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BUILDING FOR LIFE

NEWSLETTER 07 STORAGE SPACE

Introduction

In the last issue of the Building for Life newsletter we looked at how new housing developments can accommodate cars. Now we turn our attention inside the home to examine the issue of storage space. Amidst all the debates over space standards and density, space for people to store their possessions seems to have slipped off the radar. Yet the growth of out of town self-storage units demonstrates that people are having increasing problems accommodating their belongings.

We've talked to several key figures from across the industry to find out the current state of play and what can be done in the future. We've also delved back in time to look at the influence of the famous Parker Morris Standards – and wonder what the man himself would have made of housing today.

Also in this issue, we take a look at the latest winners of the Building for Life Standard, three excellent schemes that offer many innovative design ideas. And there's a profile of Chris Crook, the managing director of Countryside Properties, recent recipients of a Gold Standard for their Accordia development in Cambridge.

Finally, we hope you've had the chance to visit the recently revamped Building for Life website: www.buildingforlife.org. If you have any comments on the site, or this issue, we'd love to hear them. Email us at enquiries@buildingforlife.org.

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Front cover:
Store cupboard at the
New Music School
and Auditorium,
Shrewsbury
University of Newcastle
School of Architecture,
Planning and
Landscape

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POLICY

We need to start taking storage space seriously



Are your cupboards and shelves bulging with stuff? What's the alternative? Should you adopt the hair shirt of denial and de-clutter – achieving the minimalist lifestyle so beloved of the glossy magazines? At least selling all your possessions on eBay could pay the rent... Seriously, though, is it too much to ask for homes to be designed to work for the real people living in them? Isn't that what good design is all about?

Architects, planners and developers spend huge amounts of time discussing storage of the car – whether there are enough places to park it, and how these places affect the surroundings. Considering the amount of energy spent on the storage of cars, even though not all of us own a vehicle, it seems bizarre to neglect all our other belongings.

It's not an indulgence to have belongings we need to store around the home. It's a fundamental human trait to accumulate things, a fact of everyday life, and we should not have to pay for it by buying homes with more bedrooms than we need just for the additional storage space. A one-bedroom flat should include enough storage space so that one person living in it can conveniently store all their things. Selling a home without adequate storage space should be considered as ridiculous as selling a home without a bathroom. We could get so much more out of our homes if storage was given more thought at the design stage – often it's simply a matter of poor layout and thoughtlessness.

In Germany, every home comes with a cellar space and usually a fully accessible attic space to boot – and these are not considered an expensive luxury. German consumers opting for prefabricated homes such as the Weber Haus can buy an off-the-shelf concrete cellar to put underneath it. In the Netherlands, space standards for housing used to include space for storing bicycles.

So here's a controversial suggestion. Since we consider the storage of cars so important, why don't we encourage people to live in their cars and put all their belongings in self-storage. Let's face it, people love spending time in their cars, and it might even fix the housing shortage.

What do you think can be done about storage space? Email your suggestions to enquiries@buildingforlife.org. ✉

Listings

Sheltered housing – conference and exhibition 10 & 11 August 2006 The Majestic Hotel, Harrogate

Now in its 15th year, this continually popular event brings together over 250 housing professionals and offers a diverse and comprehensive programme to help Sheltered Housing Staff to deliver the best service possible to their clients.

The conference now includes both strategic and practically themed workshops. Over the two days there will be around 16 workshops, 10 of which will be aimed at front line staff, with a further 6 aimed specifically at managers.

Confirmed speakers include Simon Weston OBE; Imogen Parry, Director of Policy at ERoSH; and Rebecca Mollart, Centre for Supported Housing Studies. For more details, visit www.cih.org/training/confsheltered.htm

Supported housing – conference and exhibition 10 & 11 August 2006 The Majestic Hotel, Harrogate

Brand new for 2006, the Supported Housing Conference brings together professionals involved in the provision of supported housing. This new conference will address current themes such as changes in legislation, address current practical issues and offer a chance to reflect on the possible impact of new initiatives. The programme has been constructed to give delegates the chance to attend a wide range of workshops, as well as providing the perfect opportunity to learn from other practitioners and colleagues.

For more details, visit www.cih.org/training/confsupported.htm

100% Design and 100% Detail 21-24 September 2006 Earls Court, London

100% Design is one of the world's most important contemporary design exhibitions and is set to attract over 35,000 visitors from some of the leading practices across the globe. Its sister event, 100% Detail, brings exhibitors face-to-face with a substantial audience of quality specifiers actively seeking new building products, materials and ideas.

For more details on these events, visit www.100percentdesign.co.uk/ or www.100percentdetail.co.uk/

Housebuilding 2006 10 and 11 October 2006 Business Design Centre, London

Now in its third year, this event combines an exhibition, the Housing Market Intelligence Conference, a full seminar programme, free briefings and the Housebuilding Innovation Awards.

For full programme and registration details, visit www.housebuilding2006.com/





1. Gun Wharf: Lorraine Farrelly
2. Accordia: David Millington Photography
3. Pepys Estate: Ivor Samuels

Latest award winners

Three new schemes were awarded the Building for Life Standard as the latest round of winners was announced on 10 May. Two schemes – Accordia in Cambridge and Gun Wharf in Plymouth – achieved the 80 per cent of the criteria needed to achieve the Gold Standard, with one scheme – Pepys Estate in Deptford – achieving the 70 per cent needed for Silver status.

The winning schemes vary greatly in terms of style, context and layout, but all demonstrate a commitment to design quality. One notable feature is the way all three developments reveal how design innovation, combined with traffic calming initiatives such as home zones, can work to minimize the impact of the car. CABE's recent Housing Audit and resident surveys showed that most new homes were let down by poor parking, but the Building for Life judges were particularly impressed with the way that these schemes had, in their own distinct ways, managed to incorporate car use.

Wayne Hemingway, chair of Building for Life said: "Despite attempts to regulate car use, we have to deal with the current issue of cars being owned and parked now and the impact this has on the quality of our streets and public realm. Each of these winning schemes is designed with consideration of how to store cars, not just park them. It is an encouraging sign that housebuilders and planners are finding ways to give housing the kind of care and attention that the public deserve. Cars are still part of most people's everyday life and we need more of this creativity and this level of thinking to ensure that new housing doesn't fall short of its potential!"

John Slaughter of the Home Builders Federation (HBF) said: "Building for Life is not about architectural style but about creating developments that best suit the local environment and mesh with surrounding areas. We need to encourage good design across the board and it's great to see medium size companies like Midas Homes deliver exciting developments. We hope other small and medium size companies will follow their example and that the new PPS3 will allow them more scope to achieve imaginative parking solutions."

Recognised as the national standard for design quality in new housing, the criteria for Building for Life is based around 20 questions in four categories:

- Character
- Roads, parking and pedestrianisation
- Design and construction
- Environment and community.

Successful schemes receive an engraved flagstone to be installed at the development and a badge for use in promotional and marketing literature. ☒

Turn over for more details on the winning schemes...



Gold Awards

Accordia and Gun Wharf



1. Accordia, Cambridge

Developer Countryside Properties

Design team Feilden Clegg Bradley, Maccreeanor Lavington and Alison Brooks

Judges' comments "Beautifully designed ... everything is so well thought-out and detailed. It's luxurious from the five-bedroom open market homes through to the affordable units."

This exceptional residential scheme close to the centre of Cambridge has been densely fitted into a site which formerly housed government offices and prefabricated WWII buildings.

High architectural quality from Feilden Clegg Bradley (65 per cent of the scheme), Maccreeanor Lavington (25 per cent) and Alison Brooks Architects (10 per cent) offers an exciting range of design, and there are generous amounts of green open space and communal play areas. The development is set in a strong and protected green structure of magnificent mature trees, and its legible road layout displays an openness unusual in modern housing.

The spatial variety of the surrounding neighbourhood – characterized by individual villas and denser Victorian housing, along with the spacious botanic garden nearby – has been convincingly adopted into Accordia. The grand Aberdeen Avenue, with its attractive belt of trees, provides a central spine and axis into the site. The main façade on Brooklands Avenue is a high value addition – varied, up-to-the-minute and both grand and discrete. Use of a common local brick creates coherence across the scheme and different types and tenures help to ensure a good mix of residents.

The masterplan's quality and sensitivity allayed initial public concerns over the development and helped to gain the support of the local architectural centre, Shape Cambridge. After extensive public consultation, final consent was given in May 2003 and construction started on site four months later. The whole site won't be finished until 2010, but currently the scheme offers 378 dwellings (166 flats and 212 houses), 30 per cent of which are affordable units.

With an intelligent, thoughtful design and high quality materials throughout, Accordia is a worthy recipient of the Gold Standard. Indeed, Building for Life chair Wayne Hemingway has claimed, "it's developments like Accordia that can set a new benchmark for modern British housing developments."

2. Gun Wharf, Plymouth

Developer Midas Homes

Design team Lacey Hickie Caley Architects

Judges' comments "At last, this pioneering scheme starts to illustrate the full potential of this location, transforming it from forgotten sink into a wellspring of renewal."

The Cannon and Cornwall Street housing project at Gun Wharf, Plymouth has fulfilled the need to replace a run down post-war estate with a mixed occupancy development that reflects the current needs of the area. The mixed-use units vary from one-bedroom flats to three to four bedroom town houses, and sit on a stepped terrace overlooking the river Tamar.



Public meetings were held to hear local residents' views on the scheme, also involving Plymouth County Council, Devon and Cornwall Housing Association and

the Regional Development Association. Existing residents were temporarily rehoused during the phased construction.

The scheme contains 99 dwellings in total – 35 for private sale, 46 affordable rental units and 18 shared ownership affordable houses – and manages to integrate a variety of housing types whilst satisfying the needs of the Devon and Cornwall Housing Association and Midas Homes. The innovative design uses a mixture of local materials and overall, the development has been hugely successful in completely redefining the nature of the built environment in the local community.



A central, open space modelled on a Georgian circus, gives the whole development a focus, and helps determine an identity whilst providing a simple means by which to orientate oneself. It acts as a public garden and a central visual focus to the scheme. A 'corridor' running the length of the site, giving views of the waterfront, bisects the central circus. The distinctive pitched slate and copper roof lines dramatise the change in height across the site, with a variation in typology and height that accentuates the variety of the façades.

Problems on site, such as the proximity of Ministry of Defence dockyard walls, the threat of buried WWII bombs in the area and retaining access to some properties during construction, were important considerations during the development of the project – yet Gun Wharf demonstrates how high quality design can overcome such constraints to create an elegant, characterful addition to Plymouth's waterfront. ✕



Building for Life – Awards

Pepys Estate, Deptford, London

Since 2001, the Pepys Estate in South East London has been given a new lease of life. The once crime-afflicted and unpopular blocks of corridor access council accommodation have been transformed into a mixture of light-filled flats and terraced houses. The scheme also optimises the existing open spaces, and the site's proximity to the River Thames and Grade II-listed historic buildings.

The revival of the estate, which was built in the 1960s and early-1970s, began in 1993 with an Estate Action SRB funding programme. But while this remedied defects in some of the buildings, it did not overcome security problems associated with the long, dark internal access corridors. The programme was terminated in 1998, before completion. In order to address the seven blocks that had not been treated, the London Borough of Lewisham brought in Hyde Housing Association to undertake their demolition and replacement.

Following consultation with tenants, Hyde Housing Association invited three architectural practices to submit proposals for the new scheme. The winner was bptw partnership. A full planning application was submitted in October 2001. The first of three construction phases began the following year.

Phase one incorporates four five-storey blocks of flats, and two terraces of three-storey houses. Phase two comprises a six-storey block of 42 flats overlooking a garden and the Thames. Phase three – which is due for completion early in 2008 – will deliver a further 108 flats in five, six and seven-storey blocks.

Of the 169 completed dwellings, there are 46 one-bedroom flats, 84 two-bed flats, 32 three-bed flats and seven four-bed houses. All are located on a 1.19-hectare site. When complete Pepys Estate will comprise 277 properties in a combination of tenures: social rented (70 per cent) and shared ownership (30 per cent).

The Phase one buildings are timber framed with brick cladding, a reference



to the old estate. Coloured render, glass panels and untreated timber boarding add variety and a sense of informality.

To maintain a visual connection between the Thames and Aragon Gardens to the northeast, the concrete-framed Phase two block was raised on piloti.

In the new blocks, lifts and staircases have replaced the problematic long corridors. Glazing in the lift and stairwells, along with steel staircases, allow daylight to penetrate the interior, and illuminate external spaces at night.



The scheme has a parking ratio of 60 per cent. The figure is relatively high because the nearest underground station is one kilometre away. However, 'home zone' principles, including a variety of levels and paving finishes, traffic calming devices and carefully located foliage, help to minimise the impact of vehicles.

With the exception of the terraces, the previous pattern of separate blocks has been retained, and the new buildings have been erected on the footprints of the demolished structures. Several mature plane trees have also been retained to act as landmarks, and give character to the open spaces.

The project was implemented via a Project Partnering Contract (PPC 2000) with Rydon Construction. Consequently, modern methods of construction in the form of timber frames were chosen, which increased the design time but speeded up construction. They were also more environmentally sustainable than conventional alternatives. The scheme meets Lifetime Homes Standards and gained an EcoHomes rating of 'very good'. ☒



Focus on...

Storage space

Lack of storage is one of the most common causes of complaint for residents in new homes. It is a problem that raises a number of questions, both practical – as land prices rise and space standards shrink, how can more storage be provided? – and philosophical: why do some people amass more possessions than others? Is the answer related to class, profession or education? Do we need to be trained in what to throw away, and how to store our essentials?

Building for Life spoke to a number of specialists in the field, in the UK and overseas, to explore these and other questions from a range of perspectives.

The property specialist

Yolande Barnes

Head of research at Savills and member of the Building for Life judging panel



“Storage is a fundamental problem facing the housing market. Space standards are going down, and as a consequence storage and other non essential elements of housing provision are being squeezed. I suspect that there is a direct correlation between declining space standards and the growth of self-storage companies. I also imagine that there is a link between parking problems and storage needs, because so many private garages are now used for storage.”

“The problem is directly related to land prices.”

“Space is at such a premium that developers, and housing occupants, are making decisions about the best way to use the space that is available.” Developers are less likely to devalue a property if they keep the second bathroom rather than sacrifice it to build cupboards into the spare bedroom.”

“In general I think that developers are right not to build too much storage into properties. Flexibility is an issue here. Storage means so many different things to different people. Building customised storage solutions into properties can actually be counter-productive. In the second home market, I bet that quite a lot of

built-in storage is very quickly ripped out when the property is sold to make way for the newcomers different needs.”

“Lack of storage does remain an issue however. We did some research a few years ago, asking new homeowners what they thought. One of the biggest complaints was a lack of storage space. Having said this, there is little evidence to suggest that people would be prepared to pay more for buildings with storage. Where people are prepared to pay more for storage space, it clearly isn't sufficient to cover the additional land, build costs and developer premium needed to provide it. If it was, the market would already be providing it.”

The designer

Wayne Hemingway

Designer and Chair of Building for Life



“Storage is massively important, and it's a big problem.”

“In recent years houses have shrunk considerably, but at the same time we've become wealthier, and as a consequence more acquisitive. People like to collect things. It makes them happy.”

“We shouldn't try to stop people living the way they want to live. We should be catering for people's lifestyles. The Japanese are very good at this, providing flexible layouts, with less emphasis on circulation spaces. We're a bit obsessed with designing homes that are suited to everybody, partly because planning brings everything down to the lowest common denominator. Cars are not built for everybody, and Tesco don't design aisles for everybody. They target spaces and products at particular people. At the moment the housing industry is restricted from doing this.”

“I don't think that lofts are the best or most convenient means of storage. My wife and I generally take the loft out and build floor-to-ceiling storage in its place. Most people want access to all their possessions all of the time, or at least some of the time. So the emphasis should be on maximising the amount of useable storage space. We build storage into every available space, including beds and behind walls.”

“We should make better use of sheds and outdoors spaces. We've got the technology to make the outdoor spaces damp-proof and secure. But in general, the best way to maximise storage is to keep things simple, be inventive and make sure that you build floor-to-ceiling storage spaces. People often leave little gaps on top of cupboards, because they are difficult to reach. But this is just wasted space. Use a step ladder.”



The developer

Rod Stone

Associate architectural director of Midas Homes



“Storage has certainly become more important. It is something that we’re thinking about much more, particularly in apartments.”

“We are increasingly incorporating communal storage into our apartment buildings. In a recent Midas Homes development in Exmouth, Devon, we constructed an outdoor structure with individual storage facilities within it for people to store their garden furniture, bikes and golf clubs and we are looking to repeat this method at a new development in Weston-super-Mare. Bike stores are also being incorporated wherever possible.”

“A number of developers don’t provide any storage because they want to make the rooms look bigger, however we try to ensure that even our lowest specification properties have practical storage space. People like to hide away items such as ironing boards, vacuum cleaners and suitcases, they’re not items you necessarily want on display and we try to take these requests on board by providing under stairs cupboards, adequate kitchen storage and loft storage areas.”

“People do appreciate storage space and we are constantly reviewing our plans to ensure we are providing homes that suit our purchasers requirements.”

The European perspective

Annet van der Horn

Standardisation consultant, NEN-construction, Holland

“In the second half of the 20th century, the tradition of building houses with built-in closets slowly faded, probably because it made houses cheaper to build, although the introduction of fridges also played a role – cellars were no longer necessary for storing food. Today it is generally left to residents to choose their own cupboards. If a new house does have a build-in closet, it is most likely to be the otherwise un-useable space under the stairs.”



“Dutch building regulations used to require external storage for bikes with a minimum net area of six square metres for each property. If you drive around Holland today you will see these little boxes everywhere. With the new building regulations of 2003, this regulation was annulled. There was and still is a call for less regulations in Holland, so this kind of storage space is now left to ‘market mechanisms.’”

“We see now that in big apartment blocks the ‘outdoor storage’ is still in the basement, sometimes on higher level floors in really high rise buildings. There are sometimes more apartments than storage rooms, which means that those who want a storage room have to pay extra, or higher rent, for it.”

“For houses with a garden there is a variety of prefab storage boxes available, including tent-like constructions. These are usually very small. Houses without gardens or pre-provided storage just have to make do. Some households construct a hook and pulley-construction in the hall.”

Chris Drury

Weber House, Germany

“Storage is very important. Modern lifestyles demand it, people need space for ski equipment, and all sorts of leisure activities.”

“In Germany, and much of continental Europe, the basement provides the solution to the problem. Over there, asking for a house without a basement is like asking for a car without wheels. It’s a great solution, because a basement is accessible, large and doesn’t usually have any views.”

“So far, we haven’t built any houses in the UK – the £60K competition was really our entry into the market. But we’re developing two sites with William Verry, one of 15 units in Hastings, and the other of over 100 in Aylesbury.”

Last year German manufacturer Weber House, in association with developer William Verry, was selected as one of the preferred bidders for the £60K Home Challenge.

Self storage

The recent growth of self-storage companies gives some indication of the demand for safe and accessible storage facilities. For instance, in 2002, Big Yellow Self Storage, which operates mainly within the M25, had 19 stores, 8,100 customers and annual revenue of £8,408,000. The equivalent figures for 2006 are projected to be: 39 stores (with a further 19 in the pipeline), 27,800 customers and annual revenue of £41,800 – representing a growth of almost 80% in five years. www.bigyellow.co.uk

Parker Morris

50 years on...

Every party manifesto throughout the 1950s and 1960s made a commitment to more new housing, but as volumes grew, so did concerns about appropriateness. Consequently, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government – alongside the Central Housing Advisory Committee of London County Council (a forerunner to today's Greater London Authority) – launched an inquiry into development standards. Sir Parker Morris, the hugely experienced clerk who had overseen the procurement of post-war classics such as Churchill Gardens and Lillington Street, was seconded to chair the inquiry and the resulting report, *Homes for today and tomorrow*, was published in 1961.

The Parker Morris Committee anticipated that the report's proposals would become mandatory for all new housing. In fact, they didn't actually apply even to local authority housing until 1967 and only to housing association development some time later. They were then only in operation for 14 years before Michael Heseltine's Department of the Environment axed them in 1981 as "red tape".

Despite their relatively short life, the standards remain a benchmark in the search for quality – developing to "better than Parker Morris" is still a proud boast. But they were not quite the de minima space standards they are now considered. The Parker Morris Committee considered how to design for the accommodation of furniture and storage. Part of this emphasis was a desire to plan for the increase in consumer prosperity – which the report called "revolutionary" – and especially the growth in home ownership and the accumulation of white goods and the TVs, hi-fis, and radios then called "brown goods." People were accumulating more belongings than they could store in their homes. So a bedroom had to be big enough for a 2000mm x 1500mm double bed, two bedside tables, a chest of drawers, a double wardrobe (or space for built in cupboard), plus a dressing table. This was planned with a net floor area and a storage space supplement: for instance, 30m² plus 3m² for a single storey, one bed house. These figures for storage altered depending on how many floors and the type of property, so comparisons between a terraced and a semi-detached house, for example, would reflect the respective availability of further outside storage.

Number crunchers subsequently reduced the functionality aspect of Parker Morris's guidelines for room storage into a single total net floor area and then again to a figure per person: 33m² with 17m² for each added individual. This approach reflects how housing associations developed floor area bands to guide values in its total cost indicators. Adapting Parker Morris to reflect occupancy levels, these are often incorrectly expressed as Parker Morris Standards and are, in fact, the Housing Corporation's 1993 Scheme Development Standards. One recent example of Scheme Development Standards was as a requirement for the Design for Manufacture competition which called for a 76.5m² minimum net floor area for a two-bed, four-person dwelling. By contrast, Parker Morris would have focused on a net floor area for each room, a list of furniture it should be able to contain, and appropriate storage supplements.

One of the key aspects of Parker Morris to be overlooked is the committee's conclusion that the "front parlour" design should be abandoned. Instead homes should divert accommodation to living and circulation space, splitting these into an area for quiet and leisure activity and an area for eating. Here the dining space was suggested as an enlargement of the kitchen. It spelled the beginning of the end for the 'high days and holy days' dining room. ✕

"Not to be confused with..."

It's apparent that not everyone is quite so familiar with the work of Parker Morris these days. Whilst he is thankfully not often mistaken for a *Thunderbirds* character, a recent House of Lords debate saw the Duke of Montrose refer to "Parker Knoll" space standards – confusing the 1960s civil servant with the classic furniture designers. This led to a very odd discussion about how much space a golden retriever or Alsatian would have if they were kept in a "a Parker Knoll, standard, fourth-floor flat in a council block!"

Parker Morris: the interview

What would Parker Morris make of today's housing? Here's how we think a conversation might go...

What has changed most since your 1961 enquiry?

Sir Parker: "People are taller, fatter, louder. By contrast, ceilings have dropped and corridors narrowed and acoustic privacy become a lost science. Conversely your cars are twice the size, lethally fast and hardly make a noise. It's like a queer dream."

Would your designs work today?

SP: "The whole country is indulging in some Rag Week prank to see how much you can get into how little space. It pains me to see how the average family loft has come to be used less than a family crypt."

What would you change if given an inquiry to run today?

SP: "Increase the net floor recommendations and storage requirements much further. I saw a television today that had a screen bigger than an A0 drawing. What I produced are a Parker Morris Minor compared with what you need today."

What do you notice most about new housing?

SP: "It looks so old-fashioned by the standards of the 1950s and early 1960s. When did the country get this bent for the Tudor and Victorian? Is it some kind of Portmeirion vogue?"

What makes you wince the most?

SP: "Those funny little balconies copied from the bars over the windows at Wormwood Scrubs."

What cheers you?

SP: "To see so much of rundown London back on its feet. I used to be able to see a thousand vacant sites from my office in the LCC."

Any regrets?

"I got sick of people doing puppet-like walks at my name and saying 'Yes, m'lady!'"

Sir Parker Morris was in conversation with David Birkbeck of Design for Homes



Great reads



Design at appeal

Appeals play an important role in the planning system, but currently there's a lack of confidence in dealing with design issues at this stage, which is affecting the

quality of development. This new CABE publication provides a short 'how to' guide to help all those involved in dealing with design at appeal.

Copies can be downloaded at www.cabe.org.uk. For a hard copy email publications@cabe.org.uk or call 020 7070 6700.

Design at a glance: a quick reference to national design policy



Good design is important for all development types in all locations. This means a variety of planning policy guidance and planning policy statements may be relevant for any one application, and it can be difficult to find the right policy quickly. To help, CABE has drawn together the most important design-related statements found throughout national policy and guidance. The quotes are accurate and are here to be copied and quoted, for example, in policy writing, negotiations, letters, decisions, reports or appeals.

The key documents listed all supplement the various PPGs and PPSs. They can be found through the CABE or DCLG websites. The government is in the process of reviewing all PPGs. As new PPSs are published, updated electronic versions of this guide will be available from this site.

Copies can be downloaded at www.cabe.org.uk. For a hard copy email publications@cabe.org.uk or call 020 7070 6700.

Voice box

Chris Crook Managing director of Countryside Properties

What's your top tip for providing high quality housing schemes?

Be passionate about design. I firmly believe that of all the ways that you can add value to a scheme – and I mean that in the broadest possible sense, not just financial – intelligent, creative design is by far the most important.

What is the biggest barrier to good urban design in housing schemes?

A: Compromise. Our industry has become a political football, which has created the need for compromise. The problem is that as the consultative process becomes more inclusive, more and more stakeholders want to be heard, and that inevitably leads to compromise.

What is your favourite housing scheme of recent years and why?

Great Notley Garden Village, in Braintree, Essex, which is a classic Countryside Properties development. It was a concept formulated in recession, and launched into a very difficult climate, but despite everything it has always been a success on every level, notably as a sustainable development. It is also innovative. It was one of the earliest uses of traffic calming and incorporated a sustainable surface water drainage system. And of course, it's got a good range of housing, both for sale and for Housing Associations.

What would your dream neighbourhood be like?

I'm a coastal dweller, I always have been. So my dream neighbourhood would be near a beach, in the UK, have easy access to water sports, a good mix of housing and access to vital amenities. It would be in a small town, with a sense of community. I suppose it would be a lot like Broadstairs in Kent, where I live.

Who is your hero of housing?

César Manrique [b. 1919], the artist, architect and urban planner who transformed his native Lanzarote from the 1960s until his death in 1992. He set a design brief and urban strategy for the island, and he managed to control the outcome. The result is an island resort with great uniformity of architecture, scale and quality. I went there several years ago. It left a lasting impression on me.

What can be done to improve the amount of storage space in new housing?

We've tried a number of different approaches, although much depends on the nature of the building. Wherever possible, we try to give access to a roof void, and include a cloak cupboard. We also build as much as we can into any recesses created by the structural frame, ensure that airing cupboards are meaningful spaces, and build generous units into kitchens, even at the affordable end of the spectrum. In apartment buildings another option is lock-up or caged units in the basement. And there is always the possibility of some external storage. Garages were traditionally a good option, but fewer houses are built with them these days, which is one of the reasons for the increasing pressure on storage. But with creative thinking, solutions can be found. ☒

Next issue

The next issue of the Building for Life newsletter will look at the issue of management companies. Please email us at enquires@buildingforlife.org with any feedback on the newsletter and details of developments deserving recognition in your area

