



Future proofing our homes and neighbourhoods: time to get back to basics

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According to the recent GO Science Foresight Report on the 'Future of an Ageing Population'¹, the proportion of households where the oldest person is 85 years old or over is set to grow faster than any other group. By 2037 there are projected to be 1.42 million *more* of these households in England, an increase of a whopping 161%. Many more of us will be living alone in later life. GO Science predict that by 2037, 66% of all people living in one person households will be 65 years or older.

Much of our current housing stock and planned new developments are designed for families and 42% of homes in England and Wales have three bedrooms. You don't need to be a housing expert to see that, with the type of current housing supply and these changes in demand, we need to take action to avoid exacerbating a shortage in housing that meets our needs in later life.

Whilst specialised housing could form part of the answer, currently only 7% of older people live in these types of homes. Ideas such as intergenerational living and co-housing can be creative solutions but they are too niche to make much of a dent in expected housing demand. The real gains will need to be in mainstream housing. Adapting existing housing stock and building suitable new housing are the building blocks of future proofing our homes for an ageing population. This is not necessarily about whizzy new ideas or innovations, it is about delivering the fundamental things that housing experts have been shouting about for years.

Increasing the use of home adaptations, in the short term, will mean using the Disabled Facilities Grant wisely to ensure it reaches those who need it most. For those who self-fund home adaptations, improving the offer of advice and information is key. The bigger challenge is improving the product. Current home adaptations are functional but ugly (just picture a grab rail). They are not the kind of things that most of us would want to have in our homes. Given the amount of time and money many of us spend on home interiors, surely there is a market for well-designed attractive home adaptations which you could buy on the high street?

Building sufficient, suitable new homes for our ageing population requires effort from national and local government, housing associations and housebuilders. National government should lead the way with robust analysis of need, sharing good practice and providing the business case to housebuilders. Local governments need to know the age profile of their populations and projected housing needs. Plus, they need to use their planning powers to influence the types of houses that developers build.

1

<http://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/HousingOlderPeople/OlderPeopleHousingProvision/Telecare/?&msg=0&parent=987&child=9700>

Housing associations are well placed to provide suitable homes for sale or rent and to be advocates for age-friendly housing.

The neighbourhoods we live in and our connectivity to others are as important as our homes when it comes to quality of life in later life. There is good evidence about the positive association between neighbourhoods; health and wellbeing. An age-friendly neighbourhood can provide us with opportunities to exercise, socialise and have contact with nature.

Some of the important things which can enable us all to continue to see our friends and family and do the things we enjoy in later life, are at the less glamorous end of public policy. Such as maintaining the built environment –uneven pavements are a common cause of falls in later life; and a lack of seating or public toilets can be barriers to getting out and about.

In terms of where we live in later life, people over 50 years old comprise 50% of the population in small towns and rural areas and this is projected to increase by 2037. Maximising the accessibility of transport, especially in rural areas and ensuring supply meets demand is vital to enabling us to be physically and socially connected in later life.

The evidence in the GO Science report on homes and neighbourhoods is an important reminder that when it comes to future proofing for later life, sometimes the best thing to do is go back to basics.

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