

Apartments for Life at Ocean Street

March 2009

A new concept in retirement living and aged care for Waverley



Apartments for Life will offer a new way of living in later life, giving older people an alternative to traditional forms of retirement accommodation and aged care.

About The Benevolent Society

The Benevolent Society is Australia's oldest charity. We are a non-profit, independent organisation with a history of pioneering new services in response to community needs. We provide services to children, women, older people, carers and disadvantaged communities in New South Wales and Queensland.



Our work in the Eastern Suburbs

The Society has served the eastern suburbs community since the mid 19th century. The Society is probably most well known for the Royal Hospital for Women in Paddington which it established at the beginning of the 20th century. It operated there until the 1990s.

Today, the Society's services in the eastern suburbs include:

- child protection services, parenting programs for vulnerable families, support for people affected by adoption
- community care, respite and information services for older people and people with a disability who need help to stay living at home, and their carers.

Over the years the Society has run a number of services on the site proposed for the Apartments for Life project. Between 1917 and 1986 the Society ran Scarba Welfare House for Children providing short term care for 30,000 to 40,000 children.



Why Apartments For Life is needed

The Apartments for Life at Ocean Street project follows in the Society's tradition of pioneering new services in response to community needs.

Population ageing raises major opportunities as well as challenges for Australia. Currently there are 2.8 million people aged 65 and over. Their numbers are projected to more than double over

the next 30 years, to 6.4 million. By mid century a quarter of all Australians will be over the age of sixty five.

There are 0.4 million people aged 85 and over. Their numbers are projected to treble over the next 30 years to 1.1 million.

These demographic trends are expected to lead to a burgeoning demand for aged care services. At the same time it is projected there will be fewer people in younger age groups to support them – as taxpayers, aged care workers and as family carers.

Most older people want to live as independently as possible, continuing to do the things they enjoy and staying connected to their community.

Yet current housing and care options to enable them to do this are very limited. Unsuitable housing can increase the costs of caring for older people and contributes to premature and unnecessary moves to nursing homes and hostels.

On the other hand we know that appropriate housing and social supports can enhance older people's self reliance and quality of life and reduce their need for aged care services. The challenge is to develop new forms of housing and care that:

- enable people to remain in their own homes and communities
- encourage older people to be as self-reliant as possible

Secure and appropriate housing is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of older Australians.

I am very interested In this project. I have a health condition that's probably going to get worse and so I am thinking ahead. I own my one-bedroom unit in Bondi and have limited finances.

**Older local resident
Details supplied**

- offer more cost effective ways of supporting frail older people, and
- enhance older people's participation in the community.

If given the choice, the majority of older people would prefer to live in their own homes throughout older age and, when their health declines, be supported by community care rather than move to a nursing home or hostel. Research commissioned by the Society confirms that the overwhelming majority people over 50 do not relish the prospect of spending their last years in a nursing home and want alternatives.

Nursing homes provide an important service but they are essentially institutions. Older people typically describe the difference by saying that staying in their own homes allows them to 'maintain their dignity'.

Nursing homes are also an expensive option. Governments already spend some \$6 billion per year on residential aged care. If current policies remain, the federal government's spending on aged care as a percentage of GDP, is projected to more than double.

Social isolation among older people is associated with poorer health.

One section of the population is particularly vulnerable in older age – those in private rental accommodation. On average they spend a higher proportion of their income on housing than any other section of the community. The number of low income older renters is projected to double over the next 20 years, with the greatest projected change among those age 85 and over.

The situation in Waverley

The Waverley area reflects these national trends. As in many other parts of Australia, there is a shortage of housing that is suitable for older people and affordable. This can create major difficulties for older residents when health problems make their housing no longer suitable.

When this happens older people on low or moderate incomes typically have to move away from the Waverley area because there are limited other options for older homeowners – and virtually none for low income renters. In some cases it may mean they are forced to move prematurely to a nursing home or hostel.

Moving away threatens older people's social networks, putting them at risk of social isolation.

Waverley Council recognises these trends. In Council's 2005–2010 Social Plan and Housing Policy 2007 it highlights the importance of:

- enabling long term older residents to remain living in and connected to their local community
- improving access to affordable housing to enable people from diverse backgrounds to remain in the LGA
- ensuring the provision of adequate facilities for Waverley's ageing population
- improving older people's health and sense of wellbeing and participation in the life of the community.

A high proportion of Waverley's older population live alone – 37% of Waverley's over 65 population, as compared to 27% in Sydney as a whole. Waverley also has a higher proportion of people aged 75 and over than does Sydney as a whole.



The key aims of Apartments for Life

Apartments for Life at Ocean Street will be a new concept in retirement living and aged care.

Key aims:

- Residents are able to stay in the same apartment for the rest of their lives. The Society's goal is that 95 percent will never need to face the disruption and cost of moving to a nursing home.
- Older people are able to stay living in their familiar community, close to their established networks of friends, family and services.
- A vibrant new social hub is created; connections between residents and the local community are built and strengthened; contacts with family and friends are promoted; social isolation is reduced.
- The apartments are affordable by local older people in a range of financial circumstances, reflecting the diversity of the local community.

Factors that can make it hard for older people to stay in their own homes:

- Design of their home (e.g. too many stairs, bathroom unsafe)
- No longer able to manage repairs, garden
- Location (e.g. hard to get to shops, doctors, see friends)
- Feeling unsafe living alone, or lonely (e.g. after partner has died)
- Families/friends unable to provide enough help (e.g. they don't live close by, have other responsibilities or are also elderly)
- Inadequate access to care services at home (e.g. hard to find out what's available and get what you really need).

How Apartments for Life will work

These aims will be achieved through a combination of:

- the design of the apartments, buildings and external open space
- inclusion of affordable housing
- assisted access to support services and care
- on-site services, facilities and social activities
- a philosophy of respect for residents' individuality and autonomy.

DESIGN FEATURES

Features include:

- Self-contained apartments, with balconies or courtyards.
- Meeting areas and balconies on each floor for catching up with neighbours and friends, or just 'watching the world go by'.
- No steps and stairs and wider than normal doors and hallways, for people who use walking frames or wheelchairs.
- Bathrooms designed to be safe for people who are unsteady on their feet or who have disabilities.
- Kitchens designed to take into account common health problems such as arthritis. Switches and plugs within easy reach.
- Enough space so that a family member or friend can stay overnight.
- Built in safety features, including lifts which can be used in the event of a fire, up to the highest modern standards.
- Technological advances to make life easier for residents and to enable them to get help quickly, such as personal alarm systems.
- Provision for installation of non-intrusive ways of monitoring residents' health and wellbeing, for example, sensors to alert staff if a person has fallen and is not able to get up.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Apartments for Life will address the shortage of affordable housing in the Waverley area.

Thirty percent of apartments will be offered at discounted entry prices. They will be for local older people who cannot afford to pay full price because of the value of their current home.

Another ten percent of apartments will be rental housing for disadvantaged older people.

The substantial affordable housing quota (40% in total) will help more older people stay in the Waverley area.

The apartments will be offered on a 'loan-licence' or rental basis. The Society will retain freehold ownership thus ensuring that the affordable apartments will be kept affordable for future residents.

Loan-licence is the most common arrangement in retirement villages. Residents pay an up-front interest free loan (a capital payment). The loan is repaid when the resident leaves or dies minus an agreed proportion specified in the contract. Fortnightly or monthly service fees are also payable.

The complex will be classed as a 'retirement village' under NSW legislation.

SERVICES AND CARE

Some residents will live wholly independently; others will need care services and support from time to time or on an ongoing basis.

The Benevolent Society has 20 years' experience in providing care assistance to older people living in their homes in the Eastern Suburbs. We are one of a network of more than 20 organisations that do this in the Waverley area.

The Society understands that one of the hardest things for older people is finding out about and then getting the right type of care and support when they need it.

At Apartments for Life there will be a care advisor to help residents obtain necessary care assistance from one or more of the care agencies in the area. The care advisor will

Professor Tony Broe, Professor of Geriatric Medicine, Prince of Wales Hospital:

The Benevolent Society proposal to provide innovative affordable housing in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs brings Australian housing for older people into the 21st century.

provide hands-on help to enable residents to connect with the type of care and support that they need, such as:

- personal care (e.g. toileting, showering, dressing)
- housekeeping, laundry, help with meals
- nursing (e.g. dressing wounds, administering medicines)
- loans of equipment (e.g. walking frames)
- help with paperwork (e.g. paying bills)
- day care for people with dementia
- respite for their carer.

Depending on what residents need, this assistance can be anything from occasional, once a fortnight or once a week, to every day or several times a day and at night (that is, up to a level equivalent to the care received in a hostel or a nursing home).



The care advisor will also:

- negotiate with health and care services on residents' behalf
- discuss with residents' families about how they might help more, if appropriate
- arrange for volunteers to visit isolated residents
- help organise transport, e.g. for people to go on an outing or to see a specialist.

There will be staff on site during the day and at least one person always on site at night to respond to emergencies.

HERITAGE AND GREEN SPACE

The site includes the heritage-listed Scarba House. It is one of the area's best Victorian mansions and one of the few to retain some of its original grounds. It will be opened up for use by residents and people living nearby.

- Scarba House will be refurbished and enhanced.
- Substantial landscaping will be undertaken to create an attractive open area for people to walk through and enjoy.
- Half of the site will be publically accessible open space.
- Cars will be banned from the carriageway, making the area safer and more pleasant for pedestrians.
- Underground parking will relieve pressure on street parking. 'Go-Get' share cars will be parked at the site for community use.

What attracts me about this project for my mother? She wouldn't have to move again. You want things to be reassuring at this stage of life, not all the confusion, things getting lost etc that can happen if you have to move again. And the apartments would be designed with the necessary equipment for when she needs it.

Daughter of local resident
Details supplied

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The complex will have a range of community facilities for use by nearby residents as well as residents of the site.

- Rooms of various sizes for flexible use; for example, for local club meetings, craft groups, social activities, fitness classes, adult learning etc.
- A café offering meals, a child-friendly area and basic supplies for people with limited mobility.
- A day centre where people with dementia can go for the day, be looked after by trained staff and give their family members a much-needed break.
- A men's shed or workshop where older men can spend time with others and work on their own or community projects.
- Consulting rooms for health professionals, e.g. doctor, podiatrist, diabetes nurse.
- A program of social and recreational activities, some involving local schools.

The Society owns the site proposed for the project at 18-22 Ocean Street and 30 Wellington Street, Bondi. Under this proposal the Society will retain ownership for future generations.

More information

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