



DESIGN APPRAISAL GUIDE

This easy guide **should help you decide** if the location and the design of a particular scheme are right for you. We concentrate here on ‘bricks and mortar’ bearing in mind that the assessment of a scheme’s ethos, its management and services are equally relevant to your final decision.

You are looking for a **new home**, hopefully a home for life, i.e. a place where you can live independently, possibly with the confidence that care and support services will be available should you need them.

You are not selecting a **hotel** for a short stay. Many design features that you would accept, or not notice on holiday, could become depressing and restrictive in the longer term: e.g. long windowless corridors, no proper staircase (only emergency stairs), limited views, no balcony or tall windows, nominal storage.

Below we help you look at the scheme location, the building layout, the communal facilities and the apartment, to provide you with a useful checklist. To keep it simple we are assuming that relevant regulations, especially on accessibility, sound proofing and health and safety have been met, while concentrating on purely design matters which may influence your decision.

LOCATION

Whether the environment is rural, suburban or urban, the principle criteria for the scheme location to consider remain the same:

- Proximity to local amenities
- Proximity to public transport
- Accessibility

Your independence relies to a great extent on your ability to access local amenities, to become part of the local community.

- Are shops, a post office, a library within walking distance?
- Will the location of the scheme help you to take part in local social and cultural activities?
- How close and accessible are the bus stop or, the train station?
- Is there level access to scheme? Is the local area suitable for forays by wheelchair or scooter?
- Will your friends find it easy to visit you? Are there hills to climb or busy roads to negotiate?

In a rural setting,

- Does the scheme compensate for relative isolation by exploiting fully what it can best provide: peace and quiet, countryside, long views, closeness to nature, accessible walks?
- What are the gardening opportunities? Is the long-term future of local public transport secure, or are there alternative?

In an urban setting,

- Does the scheme provide outdoors and indoors areas of peace, such as a communal garden or a conservatory sheltered from noise and traffic?
- Are there views onto public activities?
- Are some of the facilities shared with people from outside the scheme?
- Does the immediate environment feel safe?

In a suburban setting,

- How does the scheme address its immediate environment in terms of views, safety, gardens, links with the local community?
- Has it been put there for a particular reason or just because the land was cheap?
- Check all the points above

BUILDING

Building types

Building types range from bungalows, single-storey, two-storey, multi-storey buildings, to 'villages'. There is no ideal type, but one might suit you better.

Communal facilities

The provision of communal facilities will depend on the location and size of the scheme, on the needs of the residents, as well as on the meals, support and care services available.

- Are all facilities wheelchair-friendly, indoors and outdoors?

Minimal communal facilities

From your point of view, the minimal communal facilities ought to include:

- A communal lounge with kitchenette

- A communal garden or patio
 - A guest room
 - The manager's office
 - Laundry facilities
 - A wheelchair/scooter store
 - One disabled toilet near the communal lounge
- Is there a proper communal lounge or just a token extension of the entrance lobby?
 - Is there a kitchenette close to the communal lounge?
 - Is there a wc close to the communal lounge?
 - Does the communal lounge open onto a garden, patio or conservatory?

Common circulation spaces

Corridors

Long corridors without natural light, without views and resting areas may be fine in a hotel, but are certainly not desirable in housing.

- Do the corridors need artificial light during the day?
- Do they have windows and views?
- Do they offer resting areas?
- Are they well ventilated?
- Is there a semi private space by the apartment doors, allowing some personalisation?

Staircases

in multi-storey buildings one staircase leading to the upper floors ought to be located adjacent to the main entrance for the staff and residents looking for this form of exercise, and when the lift is out of order. Emergency-only staircases are no replacement for this central feature.

- Is there a central staircase providing the advantages listed above?
- Is the main staircase naturally lit, with windows?
- Does it lead to the main entrance?

YOUR APARTMENT

Deep apartments

During the last 15 years plans of apartments have tended to get deeper and deeper in order to line up as many units as possible along, and often on both sides of a long corridor. The one reason for this is that deep buildings are cheaper to build than thin ones.

With a normal floor to ceiling height and for normal activities, you have to rely on artificial light beyond 5 m (16½ ft) from a window. A deeper plan - and many reach beyond 7 or 8 metres (23 to 26 ft) - is likely to create the following disadvantages:

- you will need to keep some lights switched on even during the brightest day
- the windows will glare, making it difficult for your eyes to adjust when you move about
- the good ventilation of the apartment is compromised

Orientation

An apartment offering more than one aspect will be rare and at a premium today. Most apartments are single-aspect, and the direction they face is important.

South-facing:

- Generally preferred

West-facing:

- Can feel relatively dark and cheerless in the morning; however the view of a sunlit morning scene without the sun glare will compensate
- Tends to collect much heat in the afternoon. Needs good sun shading in the afternoon and evening

East-facing:

- Cheerful in the morning
- Can feel relatively dark and cold in the afternoon and early evening; however the view of a sunlit afternoon scene without the sun glare will compensate.

North-facing:

- Generally avoided. Good views over landscape or a lively environment can offer some compensation.

Which floor?

- Light, views and privacy tend to be greater on upper floors.
- Accessibility and immediate contact with garden and patios are easier on the ground floor.

Entrance lobby

- Does it receive any natural light during the day (from a corridor window or a glazed door)?
- Does it provide sufficient storage?
- Is it wheelchair friendly?

Living room

- Is artificial light needed during the day in parts of the living room?
- Is the living room very deep and its window glaring?
- If a room seems deep, how can it be properly ventilated?
- Can you enjoy the view while sitting down?
- How does it feel with the door be kept open?
- Is the living room adjacent to a lift? Noise!

Kitchens / kitchenette

- Is it large enough and sufficiently equipped for you?
- If it is without a window, will you mind in the longer term?
- Can it be adapted for limited mobility (lower worktops, accessible wall units, etc) or for a wheelchair?
- Do you prefer the kitchen door to open to the lobby or to the living room? The difference may not be important if the living room door is generally kept open.
- How is it ventilated? Test it.

Bedroom

- Can it be properly furnished?
- Is there sufficient space for storing your clothes
- Can you enjoy a view from the bed?
- Is the bedroom adjacent to a lift? Noise!

Bathroom

- Can it take adaptations, such as a level threshold shower?
- Is it wheelchair friendly?
- How is it ventilated? Test it.

Ironmongery and accessories

- Are you are satisfied with the design and mechanism of the door handles, window catches and all ironmongery?
- Can you open and close all the windows?
- Do the types and location of light switches and power points suit you?

Finally

The above list should be helpful in a general way. It does not touch on care and support services, telecare, community alarm, the role of the scheme manager, etc., just on basic design considerations.

Weigh up your own preferences, your own anxieties, your own physical, cultural and emotional needs, and above all, take your time. To be given only a few days to make such an important decision should not be acceptable. Ask if you can spend a little time in the apartment on your own, perhaps even a day and a night; or in the guest room, or in somebody else's apartment.

Get help and advice if you feel you need it to help you decide; ask a friend or a relative. Talk to people who already live there.