

An architect's guide to strategic planning



Refurbishing or expanding your care property portfolio? Peak Architects' Paul Holden shares insights on how to make smart, future-proof development decisions.

Produced in partnership with Peak Architects.



As the need for social care expands and the regulatory environment changes, care organisations must carefully consider their wider development needs. This is best done with experienced chartered architects and specialist building contractors who have a firm grip on the sector and its unique challenges.

Success in developing and expanding your care facilities to, for example, prepare for increased demand or align to regulatory standards should begin with a comprehensive property and design evaluation. During this process, you can test the waters and work with an architectural firm to explore various alternatives.

Refurbishment or new development can be stressful, disruptive, and costly. “It’s therefore critical to carefully examine your operational challenges, specific facility requirements, and efficiency concerns,” says Paul Holden, Founder and Director of Peak Architects.

This process is best done through an extensive, collaborative process in which a high-level, holistic development plan is created – a process Peak Architects has perfected.

“Maintaining quality care while refurbishing requires **meticulous planning** and **phasing**.”

A growing need for more complex care

The World Health Organisation (WHO) projects a dramatic demographic shift worldwide: a **40% surge in the 60+ population by 2030**, followed by a two-fold increase by 2050.

Like many other countries, the UK faces a “crisis of care”. By 2040, we’re expected to see a **69% rise in seniors** who need help with everyday tasks compared to 2015. This growing care need extends beyond the ageing population, with projected

increases in adults living with learning disabilities, mental health conditions, and physical impairments.

Care organisations wanting to expand or update their facilities to accommodate these shifts or provide better quality care often face a crucial choice between refurbishment and new construction. Each path presents pros and cons that must be carefully weighed against objectives.





Refurbishment vs. new build

While refurbishing existing properties usually requires less initial capital, it can have an impact on the operational requirements of the business.

“Maintaining quality care while refurbishing requires meticulous planning and phasing,” says Paul. “Not only is this the residents’ home, but unknown building conditions can present unexpected challenges,

Refurbishing existing properties can have an **impact** on the **operational requirements** of the business.

potentially extending project timelines and increasing costs. The build quality, spatial layouts, and specifications of any existing buildings often mean providers’ aspirations can be difficult and costly to achieve.”

New construction, in turn, offers the advantage of purpose-built facilities that adhere to current care standards, CQC regulations, and current building regulations. This translates into improved efficiencies and reduced maintenance and running costs.

“While requiring higher upfront investment, new construction usually provides cleaner project delivery and fewer operational disruptions,” Paul says.

“ Although **new construction demands a higher initial investment**, it typically **ensures a smoother project execution** and **reduces** medium- to long-term **operational costs** and **interruptions**.”



However, he continues, the return on investment period is generally much longer, and project viability can be challenging. “With a new facility, the build can be efficient.

However, it will likely take up to 24 months to realise a mature level of occupancy, operational stability, and quality of care across the home.”

“In contrast, a refurbishment or extension can be achieved with little to no impact on occupancy or the residence experience in the home. Of course, this is dependent on the scale or type of works.”

The key, says Paul, is to have a holistic, long-term view of the property’s development and all the potential ways it could yield a high return on investment over time.

The importance of scenario planning

Paul urges care providers to follow a strategic, step-by-step process that allows enough time for thoughtful consideration, deliberation, and refinement of architectural plans and scenarios. This process should involve close collaboration with your chosen architectural firm and any other relevant stakeholders, including care staff, residents, and their families.

“This is where we add the most value,” says Paul, referring to the structured process Peak Architects has developed.

“We look at different layouts and options against which we assess the associated risks. We explore how much each scenario (e.g. refurbishment, new development, or a hybrid approach) would cost, the potential value and operational benefits, the impact on existing residents and staff, and at what point you’ll get returns.”

During this process, many interesting opportunities and options may arise.

“The short-term fix could **stand in the way** of a better long-term solution.”



“For example, you may have a beautiful Victorian manor house or gentleman’s residence currently used as a care home,” Paul explains. “If it has a fantastic location with breathtaking views, you may find it makes more sense to change the use of the building, sell it (perhaps to a hotel or residential operator), and use the revenue to fund the development of other sites within your portfolio.”

A strong team of architects, designers, quantity surveyors, and engineers can also use the “optioneering process” to explore practical strategies that will save costs over the long term.

“As the schemes develop, we can bring in efficiencies,” Paul says. “Simple actions, such as maintaining floor-to-ceiling heights at 2.6m in all new buildings – which allows for the use of standard plasterboard sheets – can make a massive difference in terms of costs.”



Future-proofing our care organisations

Paul emphasises that immediate operational needs shouldn't stand in the way of long-term strategic planning.

Unfortunately, Peak Architects often sees care organisations making instant, unconsidered decisions. "Be careful of jumping in too quickly and reacting to 'I need this' without considering your longer-term goals," Paul says. "The short-term fix could stand in the way of a better long-term solution."

With the care landscape set to change dramatically over the next 20-25 years, it's crucial to anticipate your future requirements for facilities, spaces, and equipment, even if they seem unnecessary right now.

"For example, look at incorporating features like reinforced ceilings for

future hoisting equipment and designing spaces that can be readily modified to meet changing care requirements."

Other practical examples include installing magnetic pads beneath bathroom tiles for future grab rail installation and designing bathroom doors with removable panels above them to allow future hoist track installation. It also makes sense to plan for a potential unit subdivision, ensuring the overall building design allows for the compartmentalisation of bedroom clusters.

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This level of planning, says Paul, is particularly important for specialised dementia care units. "We're definitely finding that the level of complexity is increasing – a result of factors such as higher dementia rates and increasing wheelchair use."

Involve all stakeholders in the planning process

Successful care environments ultimately depend on the people within them. Good facility planners recognise this reality, aiming to create spaces that enhance staff efficiency while maintaining a homely atmosphere for residents.

Paul says it's crucial to involve staff and residents in the discussion. Ask them to help identify current workflow patterns, service delivery routes, and spaces that promote operational efficiency and resident well-being. "Just ensure you communicate in a way that helps to reduce these stakeholders' anxiety levels."

One practical example Paul's team implemented as a result of discussions with employees and residents was to position staff stations within lounges. This solution helps to ensure constant staff presence in the particular care home, providing residents with familiar points of contact.

"We see ourselves as **innovative thinkers** and **collaborators** on the care providers' journey."



Balancing immediate needs and future adaptability

Are you ready to start planning your refurbishment or new development? See those first consultations with your architects as very exploratory – an opportunity to test their thinking.

At the same time, be open to being challenged by them. If they're as good as the team from Peak Architects, they'll help you to develop the best possible long-term solutions.

"We see ourselves as innovative thinkers and collaborators on the care providers' journey," Paul concludes. "Where necessary, we challenge their perceptions of space and how to use it."



PAUL HOLDEN, Founder & Director of Peak Architects

More about Peak Architects

Paul Holden has over 30 years of experience within the construction and architectural industry. He is an architect and urban designer who has developed landmark developments in central London and Birmingham.

Peak Architects is Paul's award-winning RIBA Chartered architectural practice which operates nationally, with our head office being based in Sheffield. Visit peakarchitects.co.uk to view their portfolio, or email paulholden@peakarchitects.co.uk to set up a consultation.