has a traditional front and modern rear, though from the inside there is a uniform appearance with no visible ‘join’.

Sanctuary Care is part of the Sanctuary Group, which includes social housing and housing management arms. It engaged KWL Architects, a firm that specialises in care homes, to design Haven.

Director Phil Lewis explains: “We have worked with Sanctuary on a variety of care homes, so this one is a progression of ideas we have applied elsewhere. The planners were very keen that it had a frontage that matched the adjacent buildings so we had to reference that and took our cue from the building next door for our proportions. At the back it did not have to look like the older buildings and it is in a quite different style.”



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From top: Bedrooms are furnished to a high standard and adapted to residents’ needs; Haven’s dining room has a satellite kitchen for food serving

There were some overlooking issues to resolve, as the previous care home on the site had been lower.

Haven is designed with its plant, kitchens and other areas that it would be undesirable for residents to access on its second floor, well away from residents’ rooms and circulation space.

Sanctuary uses a standard room design, but Lewis says some rooms had to be turned at 90 degrees to fit into the overall structure given site constraints.

The ground and first floors both house residents’ rooms around corridors that lead to dining and lounge areas. Each of these has a subsidiary kitchen so that food delivered from the main kitchen upstairs can be kept hot while served.

Ground floor lounge doors give onto a garden, while those on the first floor open onto a terrace, which is glassed in at the front and sides but open above, so residents can enjoy fresh air in safety.

“It is designed with a lot of light coming in as natural light helps the residents to get around,” Lewis explains, noting that a small atrium lets in light to the main corridor of the first floor, as the second floor does not extend across the full depth of the building.

“Corridors always have windows at the end so that residents can see where they are heading to,” he says.

“There are three staircases and two lifts – one for residents’ normal use and one for emergencies and deliveries of supplies – which we designed around.”

He adds that considerable research now exists on the optimum colour schemes to use in homes where some residents suffer from dementia – most notably from the University of Stirling – showing which colours engender responses and which do not, so residents can be guided to facilities they need and away from areas they should not access.

Inside Haven the rooms are grouped along the corridor but



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their doors look like conventional street doors rather than those ordinarily found in institutions.

This is because Sanctuary designs homes around residents' needs, explains its care director Len Merton.

"There are lots of things of interest designed in for residents," he says. "Themes are used to trigger pleasant memories to talk about, for example."

This is apparent from the flat metal representations of popular musical instruments used to decorate the ground floor

and from the newspaper front pages displayed on the first floor that mark events within the memory of older people, such as the conquest of Mount Everest and the abdication of King Edward VIII.

"Front doors are coloured for each resident for recognition and sometimes it will be the same colour as the front door in their original home, for example if they've lived somewhere for many years," Merton says.

"Each door has a brass door knocker and each room has a

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'Front doors are coloured for each resident for recognition and sometimes it will be the same colour as the front door in their original home'

Len Merton, Sanctuary care director



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From top: The care home even has a fully-equipped hairdressing salon; Hallways are designed to mimic streets with traditional front doors

‘...a warm and cosy home [for] residents but also real peace of mind for their family and friends that can take comfort in knowing their loved one is being so well cared for in such a lovely setting’

Fiona Phillips, television presenter



memory box. This was created with help from family members to contain things to trigger memories and help staff to engage with residents, for example if they once supported Aston Villa there might be a football scarf there.”

Merton says great care is taken with choices of wallpapers and carpets so that a home has a pleasant appearance but

avoids ‘busy’ patterns that might confuse residents.

Bathroom and toilet doors are white “so they associate that colour with them,” he says and lights in these rooms are triggered automatically so users need not search for switches.

Rooms that residents should not enter, such as those housing electrical apparatus, are painted the same colour as the wallpaper so they are not noticeable.

“People with dementia see contrasts so the handrails and dining room furniture are designed for that and the corridors are wide for ease of movement.

“Our aim is to create a luxurious feel with high quality materials, not ‘hospital plastic,’” Merton says.

Amenities provided around Haven include rooms for quiet reading, offices for staff and nurses, bathrooms that residents can be assisted to use and a fully-equipped hairdressing salon used by visiting stylists or family members.

The top floor is entirely different. It is decorated in plain colours housing utilitarian facilities for the main kitchen, plant and storage, giving the additional benefit that noisy operations are well away from residents and so do not disturb them.



The roof is designed to admit maximum natural light



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A Bain Marie system is used to move food from the main kitchen to the subsidiary ones in the dining areas.

Supplies can be brought straight to the top floor by the service lift, to which residents do not normally have access.

Sanctuary's construction manager James Tolley had to take the design and specialist requirements and make sure Haven was built accordingly. He engaged Mansell, part of Balfour Beatty, on a design and build contract.

"We went down that route for reasons of collateral warranty, as it keeps things simple for Sanctuary because we have a relationship with Mansell and they appoint and manage other contractors," he says.

Demolition of the old care home was "straightforward, though the site is quite tight for movements," Tolley says.

Haven is built of masonry finished with render on concrete floor planks and the roof is zinc, lead and slate, Tolley says.

"The building techniques were not unusual, and the construction process over about 18 months was straightforward, but there is quite a complicated M&E package in there for lighting," he says.

Haven was formally opened in January by television presenter Fiona Phillips, who carries out charity work for the Alzheimer's Society.

She described Haven as providing "a warm and cosy home [for] residents but also real peace of mind for their family and friends that can take comfort in knowing their loved one is being so well cared for in such a lovely setting".

The Alzheimer's Society said in February that fewer than half of the 322,000 people with dementia who live in care homes enjoy a good quality of life.

Its finding that 80 per cent of people in residential care homes have either dementia or severe memory problems, against its previous estimates of 62 per cent, suggests that designing in the sort of specialist features for dementia sufferers favoured by Sanctuary will become an increasingly common requirement in the construction of reputable care homes.

At a time of increasing recognition of dementia, better research on how to cope with it and growing demand for specialist care, facilities such as Sanctuary's Haven may point the way to designing and building suitable homes to high standards.

The construction phase at Haven

Client: Sanctuary Care

Planning authority: London Borough of Harrow

Architect: KWL Architects

Design and build contractor: Mansell

Mechanical and electrical contractor: Warburtons

Catering equipment contractor: Advance Catering