

PLANNING TO MEET THE HOUSING NEEDS OF OLDER PEOPLE – AN INTRODUCTION FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Why more housing is needed for older people

The older population is the most rapidly growing sector of the population: the number of households in England aged 75 and over is set to increase from 2.97m to 3.7m by 2021.

Many older people will want or need to move to retirement housing for one or more reasons:

- A desire for greater security or companionship following loss of a partner
- To reduce the cost of heating and maintaining a larger home: 59% of older home owners, 29% of private renters and 16% of social renters have 2 or more “spare” bedrooms
- Because the home is unsuitable for adaptation for a disabled person due to features such as external steps, steep internal stairs and narrow doorways
- To maintain independence or access care or support
- Mental illness linked to social isolation¹ due to limited mobility, sensory impairment or living alone
- The home may become less suitable due to location and lack of access to public transport.

There is an acute shortage of specialised retirement housing

Retirement housing comes in many forms specifically designed and managed to meet the combined housing and support needs of older people. Typical types include Sheltered Housing, Assisted Living/Extra Care and Close Care. Accommodation is self-contained (unlike in care homes), age restricted and usually provides communal facilities and support services.

The acute shortage of specialised housing for older people is greatest in the private sector. While 75% of older households are home owners² (and most will wish to remain so), the proportion of social rented retirement housing is disproportionately high: 75% of the 518,125 units of Sheltered and Extra Care accommodation in England in 2013³ was for social rent. Only about 124,000 were owner-occupied.

How should planning policy support the delivery of retirement housing?

The National Planning Policy Framework⁴ (NPPF) refers specifically to the needs of older people. It states that: *“local planning authorities should plan for a mix of housing based on current and future*

¹ Identifying the health gain from retirement housing, Institute of Public Care, Oxford Brookes University, June 2012

² 2011 Census, DC4201EW - Tenure by ethnic group by age - Household Reference Persons

³ Housing and Care Homes for Older People in England Key Data Report, Elderly Accommodation Counsel, August 2013

⁴ National Planning Policy Framework, Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2012

*demographic trends, market trends and the needs of different groups in the community (such as, but not limited to, families with children, **older people**, people with disabilities, service families and people wishing to build their own homes) and identify the size, type, tenure and range of housing that is required in particular locations, reflecting local demand.”*

National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) emphasises the importance of assessing and planning for the housing needs of older people and the wider policy benefits of downsizing: *“The need to provide housing for older people is critical given the projected increase in the number of households aged 65 and over accounts for over half of the new households ... Plan makers will need to consider the size, location and quality of dwellings needed in the future for older people in order to allow them to move.”*⁵ The guidance requires the full range of need, i.e. *“types of general housing, such as bungalows”*, sheltered, extra care, registered care to be assessed and broken down by tenure.

Planning policy should recognise the changing nature of local communities and proactively encourage the provision of a range of attractive housing options that encourage owner occupiers to move and down size thus freeing up underused family housing. This should not be regarded as "planning" in isolation; it should have regard to the wider issue of ageing and the attendant cost.

There will be demand for both sheltered housing and Extra Care, as well as general “downsizer” housing. Low car ownership and traffic generation make specialist older people’s housing particularly suitable on many sites where general residential schemes will not work. Extra Care schemes, offering care services and more extensive community facilities are typically larger than sheltered schemes and may therefore need a larger site. The requirement that, under S.106 or CIL, Sheltered or Extra Care/ Assisted Living housing for home ownership should provide for the same infrastructure (e.g. education) as general needs housing is an example of both unnecessary cost being added and a restriction of the total amount of provision that can be made for older people. More information on the economics of retirement housing provision is available in Community Infrastructure Levy And Sheltered Housing/Extra Care Developments: A Briefing Note On Viability prepared For Retirement Housing Group by Three Dragons⁶. Planning policy should be part of a holistic, corporate local authority strategy for an ageing population based on a detailed understanding of the age profile of an area and also involving housing, health and social care.

Specified sites in “amenity rich” sustainable locations should be earmarked for development to meet the needs of older person households. This should include sites in the local authority's ownership.

Where policies and targets for the provision of housing for older people are developed, we believe that outcomes should be monitored and included in Annual Monitoring Reports.

The demographics of an ageing population pose challenges for all sectors of society. Providing wider accommodation choices for older people should be a fundamental consideration in planning for the future.

RHG is happy to meet with local authority members and planning officers to discuss policy development and provide examples of effective practice.

www.retirementhousinggroup.com email: rhg@retirementhousinggroup.com

⁵ How should the needs for all types of housing be addressed? Paragraph: 021 Reference ID: 2a-021-20140306 , NPPG, March 2014

⁶ <http://www.retirementhousinggroup.com/publications.html>