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## **Crime and Older People, ISBN 0 642 22739 X**

### **Urban Design and Crime Prevention in Housing for the Ageing**

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#### **Introduction**

This paper summarises the results of a study commissioned by the Adelaide Central Mission and funded by the Crime Prevention Unit of the South Australian Attorney-General's Department to examine the urban design of an established retirement village with a view to upgrading and improving its safety.

It draws attention to the particular issues which long-established accommodation for the ageing encounter, in adjusting to changing approaches to aged care and accommodation. The vulnerability of the ageing was particularly evident from this study as was the strong links between uncertainty about the future of the village and fear of crime.

#### **Study Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to examine the urban design of Aldersgate Village with a view to guiding other developments in accommodation for the ageing. The study objectives were as follows:

- identification and analysis of urban design factors which influence safety and security of residents within an aged care village;
- identification of trouble spots which contribute to reduced safety and security for residents in their living environment;
- assessment of means to ameliorate trouble spots.

## **Methodology**

The approach adopted for this study included a combination of site assessment using established crime prevention and urban design criteria and consultation with the residents and staff to establish problem areas and develop solutions and priorities.

## **Background of the Village**

The Aldersgate Village was established in 1942 on a site of ten hectares. At full capacity it comprised 80 independent living units, 145 mixed independent and hostel units and six nursing home wings. The village is located in an inner suburb of Adelaide on a main road relatively close to shops and public transport routes. The initial philosophy of the village management was to provide full care for the residents.

This gradually changed to an approach which encouraged more independence of the residents and in more recent years to a review of the size of the village and a proposed segregation of the nursing home component as a facility independent of the remainder of the village and the phasing down of the remainder of the site by its gradual redevelopment for alternative uses.

The plans for redevelopment have been driven by a policy of the Adelaide Central Mission to substantially change the way services are provided for the elderly as follows:

- change in accordance with changes in work practices, the need to create 'home like' environments for the elderly and the development of new programs such as outreach hostel services;
- changes in priority of the Mission to reflect areas of greatest need in the community;
- changing needs and expectations of elderly people in the community;
- changes in federal government policy and funding;
- changes in the minimum standards of accommodation.

## **Management**

The village is managed by a management committee including residents and members of the local authority responsible to the Director of Services in the Mission. The day-to-day operations are the responsibility of a number of managers of separate components of the village with line responsibility to either the Director of Services or the Chief Executive Officer.

The residents have gradually become less dependent on the staff and administration and more active in organising their own activities and relating more to the outside community.

## **Safety and Perceptions of Safety**

This study formed part of a wider assessment of crime prevention measures for the village including the appointment of a crime prevention officer prompted by an increasing awareness of crime in the community. The following is a summary of the results of the investigations of the crime prevention officer:

- the majority of residents feel safe during the day;
- residents are more fearful of crime during the night;
- few residents reported any fear while using public transport;
- a high proportion of residents reported strong links with neighbours which increased their perceptions of safety;
- a majority of residents had made changes to deter intruders;
- a small percentage complained of harassment from youth on bicycles riding through the village.

During the consultations undertaken as part of this study residents expressed concern about:

- strangers wandering into the village during site works;
- vandalism to vacant buildings;
- lack of information about the proposed redevelopment changes to the village;
- lack of information and concern about access to residents' garages and parking areas once redevelopment occurs.

Residents' safety issues of an urban design nature within the site included:

- vulnerability on the perimeter road frontages;
- concern about going out unaccompanied at night;
- poor visibility of entrance doors of some of the buildings when entering after dark;
- some poor maintenance of lights;
- glaring spot lights in some locations creating problems for drivers and pedestrians at night;
- dense shrubbery close to the entrances;
- a movement of public through the site;
- school children attracted by a fish pond and drainage channel moving through the site and causing a perception of reduce safety;
- cyclists conflicting with pedestrians on the footpath through the village.

In summary, the uncertainty about the future redevelopment and the free movement of people through the site have caused some perceptions of vulnerability to crime although the incidence of crime is not unusually high.

### **Urban Design Assessment**

The following principles of manageable space are drawn from the study of Bell & Sarkissian (1991) entitled *Urban Design Crime Prevention in the Adelaide CBD*. They form design management mechanisms.

#### *Use of Space*

Confusion occurs between public and private areas when one use encroaches on another resulting in uncertainty for users (e.g. resident's gardens encroaching on 'nature strip' discouraging safe pedestrian movement along residential streets). Such territorial issues must be resolved and ambiguity reduced regarding ownership of spaces by the use of urban design 'signals'.

#### *Surveillance*

This is the extent to which activities in public spaces can be observed.

### *Legibility (Wayfinding) and Reducing Penetrability*

Legibility is the quality which makes a place 'graspable'. Penetrability principles are used to structure and control access into an area after hours and after dark. This is in conflict with the concept of permeability (Bentley et al. 1985, *Responsive Environments*) which encourages movement through urban areas.

For crime prevention on aged accommodation sites, it is critical that the number of pedestrian routes be controlled or at least that 'safe routes' be clearly delineated (and patrolled) after hours.

### *Robustness and Legitimate Uses*

Places which can be used for many different purposes will be safer at night and after hours.

### *Reducing Design Conflicts*

This involves reducing opportunities for two incompatible activities to be located next to one another without sufficient separation or to be forced to compete for the same space. An example would be an area for redevelopment having to share access to the village.

### *Management*

Sensitive management is management with a 'human face'. It combines support for legitimate activities with control of anti-social and inappropriate behaviour, protection of people and property, and involvement of users in the management of their environment.

The following is an outline of the range of amelioration measures proposed within each urban design component.

### Legibility

Legibility of the site to reduce penetrability, provide minimal and clearly defined entrances and allow 'way finding'.

#### Surveillance

Ensure surveillance of the site during the day and after hours by increased pedestrian movement and activities of the site.

#### Clear use of space

Reduce confusion of spaces on the site by clear definition of public and private areas.

Define the 'territory' of the village without deterring pedestrian movement through the site.

#### Vandalism

Reduce intentional damage caused by vandalism by using appropriate materials, improving maintenance programs.

#### Vulnerable materials

Avoid vulnerable materials.

#### Landscaping

Landscaping must be designed to compliment impacts on criminal and anti-social behaviour.

#### Safe Routes

Provide safe routes, footpaths, security and surveillance to enable safer pedestrian access through and into the site after hours and through the day.

#### Direct Access

Provide safe direct access to public transport stops and other access points on the perimeter of the site.

#### Parking

Provide adequate parking and garage facilities close to dwellings and staff facilities.

#### Seating

Provide adequate seating throughout the site to encourage social interaction and allow for resting places along safe routes.

#### Building Security

Improve dwelling security.

#### Lighting for Safety

Prepare a village lighting plan which provides an increased amount of vandalproof lighting, especially in areas which are presently poorly lit and unsafe.

#### Site Maps and Signs

Maps and signs should be provided to make the site clear for visitors and residents and reduce unnecessary movement of strangers around the site.

#### Land use mix and Physical and Social Context

Expand the mix of land use to encourage more people to move around the site during the day and after hours thereby providing informal surveillance and increased social interaction.

#### Negative Image

Avoid a negative image which can be created by poorly maintained or cluttered areas.

#### Management

Adopt a management approach which is sensitive, 'has a human face', combines support for legitimate activities with control of anti-social and inappropriate behaviour in particular, protects people and property, and involves users in the management of their environment.

### Redevelopment

Commence a site redevelopment planning process which involves full consultation and involvement of the residents.

### **Priorities and Improvement**

The recommended priorities for action to improve the safety and perception of safety of the village are summarised as follows in order of priority:

- continue the operation of the crime prevention committee;
- renew and modify the redevelopment plans for the village and the plans to wind down and define a consolidated zone;
- undertake the detailed design of improvements in access, landscaping, signs, fences and lighting to redefine a new focus or heart to village providing a strong link between the new Administration Centre and the Chapel and the Community Centre;
- modify landscaping and lighting throughputs site;
- modify and reduce the entrances to the site and routes throughout the site;
- provide 'safe routes' and a new focal point near the new Administration Centre;
- continue to change the orientation of the village community towards the 'outside' community;
- assist the staff and residents to adjust to the changes philosophy for the village;
- involve the staff and residents in new management approach that provides their full participation and information dissemination;
- establish a Working Party with the local authority.

### **References**

Bell, W. & Sarkissian, W. 1991, *Urban Design Crime Prevention in the Adelaide CBD*, Crime Prevention and Criminology Unit, Attorney-General's Department, Adelaide.

Bentley, I., Alcock, A., Murrain, P., McGlynn, S. & Smith, G. 1985, *Responsive Environments*, The Architectural Press, London.