



Housing LIN

Connecting people, ideas and resources

Is it time to have an ideal home exhibition for the retirement housing sector?

The idea might seem vaguely frivolous when the attributes of high-quality specialist housing for older people include such prosaic but vital considerations as adaptations and access.

But, for all the aspirational frippery that surrounds the annual Earls Court jamboree, it does have the virtue of putting designers, housing developers and builders in touch with their potential clients.

The Ideal Home Show website notes that “the main stunning feature of the Ideal Home Show is our fully built show homes”.

Influential documents such as ‘Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods’ and both the ‘HAPPI’ reports have been important contributions in raising the profile of specialist housing and emphasising quality.

However, so far, much of the resulting discussion has been about quantity and demographics challenges and virtually exclusive within professional circles. While this has been necessary it is not ideal.

We need to square up to the challenges and move the debate on so that it focusses even more on quality and, most importantly, shapes a conversation that includes the customer – older people.

By engaging with consumers and potential consumers, developers, construction companies, architects and housing, social care and planning professionals can redress the continuing British aversion to specialist retirement communities.

Market research, for example Demos’ recent think piece, ‘Top of the Ladder’, shows that well over half of those over 65 actually want to downsize with around a quarter interested in a retirement property.

We all need to be talking to those ‘interested’ in a retirement property and those older people who want to downsize but cannot see themselves in a retirement property.

This dialogue needs to highlight the best of specialist housing and the quality and design aspirations set out in projects such as HAPPI. However, it must also involve professionals and the sector listening to what older people want. What I have called a ‘living lab’.

The danger is that one day society will wake up to the fact that we need tens of thousands of retirement housing units. In our rush to meet that demand we may well repeat the mistakes of the post-war housing developments, including those that can be seen in some of the less desirable sheltered housing built in the 1960s and 1970s.

There was much to admire about the scale of ambition in the housing programmes of the three decades after 1945.

We need to match that ambition but also capture the aspirations of older people by asking them just what would be their ideal home?

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About the Housing LIN

For further information about the Housing LIN's comprehensive list of online resources and to participate in our shared learning, service improvement and networking opportunities, including our popular 'discovery visits', go to: www.housinglin.org.uk