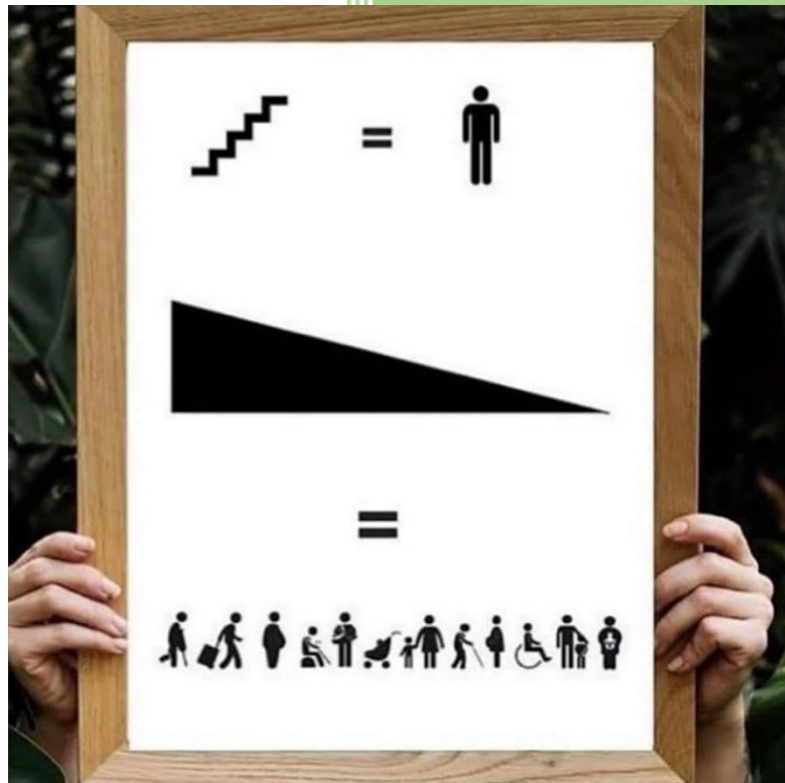


2021

# Blenheim George Street Changes



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## **Background**

The proposed Blenheim street development will consist of 6 ground and 6 first floor one-bedroom apartments. This apartment complex is designed for “elder” residents who will rent the apartments from the Council. The complex is designed for “active life stylers” and therefore no lifts have been included in the design and the principles of Universal Design have been largely ignored.

The driving force behind these decisions is based on affordability considerations and a desire to keep construction costs low, therefore enabling lower rent costs to be passed onto the residents.

## **Universal Design**

Universal Design is an inclusive approach to design that includes everyone regardless of age, stage or ability. This means that the design considerations enable all people, particularly older and disabled people to live more independently and to have more choice and control over their lives.

The proposed design excludes disabled people, particularly people with mobility impairments to both visit and live in the first-floor apartments. Similar outcomes apply to a wide range of people including people with temporary mobility impairments because of accidents or illness and obese people who find climbing and descending stairs difficult. In addition, visitors such as pregnant women and families with young children may not be able to easily access the first floor, and ambulance officers will also have difficulty with stretcher access.

The proposed design also assumes that the “active life styler” will always be immune from illness and/or accident.

## **Lifetime vrs Construction**

A building today is expected to have a usable asset life of around 100 years. During this period the building should be able to respond to the changing requirements of the occupants. If the average occupancy is expected to be there for 5 years, then up to 20 different individuals, with their own whenua, family and friends will live and visit that same dwelling over the next 100 years. It will therefore be important to consider not only the needs of immediate occupants but also future occupants. The ageing and changing profile of the Blenheim region suggest that there will be considerably more older people, living longer, have more complex medical conditions that will require easy access for optimal living options.

The cost of renovation and retrofitting are estimated to be between 10 and 30 times the cost of the same specification at the time of the build.

If tenants are forced to move because of a change in their level of mobility, then this can be stressful and traumatic. In addition, tenure would therefore be based on mobility status which is a human rights infringement.

An age friendly design should also be a design that minimises falls in the home. Falls in the home are significant with over 1.7 million falls in the last 5 years across NZ, and this has a significant cost to society.

A universally designed dwelling minimises these costs.

## **Current Design**

The proposed floor plans were reported as being developed based on tenant feedback and existing plan layouts. A recommended approach is to compare the plans to Universal Design standards and best practice for elder living.

When designing a home a few key issues to consider are:

1. Improved task and ambient light ( we need 3 times more ambient light at 70 than we did when we were 20)
2. Install motion sensor lights
3. Lower beds
4. Higher toilets
5. Walk in showers (level entry step free with plenty of room)
6. Wider doors
7. Rocker light switches
8. Lever handles on doors and tapware
9. Slip resistant flooring

The following observations were noted on the George street designs with respect to how the structural and spatial layout would support a Lifemark 4-Star (Age-friendly) outcome:

1. Access to upper-level units and to ground floor units does not appear to support minimum Universal Design Best Practice.
2. Proposed layout of the bathroom has some critical spatial issues that would fail to support safe and independent use – particularly in regard in meeting the needs of less mobile older occupants.
3. The proposed open plan layout should support easy movement through the dwelling although some proposed slight design change modification could improve usability significantly particularly for occupants reliant on mobility aids such as walking frames/ sticks.

The Lifemark expert assessment would be that the proposed units would support approx. 30% of the minimum design requirements of Baseline Accessibility and would therefore provide an unsafe and potentially hostile living situation for an older occupant based on global Universal Design Best Practice.

The Lifemark team are currently providing assessment services to the Marlborough Sustainable Housing Trust on 3 homes in the Marlborough region.

## **Recommendations**

1. The floor plans should be reviewed to achieve a Lifemark 4-star certification
2. The designs should enable all people, particularly disabled and elderly people to have choice and control over where they live.
3. Watch the following video

<https://fb.watch/5fc-bGyJVM/>