



Back to the future with homes for multi-generational living

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Much of the discussion around housing an older population has focused on extra-care accommodation. But multi-generation homes are still high on the agenda.

We are faced with an ageing society, with individuals living longer and more often better, but equally challenged by significant increases in house prices across much of the country. That, coupled with the austerity measures, youth unemployment, under employment, and difficulties in seeking any first rung on the housing ladder has led to younger people taking longer before they leave home or start their own steps to secure rent or property.

Taken together with the rising costs of childcare for working parents, and indeed the care of any group of people, means that it is often more pragmatic and cost-effective for individuals to live together, whether as a result of desire or demand. Indeed, many developers are now looking at the prospect of homes for life and the idea of a granny annexe or granddad flat, long an aspiration of the middle classes, is making a comeback.

There are benefits to living together – it does allow savings to be made and care is more readily on hand – but it is impossible to ignore the potential conflicts which may arise, always emotional and often economic. Which leads us to the notions of ‘boomerang children’, those coming to live once again with parents having previously left for work or education, and the ‘sandwich generation’ with parents situated between elderly relatives and their own children.

We have seen many reports of older people looking to rent out rooms to younger people in exchange for care and support, and where they do not wish to or do not have any opportunities to downsize. They can share life experiences and opportunities with a younger person who may be better able to assist with day-to-day chores, and emotional support.

Does this mean, therefore, that we need not be looking at solutions for older people but focus once again on the younger person? Individuals will always seek security (whether of tenure, support or finances) and, properly considered, the taking in of a young person to occupy a vacant room can be effective. Such arrangement, however, should be on the basis of being a licence only, as opposed to a tenancy.

The ‘rent a room’ scheme can still be valid for income tax purposes, providing useful income for a third party. For those on benefits, consideration should be given to a potential impact upon housing benefit claims.

The usefulness of multi-generational developments should be given consideration: town and country planners are well-versed in the determination of the need for

contributions towards the costs of health, housing and education services in any major development: putting those all on to one site should equally be considered attractive.

The potential of tax incentives or housing grants to those who can provide care and support (outside of the benefits system) may also be a consideration. Indeed, a pilot scheme commenced in June of last year between Age UK Oxfordshire and Bovis Home Share aided by funding from Lloyds Bank Foundation and the Big Lottery Fund. It will be interesting to see how those schemes roll out into the future.

As with the sharing of any form of accommodation, or indeed the sharing of apartment or development blocks, there are always potential conflicts and barriers to inter-generational living across all divides: tenure, treatment and lifestyle choices, uncertainty about future needs and where those may require individuals to relocate. There will also be financial questions regarding, amongst other things, inheritance tax on jointly owned property, or shared assets that will need to be addressed.

With concerns voiced by many developers as regards the impact of government budgetary cuts on housing association rents, benefit levies and local housing allowance costs, we do need to be looking at alternative solutions to the housing of all of our population, old as well as the young.

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