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'Test bed' housing project to go next to hospital

HOMES FIT TO GIVE SUPPORT

An innovative new concept in housing, designed to keep people with complex health issues in their own homes longer, is coming to Nairn.

At a meeting of Nairn River Community Council last week it was announced that 10 one-bedroom Fit Homes are planned to be built on land between Nairn Hospital and the Manor Care Centre. The "technologically assisted" houses are specifically for people with health issues who require "extra support", such as those with MS or MND.

Another two-storey, 12 two-bed unit is also planned as affordable housing and will be built to the rear of the one-bed homes.

A presentation on the modular-built timber homes and how the project will integrate with Nairn Healthcare was given by Lucy Fraser, of Albyn Housing; Matt Stevenson, managing director of Carbon Dynamic (manufacturers of the homes) and Dr Adrian Baker, clinical lead at Nairn Healthcare.

Ms Fraser began by describing how one of Albyn's tenants had lain dead for more than a year in his home. The incident had led to the housing group being reported to the Scottish Government.

"There was publicity surrounding it about what the housing association could have done to prevent such a situation. The answer was: 'not a lot'."

Research into preventing similar situations occurring revealed that not many people wanted to wear personal alarms at home.

However, further research led them to looking into new technologies and whether they could monitor people's movements at home to make sure that if anything happened to them there is a system that would trigger an appropriate response, but it would also be a system they would have some control over themselves.

"It has to be something owned by the individual in the house who gives their permission for the data to be known by the NHS or whomever." Sensors would also be built into homes to monitor movements.

Ms Fraser said they began looking at a normal house and what it would need done to it to enable

people to stay in their homes longer. Health professionals were called in, while at the same time specific technologies were used to vision how the house would look and what people wanted it to do for them, including video contact with their GP and other health service providers.

The new homes will be rolled out in Alness in about two months' time with the Nairn homes planned for starting next June, providing planning permission is granted.

Ms Fraser said that the 10 one-bed homes were specifically aimed at people with health issues and not those on the housing waiting list.

Dr Baker described the project as a "really exciting venture".

"The site is adjacent to the hospital and is very much a test-bed for all parties just to see if we can look after people better in technologically-assisted housing.

"One of the key drivers for us is to be able to provide quite rapid clinical response with, potentially, Home Care."

He went on to say that from a technology perspective, such as the use of Skype, iPads, etc, it would be interesting to see how it works. "It's an interesting area with potentially two-way communication at the press of a button," said Dr Baker.

He said that for some people with the right housing it could keep them out of institutional care. "We think this is a really good development."

The cost of the new homes is being met jointly by Inverness Highland City Region Funding with matching funding from Albyn Housing Association.

Mr Stevenson said the site already had planning permission for a two-storey block of 12 flats.

"Nairn is an ideal place to take this project forward...to work in a collaborative way with Adrian and his team at the hospital."

He said his firm could deliver about four houses a day and be ready to occupy a week later.

Dr Baker added: "What we're looking at here is a base where we can prove that the technology helps people to stay in their homes longer and if we can prove that and reduce moving on to institutional care we can have a good case for rolling it out to existing housing."



Dannielle Logan, from Nairn, shows off the "Derek Award", which the musical she was starring in at this year's Edinburgh Festival Fringe was judged the best. Also at the Fringe has been Caitlin Sherret, from Nairn. For the full story on the two women, see page 13

Cllr Liz MacDonald said: "This is a ground-breaking innovative project, leading the way in Scotland and we must really thank Lucy and Adrian for having the vision for bringing this to Nairn. It is incredible what they're doing. It's giving people the opportunity to live in their own home that can be adjusted to fit their needs.

"As Councillors we're always saying we want some of the (Inverness Highland) City money to come to our

town. This is a significant investment in Nairn and we need to embrace it."

Nairnshire Area Committee Chairman Cllr Tom Heggie said the project would give people "moving through their life" more choice.

"No one is going to hike someone out of a house and force them into another one, but when they get to a particular point they have to make a decision and this will be another layer in their options."