

Questions and Answers

Q. What is Apartments for Life and how does it differ from other housing for older people?

A. Apartments for Life is an innovative model of housing, care and support. It enables older people to stay in their home until the end of life, maintain their independence and links with the local community, and receive care in their home when needed.

This project will allow older people to stay in Waverley, close to family, friends and support services, in housing that is appropriate to their needs.

The key differences between it and most retirement housing are that:

- Residents will be able stay living in their own apartments for as long as they wish, with no need to move again when their health declines
- 40 per cent of apartments will be affordable housing, thus making it possible for people to stay in the local area
- Half of the site and the ground floor community facilities will be open to the public for use by local residents.
- There will be a major focus on reducing and avoiding social isolation.

Q. Some residents opposed to the plan say the complex is too high and over dense. Aren't you just adding another high-rise block to the area?

A. Our goal is to provide appropriate and affordable housing and care for older people. We are proposing a complex of two multi-storey buildings terraced across several levels from four to ten storeys, to blend in with the existing streetscape.

The higher floors have been located to minimise the impacts on neighbours' views and respect the heritage elements of the site. Careful positioning of buildings allows views to be shared with neighbours and to minimise overshadowing.

Some 75 per cent of the overall site is open space, and 50 per cent will be fully accessible to the local community. Improved public access to and from the site Dickson Park will encourage people to walk through.

Historic Scarba House will be restored to its original glory at a cost of \$2.4 million.

There will be extensive planting of new trees and improving the health of the site's iconic Moreton Bay figs.

All the community facilities at ground floor level will be open to the public.

Q. Why more aged housing in this area?

A. It is a well accepted fact that Australia's older population is growing at an unprecedented rate. In 2006, there were 2.7 million people over the age of 65.

By 2036, this is expected to more than double to 6.3 million – representing 24 per cent of Australia's total population.

Over the next 30 years, the population aged over 85 – the group more likely to need some assistance with daily living – will increase the most rapidly.

The majority of Australia's housing stock does not take into account people's needs in later life. Many older people get to a stage where they are unable to manage steps or stairs, use their bathroom safely, keep up the garden, or cope with repairs and maintenance. The lack of suitable and affordable alternatives means they often have to move out of their familiar community, or have to move prematurely to a nursing home or hostel.

Unsuitable housing also contributes to social isolation among older people ('shut-ins') whose health is poor or who do not have access to transport.

When older people move away it means their valuable contribution to the local community – as volunteers, mentors, carers of grandchildren etc – is lost.

The complexity of the system of care services that can support people in their own home, compounds the problem. Older people, and family members who want to help their older relatives, often find it very difficult finding out what's available.

This situation is no different in Waverley.

Q. But why Bondi?

A. Apartments for Life addresses the lack of affordable housing in Waverley that is appropriate to the needs of older people, and the growing demand for better support of frail older people in the area.

The proposed Bondi location is ideal for ensuring that older people can maintain their independence and their links to the community, even when their health is poor. The site is close to public transport and a walk or short bus ride to shops, services and recreational facilities.

Q. How is the proposal different to a private development of the site?

A. The Society wants Apartments for Life to be truly part of the local community, with facilities on the site that will have broad community benefits, not just for residents.

These include meeting rooms, a workshop/craft room, space for wellness and health promotion programs, exercise space, a café, and a day centre for people with dementia.

The inclusion of a significant amount of affordable housing also sets it apart from a private development.

Residents will have use of a service coordinator, someone to give them advice and assistance and who can organise support for them, when needed.

The project has the backing of The Benevolent Society which has been in existence for 195 years, longer than any other charity in Australia.

Q. Is this a joint venture with a private developer?

A. No. The Society is developing and financing this project on its own.

The Society's commitment to this important project is such that it is prepared to carry a significant deficit for several years after the project is fully operational.

Q. Why do you need to build to 10 storeys?

A. The Society has carefully located the higher parts of the buildings and made these a more slender design, to ensure the least impact on neighbours.

The Society is aiming to be able to include a significant number of people who could not afford to live in other retirement villages in the area.

In order to deliver on the 40 per cent affordable housing target and inclusion of community facilities, the complex has to be economically viable. If the number of units, and therefore height, was reduced the project would not be viable.

The Society is happy for Waverley Council to examine and independently verify its financial calculations and draw its own conclusions.

Q. Apart from providing affordability for a number of residents and a new model for accommodation for older people, what other benefits are there?

A. Total Australian, State and Territory Government recurrent expenditure on aged care services is around \$8.6 billion a year. Of this, expenditure on nursing home or hostels costs government around \$5.6 billion a year. (2005–06 figures, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare).

A key objective of Apartments for Life is to reduce the chance of people ever entering a nursing home or hostel. The aim is that no more than five per cent of residents would need to move to a nursing home or hostel.

Achieving this objective will result in significant cost savings for the community. These savings will flow from lower cost home-based community care replacing higher cost nursing home and hostel care services; reduced travel times and petrol costs of visiting careworkers; greater self-reliance among residents and support from neighbour and family members thus reducing the need for higher cost formal services; reduced costs of lower rates of hospitalisation.

Recent independent cost benefit analyses have shown that secure and appropriately designed housing can decrease the costs of care to the community.

Expert research reveals another upside for the community. As older people move into Apartments for Life, under-utilised housing stock will be freed up for younger families.

Q. Opponents say the project will obscure views and block the sunlight of some existing residents.

A. The Society has worked hard to position and design the buildings so that they have the least impact on solar access to, and views from, our neighbours' properties.

Most people's views are either down the streets or through the park site. The plans seek to retain these view lines.

The Society assembled a panel of independent experts to review the project against the state government's design guidelines for residential apartment buildings. The project design was endorsed by the panel and considered by them to be a responsible urban design approach for the site.

For most neighbouring residents, the proposed design achieves solar access standards set out in the Council's Development Control Plan (DCP).

Q. Do older people really want to live in high rise?

A. Yes, many do. In this area, according to the 2006 Census, 45 per cent of older lower income households live in high rise apartments (defined as 4 storeys and more).

As seen in Ultimo-Pyrmont, for example, on retirement many older people are choosing to live in apartments. There are a number of successful examples of multi-storey retirement complexes, including the Docherty Apartments in Willoughby. These are 8-10 storeys and have a long waiting-list.

Apartments for Life is not a typical high-rise, as it has been specially designed for older people and includes features such as meeting spaces and safety elements that go beyond legislative compliance.

Q. Some people have expressed concern on the issue of fire safety.

A. Fire safety is obviously very important and has been considered right from the start by our architects. The Society has taken into account that some residents will not be very mobile and the design includes provisions for appropriate access and egress beyond those specified in the Building Code of Australia, so that in an emergency, residents are able to leave safely and fire and emergency authorities are able to enter to assist residents.

To that end, special features include specially designed lifts that can be used during an emergency; design that overcomes the need for heavy fire doors, which older people often cannot open; and refuges in the fire stairs where people can wait safely before being helped or carried down.

In addition, the two lifts in each building are centrally located and wide enough to allow for people who use walking frames, wheelchairs or who are on a stretcher. There will be an active fire protection system throughout and personal alarm systems in all apartments.

All of these features will be supported by a management regime, and close liaison with local fire authorities, to ensure an appropriate response in an emergency.

Q. There is an argument that the project will lead to an increased environmental footprint for the site (water, power, traffic, fauna and flora).

A. Apartments for Life will be a high quality example of environmental sustainability – a project that goes beyond legislative compliance to minimise its environmental footprint.

A range of measures will be implemented to reduce the use of energy, water and private transport, and also through building materials selection and design.

Buildings will be positioned to maximise the flow of natural light and air; there will be no air conditioning, unless absolutely required due to a resident's medical condition. There will be rainwater harvesting for toilet flushing and drip irrigation; and on site water detention.

The project will maximise open space – almost three-quarters of the site will be open space; and encourage walking and use of motorised scooters, cycling, public transport and the share car service already on site. A community garden is also proposed.

Q. Are you seeking a green star rating and will you be carbon neutral?

A. We believe that our initiatives will enable us to reach a positive green star result for the complex as a whole. As part of the DA process, we are applying to be a part of the Green Building Council of Australia's (GBCA) pilot of a new tool to measure sustainable apartment building design.

This assessment would inform the construction methods and materials that we use to realise the project, and also provide guidance on the best way to achieve an exceptional green star rating for the complex.

Q. Won't the project result in more cars coming into and out of the site, creating greater congestion and increasing safety issues?

A. The Society believes this is not the case.

An independent traffic study commissioned by The Society revealed that when the Maurice O'Sullivan Childcare Centre was in full operation there were 263 traffic

movements (trips) to and from the site per day. The childcare centre generated the bulk of these (157), through pick-up and drop-off.

Most of these trips occurred at peak times of the day – 8am - 9am and 4pm - 6pm.

Apartments for Life will be a different use for the site, meaning slightly fewer trips to and from the site per day, and trips distributed across the day, relieving the strain on peak times.

While Chapman House was fully operational, an average of 26 cars per day belonging to staff and visitors were being parked on Ocean Street, as it had no parking spaces of its own.

The proposal is for a total of 85 parking spaces – 78 underground on-site car spaces, with entries from Ocean Street and Wellington Street; 4 spaces in a stand-alone building on the north-eastern corner of the site; and 3 spaces for car sharing (Go Get cars) for use by local residents.

Experts report that this allocation will provide enough spaces to meet the needs of site residents, visitors and staff, while catering for the access needs of residents with mobility difficulties and easing demand on neighbourhood street parking.

Q. What will happen to the heritage listed parts of the site?

A. We want the site to be a heritage precinct open to the public with Scarba House and its setting (including the loop carriageway and the defining canopy of mature trees) as the centrepiece.

We will conserve Scarba House and its setting to return it to its former glory, including the removal of 20th century additions and reinstating and restoring the eastern and western verandahs.

A Conservation Management Strategy has been prepared by independent heritage specialists at the request of the Society. This has already guided our activities in preserving what makes the site special to us and our neighbours and will continue to do so.

The Strategy has been developed in accordance with Local Government and State Government heritage guidelines, including the Local Environmental Plan and the Burra Charter.

Q. Surely this larger cluster will this reduce the amount of open space?

A. Not so. Almost three quarters of the site overall will be open space, and half of the site overall will be open space that is fully publicly accessible for the entire community to enjoy.

We are proposing to significantly improve the open space on the site and enhance public access to and from Ocean Street, Wellington Street and Dickson Park.

Q. Are you taking over Dickson Park?

A. No, the park is managed by Council; any decision about the park is a matter for Council.

We understand the value of open space to the local community and we are proposing to open up connections between our site and Dickson Park to improve public access.

We will work closely with Council and the community every step of the way on this issue.

Q. Will you be removing the Moreton Bay figs?

A. We intend to improve the health of these significant trees by conserving the fig trees that are in good health; replacing trees where needed; growing new fig trees from the existing ones; removing paving from around the trees and stopping cars from parking on the tree roots, as they do at present.

Q. Some local residents claim The Society is abusing public land in undertaking this project. They say the land was gifted to The Society by the State Government.

A. This is incorrect. The Society owns the site. It acquired some parts of the site from the State Government and bought other parts at different times over the years.

Since 1917, the Society has been a responsible custodian and, then owner, of the site.

The Apartments for Life proposal – for 40 per cent affordable housing, care and support for older people – is consistent with the Society’s activities to assist people in need.

The Society has invested significant resources over the years on the site, on the buildings and services that it has run from there. Many of those services ran at a loss, for the benefit of the local community.

The Society’s activities are governed by many different Acts and regulations. Our financial accounts are publicly available.

You can find information about the history of the Society on our website. There is also a detailed history of Scarba Home for Children, which operated between 1917 and 1986.

Q. Some residents claim there has not been enough consultation with the community about the project.

A. We have been open and transparent from day one, and actively engaged with the public for almost two years, including holding an open project presentation before submitting the development application. We have diligently taken on board feedback from the public.

We have also staged two workshops for service providers and local residents and have incorporated their feedback into our design; distributed project newsletters to neighbouring residents; consulted with local older people’s organisations and local aged care service providers; established a project website; and set up a project specific email address for interested people to contact us directly. Members of the community have also been encouraged to contact us over the phone, and have done so.

Q. Have you really listened to the community?

A. Most certainly. We have heard what members of the community told us about our previous design. We have worked through nearly 30 revisions of the designs.

Our aim throughout has been to cause the least impact on local residents, while maintaining our commitment to affordable housing for older people.

We have listened especially closely to feedback from local older people to ensure that the project will meet their needs and concerns.

Q. Are you building retirement houses for the privileged? Isn’t this simply a project directed at the wealthy?

A. Not at all. Apartments for Life at Ocean Street directly addresses a lack of affordable housing that is appropriate to the needs of older people in Waverley.

We have worked very hard to develop a project that extends affordable housing to the largest number of people possible.

We expect that most, if not all, of the incoming residents will be age pensioners, i.e. people on low to moderate incomes.

40 per cent of the proposal is dedicated to affordable housing, as follows:

- 10 per cent will be 'social housing' for rent by people on very low incomes with no assets, who would be eligible for public housing.
- Another 30 per cent will be priced to be affordable by older people in a range of different financial circumstances. These people would need to demonstrate a strong connection with the Waverley area. These apartments would be subsidised by the Benevolent Society.
- The remaining 60 per cent will be available at market prices. We expect that the entry prices for these apartments will be at the lower end of the price scale prevailing at the time.

The apartments will be offered on a loan-licence basis (apart from the 10% for rent).

While we are certainly utilising best practice modern urban design, it is worth noting that most of the 127 apartments are 65 sq metres. The largest are 92 sq metres.

These case examples provide an insight into typical residents.

- ***Example of typical resident: In one of the 10 per cent social housing rental apartments***

An older person on a full age pension currently renting in the private market with income of \$17,000 a year including rent assistance. Currently rents a room paying 50 per cent, or more, of their income in rent and so has very little left to live on. He or she would move into Apartments for Life as a renter with their rent pegged at around 30 per cent of their income.

Recent academic research by the Australian Housing Research Institute (AHURI) showed that older renters are some of the most disadvantaged people in our community – some up paying 70 per cent of their income in rent, having to move frequently as their rent goes up, and unable to ask their landlord to do repairs or make modifications for fear that their rent will rise further.

- ***Example of typical resident: In one of the 30 per cent of apartments priced to be affordable by older people in a range of different financial circumstances***

An example would be a person on total income of \$25,000 per annum, from a part age pension and a small amount of super or income from savings. He or she owns a modest apartment.

The sale value of their current apartment means that they could not afford to buy a suitable dwelling elsewhere in the area, or make an entry payment at full market rate to move into Apartments for Life. They would pay a discounted entry payment subsidised by The Benevolent Society, and would need to demonstrate a connection with the area.

- ***Example of typical resident: In one of the 60 per cent of apartments at market prices***

An example would be a couple on a full age pension who have lived in a house they own in the area for 40 or more years. As full pensioners with no or minimal other income, their total income would be in range \$24,000 - \$30,000.

Their health is starting to decline and so they cannot get about as easily, they cannot afford to maintain the house properly nor make modifications to it. They can no longer do repairs themselves or look after the garden.

The sale value of their house means that they could afford to pay market rate entry payment to move into Apartments for Life, and have some funds left over to enable them to increase their income slightly.

Q. What is a loan-licence and why are you taking this approach?

A. The loan-licence arrangement is a common one in retirement housing. Residents pay an upfront capital entry payment and a weekly service fee.

The capital payment is refunded (in full, or minus a percentage agreed at the time of signing the contract) when the resident leaves or dies.

The rules governing retirement village living, residents' rights and matters such as repayment of loan licences are covered by strict regulations under the NSW Retirement Villages Act. More information is available on the Department of Fair Trading's website.

Q. Does The Society plan to sell the site?

A. The Benevolent Society has no plans to sell the site. If our plan is approved, we will own and manage the complex into the future, so that the affordable apartments remain that way. And we would continue to coordinate care and support services needed by people who live there.

It will remain a community asset and means our future in the area will be secured for generations to come.

Q. Why didn't you simply refurbish the buildings (Chapman House and Walter Cavill Village) that are already there?

A. Chapman House opened in the mid-1970s. Since then, standards of aged care have changed and, while Chapman House has been fully certified and accredited by the Government to operate as an aged care facility, its design and the condition of the building meant that it would have to close or be rebuilt at some stage.

It was a hard decision, but the Society decided that Chapman House would close in early 2008. We advised residents and their family members of this decision in October 2007.

Over a six month period we talked to residents and their families about their accommodation and care needs and where they would like to move to, and then helped them find alternative accommodation in the area.

All residents have now moved to appropriate accommodation and Chapman House closed on 28 March 2008. The vast majority of people – 39 of the 45 residents – moved to other accommodation in the Eastern Suburbs. The remaining six preferred to move elsewhere, to be closer to relatives.

The decision to close Walter Cavill Village over a three year period was announced in August 2003. The accommodation it provided was no longer suitable for supporting older people as they became frailer.

Over a three year period we assisted the residents to relocate to other suitable accommodation, until the village closed in 2006.

Q. Why are you closing down the Maurice O’Sullivan child care centre?

Like many charities, we need make hard decisions at times about where our efforts are most needed, and where to place limited resources.

After much agonising over the decision, we committed to closing the centre.

In December 2007, we advised parents that Maurice O’Sullivan Child Care Centre (MOS) will officially close on 5 January 2009. This means that, taking into account the normal Christmas-New Year shutdown, the last day of child care will be Friday 19 December 2008.

Our decision is consistent with our long-term policy to concentrate greater resources on supporting vulnerable families and children in disadvantaged communities.

The Society has owned and managed the Maurice O’Sullivan Child Care Centre since the early 1970s. This was a time when there were significant numbers of disadvantaged children in the Bondi area.

The decision to close is irrespective of the outcome of our plans for a new development on the Ocean Street site.

Parents, staff and other stakeholders were advised more than a year advance to lessen the impact and allow plenty of time for putting alternative arrangements in place.

We will continue to run our Sir Phillip Baxter Childcare Centre at Woollahra.

Q. Aren’t there vulnerable families in this community too?

A. By vulnerable families we mean those in which, for example, there has been abuse or neglect of children, drug and alcohol issues, or where children have been reported to the Department of Community Services (DOCS).

Our current programs focus mainly on supporting parents to develop strong relationships and parenting skills, providing early intervention services to vulnerable families with young children, working with children who have been abused or neglected and helping families overcome the stresses which lead to abuse.

We continue to run a number of programs like these in the Eastern Suburbs, including child protection and early intervention services.

Q. Why didn’t you include a new child care centre in the Apartments for life at Ocean St Project?

A. During our planning for the project, we looked very thoroughly at the feasibility of incorporating a child care centre on the site, to be run by another organisation.

However, after considering many different possibilities with our architect and other technical experts, our conclusion was that it would not be possible to include a new child care centre as well as meet the key goals of the project.

Q. What Council planning requirements apply to the site?

A. The site is zoned by Waverley Council as a special uses site so, strictly speaking, Council’s planning requirements for the local area do not apply.

However, the Society has used Council’s Development Control Plan (DCP) as a benchmark to guide its development, so that it is in keeping with Council requirements for and the character of the local area.

The Development Application has been submitted for consideration under the Seniors Living State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP). More information on Council's DCP can be found at <http://www.waverley.nsw.gov.au/council/pes/dcp/index.asp>

Q. Is this an appropriate use of the site?

A. The Benevolent Society is the owner of the Ocean Street site. The Society acquired some parts of the site from the State Government and bought other parts at different times over the years.

Since 1917, the Society has been the responsible custodian and, then owner, of the site. In 1941 the Society acquired freehold title of the main part of the site, including Scarba House, from the NSW Government.

The Society investigated whether there are any constraints on our use of the site and there aren't any. The Society believes that this proposal – for 40 per cent affordable housing plus care and support – is in keeping with its intention to assist those people in Waverley most in need.

Social cohesion and interaction will be enhanced if the project residents are broadly representative of the local older population of Waverley and that is our aim.

The site has been home to older people for many years. Prior to 2006 some 90 older people lived on the site in Chapman House or Walter Cavill Hall.

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