



Housing LIN

Connecting people, ideas and resources

Baby boomers can lead us from ‘new age’ to *CollaborAGE*

Written by Jeremy Porteus, founder and director of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network

Has the penny dropped? The Housing LIN – and many of our partners and contributors – have argued for some time that a baby boomer generation accustomed to choice and quality design will not be passive consumers of retirement housing and care. Indeed, this was the focus of our [annual conference](#) this year where we launched an extremely useful [Housing LIN Case Study](#) by Jon Stevens that provides an overview of collaborative forms of housing for older people. In my view, they are the perfect demographic to usher in a collaborative approach to ageing – a term I have now coined: *CollaborAGE*.

With housing one of the fundamentals of life at any age, a *CollaborAGE* manifesto would surely begin with central and local government, house-builders and others working with older people to provide homes they want to live in. Homes that are situated within thriving, inter-generational communities.

This means house-builders actively involving older people in shaping their developments – rather than unveiling their own grand designs to potential customers in a thinly-disguised early marketing pitch. It means the industry (in its broadest sense), policymakers and town planners developing inviting, age-inclusive lifelong neighbourhoods as well as lifetime homes.

In its recent [HAPPI 3 inquiry report](#), the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Housing and Care for Older People celebrated improved design standards over the last decade, while calling for a new focus on the wider issues that continue to act as a brake on demand. It urged the Government to stimulate the ‘last home’ market with similar energy to that shown towards that for first home buyers. The report also urged us all “to reimagine life as we grow older, planning ahead, exploring all options and considering how best we can gain the most in our later years. Consideration of a move – ‘rightsizing’ – should be part of our forward thinking.”

Building on that active – and activist – approach, the APPG said older people should emulate their counterparts in America and elsewhere in exercising their voting power to lobby for national and local policies and strategies for better housing choices for life in retirement. The APPG cites the example of the American Association of Retired Persons which, discretely armed with the power of the ‘grey vote’, lobbies successfully on wider older people’s issues. The parliamentarians recommended that “the organisations working in this field should consider supporting the creation of a well-resourced representative body made up of, and speaking for, older people themselves”.

If that comes to pass, people in late middle-age and their older fellow-citizens should be well-placed to collaborate with industry in developing desirable homes and communities and to work with central and local government in shaping the policy and funding environment in which those communities can thrive.

This new age of collaboration could extend beyond the design of homes. As Sara McKee put it in her [Housing LIN Viewpoint](#): “The focus for many has purely been on bricks and mortar. If we’re going to create truly aspirational communities for seniors it needs to move beyond design and be about connection and relationships.”

In a more recent [Housing LIN Viewpoint](#), Ian Hooper argues: “The segregation of one section of the community in an ‘inward oriented home’ just because of age is a failed proposal and the baby boomers are looking for more enlightened prospects for later life.” These contributions recognise both that there is no single ‘ideal’ form of specialist housing – with older people wanting and deserving to choose from a range of options – and that many factors go into making a home attractive and aspirational.

The understandable desire to remain part of a wider community that Ian identifies returns us nicely to my ambition for *CollaborAGE*. Involvement in the community is one of the ‘five I’s’ that I’ve identified in a previous [Housing LIN blog](#). Older people want to retain their existing social networks and explore opportunities for wider social interaction with people from all generations.

Social interaction – whether in communal areas within specialist housing or outside in the wider community – is a key element of what I am trying to capture in the concept of *CollaborAGE*. It has been shown to benefit health and wellbeing resulting in stronger personal and community resilience.

A broader view of collaboration is gaining traction at a European level. Prosperous but ageing societies see it as part of their search for new and affordable approaches to meeting the needs and aspirations of older people. For example, Innovate UK recently awarded £1million to the ‘Give and Take Care’ project. This sees people volunteering time to support and care for older people. Their volunteering time is recorded and ‘banked’ – to be drawn down like a pension in their own later years. The concept has been trade-marked as the GAT pension – where the contributions and returns are made in time rather than money.

More broadly, last month 200 stakeholders and thought leaders from construction, health and social care, the financial sector, academia and the Third Sector gathered at NatWest HQ to discuss a Europe-wide approach to age-friendly homes and smart neighbourhoods. Amongst the key themes to emerge were the role of technology and the need for new forms of public and private sector collaboration around funding to encourage innovation. Gratifyingly, a third key theme was the appetite to share information, to collaborate and to co-create – participants wanted to work with stakeholders from sectors they would not normally engage or socialise with.

To coin a phrase, if we’re really all in this together then that means working together – collaborating.

Published on Monday, 4 July 2016 by the Housing LIN