

Some years ago, my wife and I packed our bags (and our dogs!) and went to live in Florida. Our task there was to take over the running of a failing Assisted Living Facility (ALF) in the middle of the State and, having steadied the ship, to then go on and build a new ALF up in Orlando. I believe the phrase ‘how difficult can it be?’ was used somewhere along the line. Plenty of sunshine, common language, “it’ll be like a two-to-three year long holiday” I said optimistically. Things didn’t quite work out like that.

Firstly, there’s the whole ‘same language’ thing. It was George Bernard Shaw who famously described England and America as ‘two countries divided by a common language’. On day one, I found out what he meant. I ventured out to a huge Walmart store in the middle of one of the blue collar, ‘rust belt’



Extracare housing models are evolving very quickly, but not before time, says NorthStar director **DANNY SHARPE.**

Look a long way west for new thinking in extracare

neighbourhoods which, in more recent times, had helped propel Donald Trump to the White House. I walked over and interrupted the conversation of two large Hispanic sales staff and asked if they could ‘possibly tell me where they kept the kettles’. Everyone in earshot stopped what they were doing and turned to stare. The silence was deafening. I confess I have never sounded more English than at that particular moment. I might as well have asked them if they could tell me who opened the batting for England in the first Ashes Test of 1936. Or, if perhaps, they fancied a game of cribbage after supper in the drawing room.

After much deliberation, head scratching, confused squinting and me miming making a cup of tea, we finally decided that what I wanted was a ‘water kettle’ and they explained that they didn’t sell them. I dejectedly returned to the ALF to spend an infuriating afternoon in the admin office where my request for a few sheets of A4

paper was met with a blank stare. Turns out I wanted ‘eight and a half by eleven’. How was I to know? I have never measured it. I then found the letter I had subsequently written, pinned up on the notice board! I had to explain that this was a private letter and when I said I wanted someone to ‘post it’ for me, I meant put a stamp on it and send it in the mail – not ‘post it’ on the main notice board in the reception for all to see!

On the up side, I was very pleasantly surprised that the ‘elderly care home’ we had come to run was a world apart from its UK counterpart. An elderly care facility in America was clearly not a converted seaside boarding house with lino floors and hard backed chairs spaced out around the perimeter of a well-worn dining room. Neither was it a rabbit warren of small bedrooms with one large bathroom at the end of the corridor and a strong smell of ammonia assaulting the senses.

No; the facility in Florida was spacious, well-appointed, filled with happy, busy, active people. It had a constant flow of visitors dropping in for all manner of classes, meals with friends, evening events, etc. I know the weather helps and the Americans are generally more outgoing as a nation, but still, it was an eye opener for me. It was somewhere the residents aspired to be.

I suppose the comparison is slightly unfair as the ALF movement in America caters for what we would consider residential, nursing and extracare residents all under one roof. This was several years ago and the standard of UK care homes has improved dramatically since, but I remember feeling how much more attractive the facility was there compared to a bog standard UK care home. In this instance the common terminology was again describing something quite different, but this time in a good way.

I was thinking about all of this whilst reading the latest report to come out of my alma mater – The School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape at Newcastle University. The report was commissioned by Churchill Retirement Living and is based on a PhD research project. It raised several interesting questions about the current market for ‘retirement living’: not least, the terminology itself.

We still talk about over 55s housing for example. The idea that I will need a

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Ferndown Manor opens



Ferndown Manor, Care UK's newly opened 75-bed care home in Dorset.

Care UK has officially opened the 75-bed Ferndown Manor care home in Ferndown, Dorset.

Built by local construction firm Penny Farthing Homes, at a cost of around £6.5m, the home has been designed to maximise natural light with large windows. Dementia-friendly design has been factored into all aspects of the home, from lighting and colour schemes to signage and layout.

The design of the home has divided it into smaller

communities, with each floor having its own dining room and lounge areas.

Care UK says this layout has been proven to help residents who are living with dementia to feel more secure as they prefer familiar faces and fewer disruptions. There is also a coffee shop, hair salon, cinema and landscaped gardens designed with scope for residents to get involved in caring for the flowers and shrubs.

► From previous page

pecially adapted form of housing when I reach that great age in about five years' time is laughable. Well it is to me anyway: you can keep your snide comments to yourself. Also, the idea that we 'retire' in the conventional sense is also out of the window now. Retirement these days can mean a second career for many people. It can mean a 30-40 year span of time. For others – and I include myself in this bracket – it is a meaningless phrase. I don't want to stop doing what I enjoy doing to instead spend my time playing golf, which I only occasionally enjoy and I am not as good at. The baby boom generation and my lot – Generation X – want aspirational housing that reflects what we do and who we are. The extracare model is evolving very quickly and, in my view, it's about time.

The older generation of pre-War babies was old at 55. They retired at 60-65 and, if they were lucky, carried on a life of 'pottering' in the garden and playing golf for a few years until they shuffled off this mortal coil, conveniently freeing up much-needed housing for the Baby Boomers following them. The Baby Boomers, on the other hand, are a selfish lot, living until they are 95, refusing to downsize, taking degree courses in the University of the Third Age and developing digital tech start-up businesses at 65.

We need to find a way to meet their demands. We need to create aspirational housing that will attract this group out of their family homes and thus free-up the much needed stock for the next generation. This means raising the bar. They are a very demanding lot – these are the people who marched on the streets for social change in

Ulster Bank finances Wood Green centre



At Wood Green are Mark Donnelly of Wood Green care home, Leona McNicholl of Ulster Bank, and Nigel Walsh, director, commercial banking, Ulster Bank.

An Ulster Bank-supported care home investment in Jordanstown, north of Belfast, opened in April.

The 80-bed Wood Green Healthcare centre represents an investment of almost £4 million. The facility sits on a four-acre site just outside Belfast, offering frail-elderly and dementia care.

"This is a benchmark healthcare facility where residents receive the best care possible," said owner Malachy Donnelly.

"All care assistants and staff are trained extensively in-house, not only to comply with the required national standards, but to the home's own exacting standards," he added.

the 1960s; this is the group who sent Man to the Moon; let's face it, this is the Rolling Stones! They won't go quietly or put up with a second-rate anything.

There are some great developers coming into this market and where the Americans led with their ALFs and retirement communities, we can follow. But we need new terminology – let's get rid of all of the previous 'sheltered' this, 'assisted' that, 'extra' the other, and let's develop housing which is actually wanted: apartments with large glazed balconies, developments with cinemas, coffee shops and swimming pools. Let's make it a new use class of its own.

Let's make it a special case like we did with affordable housing I'm going with 'C5' housing; it has no age connotations and – apart from sharing its name with a certain failed electric tricycle – it could actually be aspirational. ct