

ARE WE READY FOR THE BOOM? HOUSING OLDER LONDONERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Older people are the fastest-growing demographic in the UK, and we are not ready. By 2035, the number of over-60s in London alone is expected to rise by 48%, and the over-80s group is set to increase by 70%. Assumptions that retirees will move (or can be moved) to the country are outdated: increasingly, older people are choosing to remain in cities.

This desire to stay in the city puts London's booming older population into direct competition for housing and space with families, professionals and students. While the latter groups can be more asset-poor, most can increase their income, something out of the question for most older people. How will they afford the housing they want, and as a sector, how can we afford to provide the amenities they need?

All groups want neighbourhoods with good transport links and services; soaring land values in desirable areas compound the challenge of making homes with any extra features viable. Creating high-quality, adaptable homes for older people in these areas requires innovative thinking – and policy intervention.



Through roundtables, site visits, workshops with older people, case studies and a pan-London survey, Future of London – with support and input from project partners Arup, Barton Willmore, British Land and Pollard Thomas Edwards – focused on three areas with potential to improve older people’s standard of living:

Planning & Policy: raising older people’s profile and addressing gaps

Across the country, planning policy has lagged behind growing need. While the ageing population booms, only 10% of local plans include site allocation or specific policies for older people. In London, though, things are improving fast. Nearly 90% of borough respondents to Future of London’s survey have policies for older people in place or in development. Other local authority and housing association responses include priorities and provision over the next 20 years. There is more to do, but the case studies and resources in the report show the way.

Housing: fit-for-purpose products and better information

Housing is a key determinant of health, and nationally, the consequences of poor-quality homes cost the NHS £2.5bn a year. FoL’s report shows how purpose-built and adaptable homes can reduce health risks, and joins national calls for integration across health, social care and housing. This emerging market also offers exciting ways to rethink how we design and deliver housing – and how we all live in the city.

In the new homes market, developers can and should start treating older people as valuable consumers – building and offering adaptable homes, including them in general marketing efforts and tapping into the seriously under-served middle market between social housing and homes for the affluent.

With 80% of all homes already built, it’s also time to re-evaluate the cost-benefit ratio of helping people to stay in their homes. As the report notes, adaptation and maintenance can be complicated, handy(person) services are cost-effective and offer wider social and small-business benefits. Although clunky, the Disabled Facilities Grant is also a useful tool, undergoing review in 2018 and already being tweaked to good effect by local authorities like LB Camden.

Neighbourhoods: joined-up thinking for health, accessibility and inclusivity

An ageing population also reinforces the importance of accessibility and inclusion in the public realm, and older Londoners are catalysing a growing interest in healthy placemaking: how can the built environment and health services support each other, for this group and all city-dwellers? The report includes overseas case studies as well as research two London boroughs are using to shape their regeneration strategies.

Forecast population growth in over-55s, 2017-2027



In addressing all these issues, it’s vital to keep older people front and centre. This is a diverse demographic with complex needs, people are living longer, and aspirations are changing. Our report sets out best practice for consultation with this time-rich, experienced and varied demographic.

The report concludes with cross-sector recommendations and a proposed older people’s housing manifesto, based on input from research participants. The first step is to connect key actors, raise the profile of this increasingly important sub-sector, and establish a unified voice to influence plan-making and policy. The manifesto would then bring the sector together to:

- **Understand this diverse demographic better**
- **Clarify the offer to older people**
- **Lobby for legislative and policy reform**
- **Work to change attitudes**
- **Engage more with planning**

Thanks to all who contributed ideas, experience and research to this programme. We hope it proves useful to everyone working on older people’s housing and related issues – and to those who probably should be! – and we encourage you to stay engaged as we move the manifesto forward with partners.

Future of London’s full report launches 20th March 2018 at Arup; PDF available at www.futureoflondon.org.uk/publications/.

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