

Home-Making

Abstract

This is a study of the material environment of the shared lounge within a private development of retirement apartments, designed to support independent living (facilitating effective ageing in place). Architectural drawings are known to describe form, material and space (as-designed), but can also be used to record how an environment is used (as-lived). Participant observations and a photographic survey further reveal an ‘ecology of things’ and ways in which older people – acting as resident designers – inhabit the lounge, reshaping it to suit their needs. Proposed design enhancements respond to user feedback, yet work within the existing frameworks - grids, layouts, unit mixes, strategies - deployed by the developer provider.

Findings from the Lounge

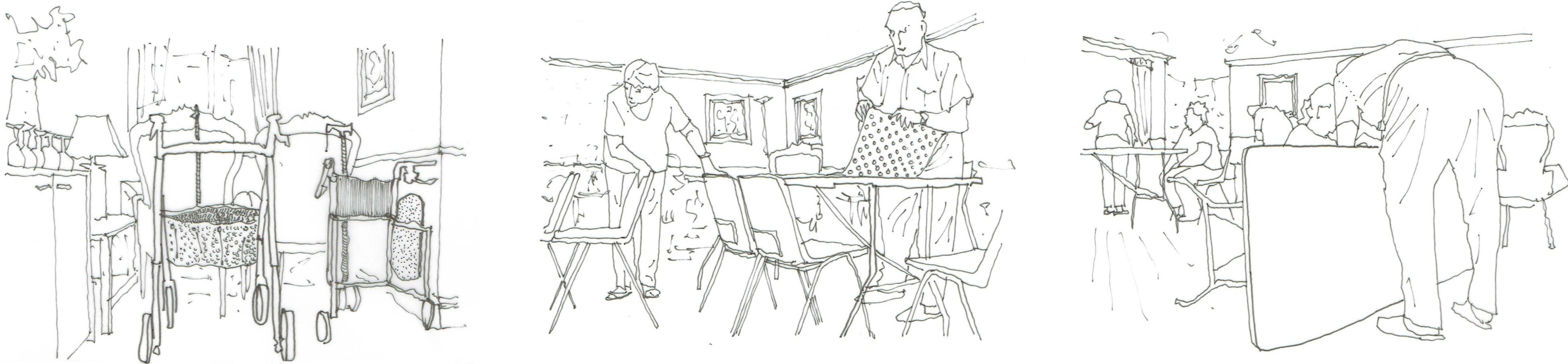
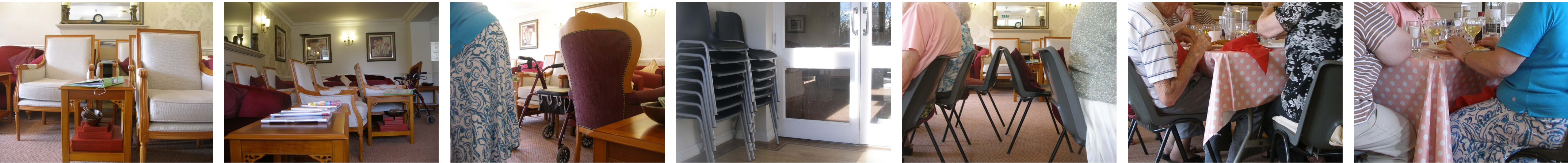
- Shared lounge facilitates companionship.
- Provides residents with a ‘big space’ for events.
- Lounge often used for a range of activities, sometimes in parallel.
- Furniture is reconfigured for different events.
- Storage is a real challenge, particularly for occasional furniture.
- The case study lounge is ‘too small’ for the number of people (occasional overcrowding).
- The kitchen/tea point is ‘too small’ and hard to access during events.
- The shared WC is a ‘long walk’ from the lounge and is not fully wheelchair accessible.
- Main entrance leads directly into the lounge, compromising acoustic/thermal performance as well as resident privacy.

Biography

Sam Clark is an architect engaged in practice, teaching and research; currently working towards a PhD by Creative Practice at Newcastle University in collaboration with a national house builder. His work is exploring new design approaches to housing in later life and involves ‘designerly’ forms of post-occupancy evaluation of independent living settings. Design is used as a method for synthesising research findings and testing emerging ideas.

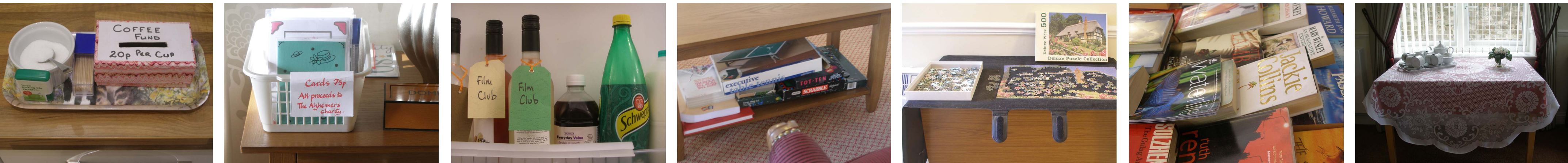
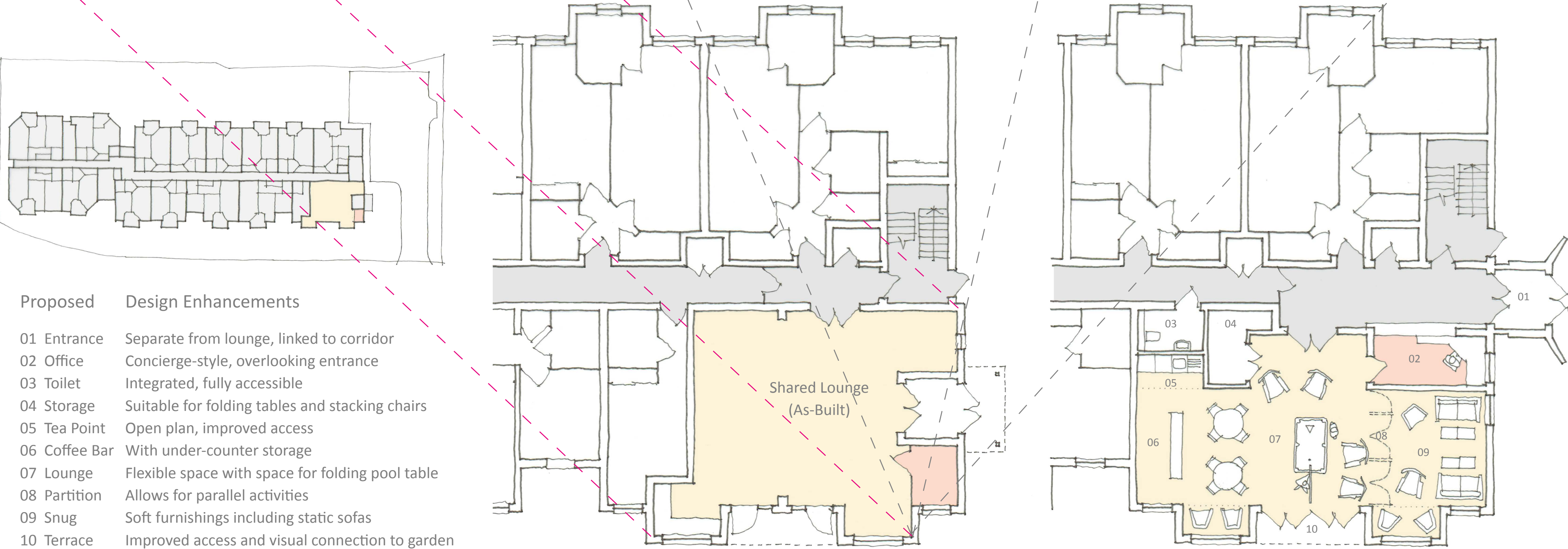
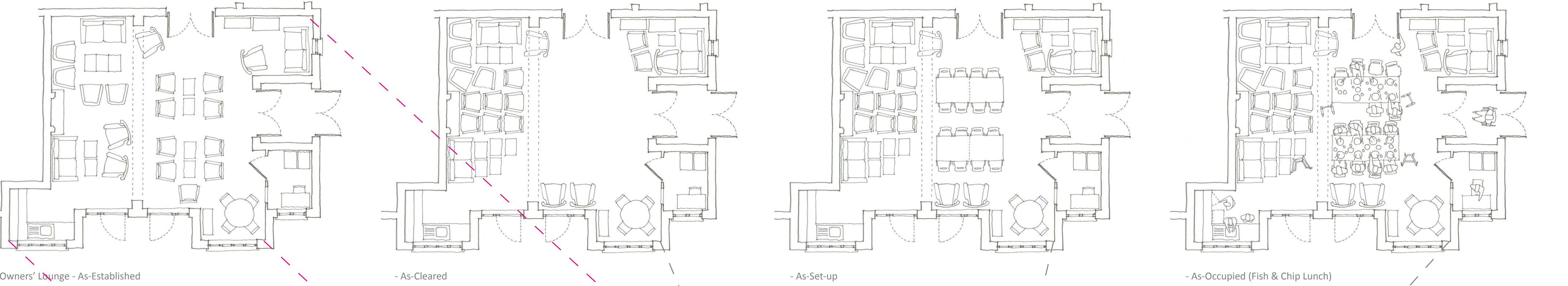
“In general, in the attempts to describe the ‘social’ aspects of architecture, language has let architecture down. Language’s particular strength – the creation of differences – has been of limited value in this domain; while the task of making evident a relationship between two such utterly disparate phenomena as social practice on the one hand and physical space on the other has proved to be largely beyond the capacity of language.”

Adrian Forty, ‘Dead or Alive – Describing the Social’, in Words and Buildings / A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture, (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) pp.102-117



“This is an occasion where you could do with 3 or 4 fit men [to move furniture]. Some can’t do it, some shouldn’t and others simply don’t...” (Resident)

“...some of the chairs and tables are quite heavy, and I’m not always here to help. I worry about the men with heart conditions...The sofas have caster wheels but are not designed for rolling - we had one break already.” (Manager)



“You see, this is the problem with this lounge - you can’t get out...you get stopped by people when you’re trying to go on holiday!” (Resident)

“Tomorrow’s wake is effectively a private function, but we can’t avoid walking through the lounge.” (Resident)

“The [lounge] kitchen is generally considered too small by those that use it... [and] the toilet is a long walk from the lounge.” (Manager)

“I used to play snooker... I could still play but would need to sit down on my walker and be near a toilet”. (Resident)

“It’s all new... These places did not exist when we were young. It was the workhouse for grandma...” (Resident)

“We would like a conservatory here – a place that feels like sitting ‘outside’ in the winter months.” (Manager)

“We moan a lot about the building, but social community is most important thing” (Resident)