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## **A DEAF UTOPIA – ‘Extra Care Village’ for Deaf and Hard of Hearing older people**

*Written by Craig Crowley, Chief Executive, Action Deafness*

My vision is for the very first Deaf Extra Care village to be planned, developed, built and delivered by Deaf people for older Deaf people in England. Here residents will live in a safe, accessible environment where communication needs will be met and Deaf culture celebrated. Older Deaf people will be able to live independently, maintain their lifestyle and wellbeing and receive care support in the latter stages of their lives.

**Our Aim:** To move from concept to exciting reality the project requires scoping, consultation, planning and developing, with specific consideration of the needs of potential clients. Our aim is to identify and deliver the outcomes of an agreed strategy to raise the expectations of those involved.

My organisation has already established a development team to plan for a high quality and value for money Deaf Extra Care accommodation within an accessible community facility. There is an exciting blend of experienced Deaf professionals and hearing professionals who bring knowledge and skills from health & social care, the third sector and the private sector.

Importantly, older Deaf people, who have expressed an interest in Deaf Extra Care housing for themselves, will be involved in all stages of the consultation, design, construction and delivery to ensure that needs are met and maximise the outcomes of the project.

**Our Team:** Sustainability is a key value which will be promoted through the consultation, development and design phase to produce an Extra Care scheme that is ‘green’, ‘affordable’ and ‘in-keeping with the surroundings’.

Our main aim is to meet all client requirements (investors, commissioners and end users) to deliver an Extra Care scheme on time which is value for money with high quality design. Client interaction is a vital part of the development team in order that we understand the needs of the investors in terms of a return on investment.

**An Ageing Population:** The Deaf population in the UK is fast ageing. By 2035 the population of Deaf British Sign Language users over the age of 65 is expected to be between 11,500 and 26,680 and the number of over Deaf people over the age of 85 is estimated to be between 2,500 and 5,800.

The increase in the general older population in the UK will drive the increase in the number of extra care housing apartments which will be required over the next decade. However, hard to cater for groups, like Deaf people, are likely be marginalised as the general ageing population puts greater pressure on the care sector.

**The Deaf Experience:** Many Deaf people state they have a cultural and linguistic identity, finding comfort and a sense of belonging with other Deaf people. This is not surprising as Deaf people share the same language, school experiences, life experiences and face similar challenges/barriers in society every day.

Deafness is often described as an "invisible disability" where non-Deaf people are unaware of the challenges that Deaf people face and equally unaware of the adaptations that are necessary. Deaf people feel they have to fight for the things that others take for granted and feel they are not understood by non-Deaf people despite legislation which should support their rights.

**Communication:** British Sign Language (BSL) is the preferred language of many Deaf people. To ensure residents are able to make informed choices regarding their housing and care needs and lifestyle choices BSL should be used as a given. Accessible communication is vital to ensure that patients or residents have positive social experiences which promote wellbeing. Unfortunately, most environments do not provide a fully inclusive environment for Deaf people and many Deaf people are in housing settings, hospitals and care homes where communication is limited at best. Furthermore, older Deaf people have poorer expected health and mental health outcomes due to previous life choices made with a paucity of information. As a result, older Deaf people are facing a future with insufficient support from housing, care, medical and social care services.

**The solution - Dedicated Extra Care Provision:** Action Deafness intends to work in partnership to build and run an Extra Care scheme, afforded in the communication & cultural mode of choice; that truly responds to the communication, housing, care, security, cultural and lifestyle needs of the older Deaf person.

Those who may be interested in partnership initiatives - particularly in housing provision and adult social care commissioning - please do not hesitate to contact Craig via email: [ceo@actiondeafness.org.uk](mailto:ceo@actiondeafness.org.uk); 0844 593 8440 (voice) 0773 986 3288 (sms only).

You can also download Craig's East Midlands Housing LIN presentation, 'DEAF UTOPIA: Extra Care Opportunity for Older Deaf People in the UK', at: <http://www.housinglin.org.uk/download.cfm?file=%2E%2E%5Csecure%5Cem%5Cevents%5C883%5CDeaf%5FUtopia%5FFinal%5FVersion%5F8%5F11%5F16%2Eppt>

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