



REIMAGINING LIVING SPACES IN THE HEART OF COMMUNITIES



Project Report
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Inspiring Housing Community Land Trust
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Foreword

Salford is a city defined by its strong communities, rich heritage & industrial past, and a deep sense of place, municipalism and solidarity amongst residents, families and diverse communities. One of our greatest responsibilities, as we look towards the future, is ensuring that the homes and neighbourhoods that we shape today continue to support our residents to live well at every stage of life, while also continuing our important work to tackle the structural and wider-determinants of health & wellbeing, inequalities and poverty.



It is for many of these reasons that the Greater Manchester Strategy continues to prioritise housing and the Housing First approach across our city-region, focusing on housing supply, standards and support. Moreover, in our City of Salford it is also for these reason that we have placed housing and neighbourhoods at the heart of both the The Salford Way and This is Our Salford Corporate Plan 2024 – 2028.

Reimagining Living Spaces in the Heart of Communities arrives at a pivotal moment. Like many places across the UK, Salford is experiencing the combined pressures of an ageing population, a constrained housing system, and increasing demand for decent, accessible & truly affordable homes that truly meet people's needs. This report makes it clear that the housing and homelessness crises are not simply one of numerically increasing housing supply via the market, but also of suitability, quality, decency, affordability and connection.

The findings in this report reinforce what we hear from residents across our city: older people want to remain close to friends, families & loved ones, places and communities that matter most to them. They are not seeking less from housing, but something better suited to their needs – homes that are accessible, warm, manageable, and rooted within places, neighbourhoods & communities.

This work aligns strongly with our priorities around increasing housing choice, supporting healthy ageing, and strengthening communities. It also demonstrates the value of co-design and ensuring that new housing is shaped by the people who will live in it and their lived experiences.

I welcome this report as an important contribution to the future of housing and ageing well in Salford. As we move forward, the challenge is to translate this strong evidence into delivery. As always, this will only be possible through the collaboration and partnership working that is characteristic of Salford, the Spirit of Salford, and its relentless commitment to delivering on our motto: *Salus Populi Suprema Lex* (The Welfare of the People is the Highest Law) and when necessary, making the case for progressive change and reform in pursuit of delivering for our people.

Paul Dennett
City Mayor of Salford

Salford City Council



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the feasibility of Garden Homes and Community Infill Sites as Age-friendly housing options supporting older people to remain in their communities as alternative responses to the UK housing crisis, especially in relation to an ageing population.

Accepting that many older people prefer to remain in their existing communities, but that current housing options often fail to support this, the report outlines the findings of an investigation into the feasibility of two alternative housing models:

- Garden Homes: small, self-contained homes built within the grounds of existing properties, created by subdividing private garden space.
- Community Infill Sites: new housing developed on unused or underused land within established neighbourhoods, such as vacant plots or small redevelopment sites.

Both offer the potential to increase housing supply in a way that is sustainable, land-efficient, and supportive of community cohesion, including opportunities for intergenerational living.

The report draws on new evidence from surveys, stakeholder discussions, and workshops with older people undertaken in the city of Salford, Greater Manchester (UK).

Older people's lived experiences combined with professionals' insight highlight a significant gap in the current housing system. Many older people are living in homes that are arguably too large, costly to heat, difficult to maintain or no longer accessible, but face limited opportunities to rightsize without leaving the neighbourhoods, relationships and routines that support their wellbeing. This lack of suitable local options not only affects individuals but also creates wider pressures across the housing system by restricting mobility and contributing to overcrowding elsewhere.



Older people were clear about what matters most to them:

- Remaining close to family and familiar places
- Living in homes that are warm, safe, accessible and manageable
- Having outdoor space and natural light
- Retaining dignity, independence and choice as their needs change.

Crucially, they did not express a desire for “less”, but for better-designed homes that support everyday life.

Evidence from knowledge-sharing activities reinforces these findings. Linking unsuitable housing to poorer physical and mental health outcomes, increased risk of falls, social isolation and earlier reliance on statutory services. In contrast, warm, accessible, community-embedded homes were widely viewed as a preventative intervention, supporting independence for longer and reducing demand on health and care systems.

Garden Homes and small scale Community Infill developments were recognised as being particularly well-placed to address this gap when delivered with high design quality and genuine community integration. While not suitable for everyone, they clearly complement sheltered and extra-care housing as part of a mixed, flexible local housing offer, especially for those wishing to age in place.





The report also shows how the greatest barriers to delivery are not lack of demand or design capability, but planning complexity, viability challenges on small sites, and inconsistent policy support. However, it presents evidence that these challenges can be overcome through early engagement, co-design, partnership working, and a clear articulation of local need and social value.

Overall, the report demonstrates that Garden Homes and Community Infill housing are credible, desirable and necessary components of an age-friendly housing system, offering a dignified, place-based response that strengthens communities while supporting older people to live well for longer.

The report offers policy and design recommendations for local authorities, positioning these housing models as a potentially important but under-used and under-researched way to support inclusive and sustainable ageing in place.



INTRODUCTION

The UK's housing crisis has underscored the need for more inclusive, locally responsive housing solutions. This is particularly apparent in the context of an ageing population. Despite evidence that most people aspire to 'age in place', growing older in the neighbourhoods and communities where they may have lived for many years, or to which they are rooted through networks of family and friends, conventional housing models for ageing populations often struggle to accommodate this. Stability, integration, and capitalising on or activating of existing community assets can offer a more sustainable and socially cohesive response.

This report documents the process and outcomes of an exploratory study into the feasibility and acceptability of a community-orientated approach to address one aspect of the UK's housing crisis: how to support older people to age in place through good quality, appropriate housing. It examines the feasibility of developing and deploying new housing models such as Garden Homes and community infill sites based on real-world attempts and older people's aspirations for future living arrangements for future generations. Such models aspire to enhance community cohesion, support intergenerational living, and promote sustainable development but to date, there is a limited evidence base to support or indeed refute this. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first attempt to work with older people to evaluate the feasibility, impact, and implementation of two housing solutions:

- **Garden Homes:** Small, self-contained dwellings constructed within what was previously designated as garden land, typically forming part of the curtilage of an existing property. Rather than being planned as part of a larger housing estate, a Garden Home is usually created through the subdivision of an existing residential plot, where a portion of the private garden is redeveloped to accommodate a new, independent dwelling.
- **Community Infill Sites:** Development of small, underused plots within established neighbourhoods. Infill homes are constructed on vacant, underutilized, or redeveloped parcels of land within already established neighbourhoods. This approach can encompass a range of housing forms, including single-family homes, townhouses, and low-rise apartment buildings. Development intends to increase housing supply and improve land-use efficiency without extending the urban boundary outward. So, Infill housing arguably has the potential to play a significant role in promoting more compact, sustainable patterns of urban growth.



Drawing on new evidence gathered from a local survey, conversations with stakeholders, and creative workshops with older people, the report proposes policy and design recommendations to local authorities and stakeholders. The report provides novel insight into an under-explored pathway for inclusive, affordable, and sustainable living by placing communities at the heart of housing innovation. It is offered as a contribution to the evidence base and wider national conversation about how to support people to age in homes, neighbourhoods and communities that meet their current and future needs and aspirations.



WHY THIS REPORT MATTERS

By 2040, nearly 25% of the UK population will be over 65. The number of people over 85 is predicted to more than double in less than 25 years to over 3.4 million (Office for National Statistics, 2022). Healthy life expectancy is not keeping pace with longevity, and many will need to manage multiple long-term conditions, social care requirements and their wellbeing as they age. Almost all evidence indicates that older people would prefer to age in locations of their choice, and this is predominantly in their own homes. Despite social, economic and political challenges, living longer presents opportunities to create vibrant and resilient communities where older people can develop their interests and aspirations.

Launching its age-friendly agenda in 2007, the World Health Organisation (WHO) proposed that age-friendly cities, towns or communities would encourage active ageing by optimizing opportunities to enhance quality of life as people age. In practical terms, an Age-Friendly Community adapts its structures and services to be accessible and inclusive for older people with varying needs and capacities. They have thus come to represent locations where age is not seen as a barrier to living well and where the environment, activities and services support and enable older people to: feel comfortable and secure; have opportunities to enjoy life; and participate as active, valued members of society as they 'age in place'.

Ageing in place encompasses the need for optimal fit for a household's current and anticipated needs and aspirations with both housing (or home) and a wider geographical location (or neighbourhood). Access to appropriate housing is vital to successful ageing in place; be that success for individuals and their families, communities, or policy implementations. This includes housing that can accommodate or be adapted to accommodate changing physical and cognitive needs, as well as being size-matched to households. While policy and practice responses in the UK have often emphasised purpose-built or specialist housing and age-restricted communities, such as retirement, sheltered and extra-care housing, these forms of accommodation serve only a minority of older people. The overwhelming majority of older people in the UK continue to live in mainstream or general-needs housing within mixed-age communities, with estimates commonly suggesting that more than 90% do so (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department of Health and Social Care, 2024)

The provision of such housing is frequently aimed at those aged 65 or increasingly older, yet for housing to be aged-matched as people age requires decisions about housing, and location to be planned at a younger age, and crucially, for an available supply of appropriate housing. In recent years the non-movement of older people has accompanied, and at times become enveloped within, a parallel housing debate. Overcrowded housing has long been part of national discourse about the challenges of making suitable, affordable housing accessible to all. Overcrowding can negatively impact on physical and mental health, childhood development and education, and familial relationships. It also disproportionately affects low-income and Black and Minority Ethnic communities (Marmot et al., 2020) and has arguably overshadowed critical debate about under-occupation. Yet under-, and over-, occupation are not individual problems but part of the same problem in ensuring the efficient and proper management of housing (Addison et al., 2022). The introduction of previous government housing policy such as the UK under-occupation charge (dubbed a 'bedroom tax') designed to encourage social housing tenants occupying properties deemed too large for their needs to relocate to smaller homes; a policy that created considerable hardship for many. Although the UK under-occupation charge did not directly affect people reliant on pensions, and so had perhaps less influence over older people's decision to move, it nonetheless contributed to ageist assumptions about how the housing shortage could be addressed. As Hammond et al. (2018) note, even 14 years ago, almost a third of UK residences were occupied



exclusively by people aged 55 and over, (representing 7.3m out of 22m total households), so the idea of 'downsizing' emerged as a way of redressing the 'under-occupation' of properties by older people (Pannell, Aldridge, & Kenway, 2012). So, 'downsizing'; that is the movement of predominantly older people out of homes assumed to large into smaller properties, remains at a discursive level a seemingly viable solution and older people chided into relinquishing larger homes as part of an inter-generational contract (Burgess, Quinio, 2020). While the envisioned benefits of 'downsizing' might include the release of larger properties into the housing market to increase supply, and enabling 'ageing in place' without further increasing demand for specialist housing support, the reality is that older people either preferred to remain in place or move for other reasons than to locate to a smaller property. Indeed, older people's housing preferences align with those of other demographics, motivated by similar aspirations of additional space, relocation to more desirable neighbourhoods, and improved access to green and open spaces (Hammond et al., 2018).

As people age, decisions to move home are largely influenced by two drivers: (present and future) personal circumstance and (current and potential) environment. Decision-making involves assessing the appropriateness of current environment in relation to personal situations (such as health, socio-economic status, personal and social connections, and aspirations), and considering whether other options would suit them better. So too is it relevant take into account logistical challenges involved with moving including cost (taxation, professional fees, removal services), effort, and available help (either family, friends or policy driven support). In this context, moving home, and the decisions that lead up to doing so, are informed by complex choices, often rooted in biographical experiences and made in relation to the expectations and aspirations of others, such as family members, and the limitations imposed by structures and resources (Peace, 2022). As a result, while over 4 million older people are actively seeking to move home, only a fraction of older people do move every year. For example, it is estimated that although 22% of people aged over 50 would like to move, fewer than 5% would (Centre for Ageing Better, 2023i). Crucially, while personal finances and finding the right type and size of housing can act as barriers to moving, so too is it important to consider location, wider community setting and sense of belonging to place (Centre for Ageing Better, 2023ii).



The lack of evidence indicating that older people in the UK either do, or aspire to, 'rightsized' their home suggests that a focus on rightsizing alone as either a solution to the UK's housing challenges, or part of the 'natural rhythm' of the housing lifecycle as people grow older is insufficient (Abramsson and Andersson, 2016). Indeed, the idea that the under-occupancy by older households is the barrier to enabling younger people to buy or rent a suitable, affordable home detracts from wider debate about the future of housing in the UK, including how and where, that housing is located, and how neighbourhoods and communities can be supported to ensure they have the kinds of housing that residents need as they grow older. Achieving this requires identification and understanding the feasibility and acceptability of alternative housing models to support people as they age, including use of underdeveloped land via Community Infill development and/or using garden spaces via Garden Homes.



AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The work underpinning this report is rooted in the belief that housing should serve the people who live in it. The report aims to (1) understand the individual, household, policy and planning implications of developing garden and underutilized infill plots and (2) identify the opportunities and barriers that arise from their potential reuse for housing for intergenerational living.

The report details two sets of activities: (1) Community Engagement based on co-design workshops and interviews with older residents in Greater Manchester to understand preferences and barriers; and (2) Stakeholder Collaboration through work with Local Authorities and Housing Associations to assess planning, design and opportunities.

Specifically, the report:

- Documents a process for engaging with older people on an equal footing with policy and planning experts to assess the feasibility of Garden Homes and Community Infill homes as one potential solution to the UK's housing crisis.
- Identifies barriers and enablers to the implementation of Garden Homes and Community Infill homes.
- Reports on a unique programme of a community-led housing provider working alongside local authorities, housing providers, and older people to co-develop generate policy and design recommendations.



HOW WE GATHERED THE EVIDENCE

A multi-layered community engagement approach was used to understand the preferences, needs and lived experiences of older people in Salford (Greater Manchester) in relation to Garden Homes and small scale Community Infill housing options. Older residents were central to shaping the feasibility work that included:

1. Online survey

An online survey was distributed through Inspiring Communities Together[1] Development Workers and was used as a facilitated conversation tool. This enabled participation from people who may not attend in-person sessions, offering a broader and more inclusive evidence base. Respondents reflected diverse ages, backgrounds, household situations and care responsibilities.

The demographic profile of respondents reflects some of the diversity of older residents living across Salford, though females were over-represented:

- Gender: 27 female, 1 male, 1 preferred not to say
- Living arrangements: 12 participants live alone; 17 lived with a partner and/or other family member (primarily an adult child)
- Disability: 9 participants identified as having a disability.
- Caring responsibilities: 7 participants are carers for a family member or partner.
- Age range:
 - Age 55–64: 14 respondents
 - Age 65–74: 6 respondents
 - Age 75–89: 7 respondents
 - Age 90+: 2 respondents



Responses were received from across Salford though a targeted set of activities in the east of the city resulted in noticeably higher levels of engagement from there.

2. Co-design workshop

A structured, interactive workshop was conducted at a community venue in Salford, involving nine participants aged over 50 and four participants aged under 50 who currently support, or may potentially support, older people. The session explored participants' perceptions of what contributes to a home feeling appropriate and desirable, the key factors influencing decisions about relocating, and the potential role of microsite housing solutions, such as Garden Homes, in supporting ageing in place.

[1] Inspiring Housing Community Land Trust is a not-for-profit community benefit society with a geographical mandate to act as a Community Land Trust across Greater Manchester. It is a subsidiary of the Charity Inspiring Communities Together.





3. Stakeholder knowledge sharing

A presentation and facilitated discussion was delivered to members of a cross-sector network of ten practitioners, housing providers, and older people. This provided early testing of Garden Home concepts. Further conversations were held with an organisation involved in alternative housing delivery. These discussions offered insights into small-site development, community-led design, and the practical considerations of working within established neighbourhoods.



FINDINGS

The findings are presented in three strands. First, the descriptive survey results provide an overview of key trends, patterns, and older people's perspectives captured through quantitative and qualitative responses. These findings establish a broad evidence base for establishing Garden Homes and Community Infill developments in the context of a locally ageing population. Next, the outcome of the interactive workshops with older residents provide a more in-depth exploration of aspirations, priorities, and opportunities for future development. Finally, insights from the stakeholder workshop illustrate how collaborative discussion and shared reflection helped consolidate learning and strengthen collective understanding of the issues identified. The workshop created a space for participants to validate findings, exchange experiences, and identify areas of consensus and divergence.

FINDINGS I: SURVEY RESULTS

Current housing situations: respondents live in a mix of housing tenures

Satisfaction levels were generally positive with some key priorities identified highlighting a clear unmet need for age-friendly housing options within existing communities.

Current housing

- Social rent: 17
- Owned outright: 9
- Owned with mortgage: 1
- Private rent: 1
- Rent free: 1

Satisfaction levels

- 14 very satisfied
- 15 somewhat satisfied
- 1 neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

- 7 respondents felt their home was too large, and all but one said it was difficult to maintain.
- 3 respondents reported that moving around safely inside their home was a challenge.
- 9 people would like to move but want to stay in their current neighbourhood.
- 14 respondents said they would like to move but suitable housing options are not available.

What matters most: If you were to move what would be most important to you?

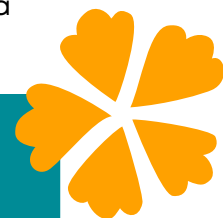
These preferences directly mirror the themes identified during the in person activity reported later: accessibility, proximity to services, social connection, and remaining within familiar neighbourhoods are core to ageing well.

Priority

- Stay in same neighbourhood
- Accessibility
- Close to family and friends
- Close to services
- Close to social support

Responses

20
21
24
25
23



Interest in Garden Homes and small scale Community Infill Developments

The survey explored awareness of and interest in the two alternative housing options being tested through this project:

Garden Homes:

8 respondents would consider one
7 would like to know more

Small Infill Developments:

7 said yes
6 said maybe
9 want more information

These responses indicate an emerging openness to new housing models, provided they are well-explained, affordable, and embedded in local neighbourhoods.

What people told us:

Participants shared comments that echo the themes that emerged in the subsequent activities:

"I would like to stay in the area I live in now as I get older – knowing my area is very important to me and that I stay near my family."

"Storage if needed to move to something smaller."

"I don't want to move – I'm filling in this form as maybe I could have one of these pods in my garden for my sister."

"I need a bigger home – I am overcrowded. My poorly daughter would live in the Garden Home."

"Needs to be accessible, warm, affordable to heat, close to regular public transport and local services."

"Needs to be on a bus route – not one that is only once an hour."

"Well-designed with communal internal and external space to encourage social connection."

"More support needed with downsizing and moving."

"It should be in the community, near shops, transport, surgery etc."

"Community is important – knowing who is living near you."

One comment raised concerns:

This is not a good thing for people of Salford. We need sheltered homes, not degrading people by putting them in pods.

There is an ongoing need for clear communication, myth-busting, and co-design to ensure Garden Homes are understood as high-quality, dignified, and community-based housing options, not temporary or substandard solutions. Discussions with interested parties throughout the project revealed significant variation in understandings, particularly around Garden Homes. Societal perceptions of such dwellings (sometimes considered in derogatory, ageist terms such as 'granny annexes') will also require addressing if wider acceptance is to be achieved.

Interest in Garden Homes and small scale Community Infill Developments

The survey explored awareness of and interest in the two alternative housing options being tested through this project:



Exercise two – What matters most to older people? Using different profiles explore needs, barriers and opportunities for alternative housing choices

Four different resident profiles illustrating the diverse but overlapping needs of older people living in social housing across the city were shared with the participants for discussion. While each individual has unique circumstances, their experiences reveal consistent themes related to accessibility, safety, connection, comfort, and affordability. These insights reinforce the emerging findings from Exercise One and highlight clear opportunities for more flexible, community-rooted housing options.

Mary, Patrick, Amina and George are all vignette characters who face barriers within their current homes—whether mobility challenges, poor-quality housing, financial pressures, or declining confidence navigating their neighbourhoods. Despite these difficulties, they each have strong attachments to familiar places, local support networks and daily routines that contribute significantly to their wellbeing. This reinforces the importance of housing solutions that allow older residents to remain close to the people, places and services that matter most.

Garden Homes emerge as a particularly valuable option for individuals like Mary and Amina, whose needs centre on single-level, well-insulated homes within neighbourhoods they know and rely on. In these cases, Garden Homes offer a sensitive and place-based response—supporting independence while maintaining family and community connections.

For Patrick and George, sheltered or extra-care housing may provide the level of support, accessibility and social contact needed to maintain wellbeing as health changes. These models offer warm, manageable and more affordable homes, alongside environments designed to reduce isolation and provide additional security.

Overall, the profiles demonstrate that older residents value familiarity, independence, closeness to community, safety, and comfort. They also highlight that no single housing model will meet every need and that a mix of micro-site development such as Garden Homes and Community Infill housing needs to be offered alongside supported accommodation to create a more responsive and Age-friendly local housing offer. This underscores the potential of Garden Homes as a key part of a wider solution, particularly for those who wish to age in place while staying rooted in their existing communities.

Exercise three - Imagining what a Garden Home could look like

As the final activity participants were asked to apply the knowledge and ideas generated throughout the session to imagine what a Garden Home or a small Community Infill cluster of homes could look like. Working in small groups, residents produced sketches and concept ideas that reflected their priorities, lived experience, and the themes emerging from earlier exercises.

There was a shared understanding that both the internal and external environment must work together to support ageing well. The following insights summarise the key design elements identified:

- Connection to green space and social activity: All three groups emphasised the importance of locating homes within walking distance of green space, parks, community venues or social activities. Participants felt strongly that the surroundings were as important as the design of the home itself. Easy access to nature and community was seen as essential for wellbeing, independence and daily routine.



- A modern, functional kitchen: While conventional thinking often suggests that older residents prioritise smaller, simpler kitchens, the participants highlighted the opposite. Groups noted a clear need for a larger kitchen area to accommodate modern countertop appliances such as air fryers, microwaves, kettles and coffee machines. These were viewed as essential, practical tools that allow people to cook safely and easily. An oven was considered less important than adequate worktop space, easy-reach storage and good layout.
- Natural light and large windows: Natural daylight was repeatedly mentioned as a defining feature of a desirable home. Participants valued large windows, good orientation and the ability to sit indoors while reading or enjoying the sunshine. Brightness was linked to comfort, mental wellbeing and creating a pleasant, uplifting living space.
- Two toilets for privacy and dignity: A shared idea across the groups was the inclusion of at least two toilets - one for personal use and one for guests. As people grow older, maintaining privacy, dignity and practical convenience become more important, especially when mobility becomes restricted or when family members visit.

Interest in small cluster homes as an alternative: One group felt that small infill cluster sites could offer greater benefits than individual Garden Homes. They imagined a cluster of no more than six homes, allowing older residents to be co-located with peers while still integrated into a wider neighbourhood. This design was seen as offering:

- informal companionship
- shared outdoor space
- a sense of safety and collective belonging

Importantly, participants clarified that although these clusters share similarities with sheltered housing, they should remain small-scale, community-embedded and independent, not institutional.

CASE STUDY: SITUATING THE HYPOTHETICAL INTO REAL WORLD CONTEXT

This case study, gathered through community engagement activity, illustrates the real-life housing challenges facing older people and their families, and highlights the potential role of Garden Homes and Community Infill solutions.

The situation Angela (not her real name) shared the experience of her mother, an older social housing tenant who has lived independently for many years but with long-term mental health challenges. During periods of poor mental health, family members, particularly grandchildren, have provided informal care, enabling her to remain in her home and community. The wider family lives locally on the same social housing estate. The participant herself has significant caring responsibilities, having taken on the care of additional children within her extended family to prevent them entering the care system. However, despite clear need, the housing provider was unable to adapt or extend the home the family occupied and requiring the family to undertake a disruptive move to secure appropriate space. Alongside these pressures, the older resident experiences alcohol dependency and associated health risks, including periods of aggression and contact with emergency services. She has also spent time in residential mental health settings, demonstrating the cyclical relationship between housing instability, health, and support needs.



Over time, both Angela's and Angela's mother's health have deteriorated, significantly increasing pressure on informal care networks. While the family remains highly supportive, the current housing arrangements are no longer sustainable. Attempts to access supported housing have been unsuccessful, with placements breaking down due to behavioural challenges, highlighting the limitations of existing, institutional housing models for some older people

Potential solution: Angela and her family identified that a Garden Home—a small, self-contained dwelling within the grounds of the family property—could provide a practical, dignified and flexible solution. This model would:

- Allow the older resident to live independently but with close family support
- Reduce risks associated with isolation, crisis episodes, and service breakdown
- Enable the family to remain together while managing space and care needs effectively
- Provide a non-institutional alternative that supports ageing in place

Wider implications: This case exemplifies the 'missing middle' in housing provision identified through the project, between remaining in unsuitable accommodation and moving into formal care settings. It reinforces the need for:

- Flexible, small-scale housing solutions embedded in communities
- Greater planning and delivery support for microsite housing
- Continued co-design with residents and families to ensure solutions reflect lived experience

FINDINGS III: KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Ten representatives from organisations across Greater Manchester including housing providers, local authorities, architects and community-led housing organisations. This insight strengthened the feasibility work by testing Garden Homes and Community Infill housing against operational, financial, planning and health system realities.

The responses consistently validated the core assumptions of the project: that there is both high unmet demand for accessible rightsizing options within existing neighbourhoods and strong professional interest in microsite housing as part of a wider, preventative, age friendly housing strategy.

Evidence of demand and system pressure

Across housing providers and local authority respondents, there was strong confirmation that older people are frequently "trapped" in unsuitable homes:

- Older single households under-occupying large family homes due to lack of suitable alternatives.
- High demand for ground-floor, one- and two-bedroom accessible homes, with waiting lists significantly exceeding supply.
- Difficulties letting upper-floor homes without lift access.
- Overcrowding elsewhere in the system as family homes are unavailable.



Health, wellbeing and preventative impact

There was agreement that poor or unsuitable housing has a direct and damaging impact on older people's health, mobility and independence. Respondents linked cold, damp, poorly laid-out homes to:

- Increased risk of falls
- Reduced mobility and confidence
- Worsening long-term health conditions
- Mental ill-health and isolation
- Earlier reliance on statutory services

In contrast, warm, accessible, locally-embedded homes were widely viewed as a preventative intervention, supporting:

- Improved physical safety and mobility
- Reduced loneliness and improved mental wellbeing
- Lower GP visits and hospital admissions
- Delayed need for formal care
- Longer periods of independent living

Stakeholders noted that remaining connected to familiar places and people is “extremely important” for mental wellbeing in later life, with community connections acting as a form of informal care and resilience.



Strategic fit of Garden Homes and microsite housing

While some respondents initially lacked clarity on the definition of a ‘Garden Home’, once understood, there was broad support for the model as a complement rather than a replacement to existing sheltered or extra-care housing. Key insights included:

- Garden Homes work particularly well for people who want to remain close to family, neighbours and routines.
- Small infill clusters (typically 4–6 homes) were seen as offering a balance between independence and informal social support.
- Microsite housing fills a gap between “staying put in unsuitable housing” and “moving to institutional settings”.

A consensus emerged that no single housing model meets all needs, but that Garden Homes, Community Infill sites, sheltered housing and extra-care should operate as a mixed, flexible local housing offer.

Design quality, dignity and permanence

Stakeholders strongly challenged assumptions that smaller homes require reduced quality. Across developers, architects and housing providers, recurring messages included:

- Compact must not mean poor quality, dark, or lacking storage.
- Natural light, good ceiling heights, durable materials and well-designed boundaries are essential for dignity.
- Functional kitchens with adequate workspace and storage matter more than oversized bathrooms.
- Storage space is critical to enable downsizing without forcing people to give up valued possessions.
- Homes must feel permanent and ‘real’, not temporary or subordinate.



Clear design risks were identified, particularly where Garden Homes are perceived as secondary or overly dependent on a host dwelling. Solutions proposed included:

- Independent access and clear frontages
- High-quality landscaping and boundary treatments
- Durable, long-life construction
- Integration into the street and neighbourhood rather than hidden placement



Planning, viability and delivery challenges

Respondents consistently identified planning and viability as the main barriers to delivery rather than lack of need or design solutions. Common challenges included:

- Neighbour objections and concerns around intensification.
- Ambiguity in planning policy regarding microsites and garden developments.
- Higher per-unit costs and disproportionate professional fees.
- Creating access, refuse collection, services and surface water considerations on small sites.

However, many also identified mitigations:

- Early pre-application engagement with planners.
- Strong local evidence of housing need and health outcomes.
- Community-led or co-design approaches improving acceptance and reducing objections.
- Locating microsites adjacent to or within existing housing stock to improve management efficiency.
- Grant funding, gifted land or low land costs to unlock viability.

The role of co-design and community buy-in

There was strong agreement that co-design with older people improves outcomes across design quality, acceptance and delivery. Benefits included:

- Homes better aligned with real lived experience.
- Reduced redesign and planning risk.
- Increased resident confidence and readiness to move.
- Stronger local support.
- Clearer articulation of social value and preventative impact.



Contributors emphasised that older people are experts in how they live and should be treated as partners in shaping solutions rather than consultees at the end of the process.



KEY LEARNING

Insight from community engagement with older residents and structured knowledge sharing with housing providers, local authorities, designers and community-led housing organisations has generated an early evidence base for the feasibility and acceptability of Garden Homes and Infill developments. Both lived experience and professional perspectives point to the same conclusion: there is a clear gap in the current housing system for high-quality, accessible, small-scale homes that allow older people to remain in their communities. Garden Homes and Infill housing emerge as credible, desirable and necessary components of a more responsive, age-friendly local housing system when delivered with quality, dignity and community at their core. These findings provide a robust foundation for moving from feasibility to pilot delivery in Salford and beyond.

Remaining local is central to wellbeing and independence

Across all activity, place attachment emerged as a defining priority. Older people consistently expressed a strong desire to remain in the neighbourhoods they know; close to family, friends, shops, GPs, transport and community venues. This was echoed by housing providers and local authority stakeholders who confirmed that many older people remain in unsuitable homes specifically because no appropriate alternatives exist locally.

Knowledge-sharing participants described this as a system-wide issue, contributing to:

- under-occupation of family homes,
- limited housing turnover,
- overcrowding elsewhere in the housing system.

Being uprooted from familiar places can accelerate isolation, anxiety and loss of independence, while remaining embedded supports mental wellbeing and active ageing.

Key learning: Housing solutions for later life must prioritise staying local alongside physical accessibility.



Accessibility, safety and single-level living are non-negotiable

Older people clearly articulated the importance of homes that are:

- single-level or step-free,
- easy to move around,
- safe, predictable and future-proof.

Mobility issues, risk of falls, and difficulty navigating stairs were frequently cited challenges in current homes. Sector partners reinforced this, linking poor internal layouts and inaccessible homes to increased health risks and earlier reliance on formal services.

Both older people and wider stakeholders stressed that accessible design should be embedded from the outset, not added later through adaptations, and that many older residents want a home they “won’t need to move from again”.

Key learning: Age-friendly design is essential infrastructure, not a specialist add-on.



Warmth, comfort and energy efficiency are essential to ageing well

Comfort and warmth were repeatedly described as central to quality of life. Older people associated cold, hard-to-heat homes with discomfort, stress and high energy bills. Knowledge-sharing evidence directly linked cold or poorly insulated housing to:

- worsening health conditions,
- reduced mobility,
- mental stress,
- increased demand on health services.

There was agreement that high energy efficiency, low running costs and good ventilation are critical preventative health measures, particularly for people on fixed incomes.

Key learning: Warm, energy-efficient homes play a preventative health role and reduce long-term public costs.

Design quality, space and dignity matter regardless of size

Consistent across the data is that smaller homes must not mean lower standards. Older people challenged assumptions that they would accept cramped layouts or reduced functionality. Specific priorities included:

- functional kitchens with adequate worktop space and storage for modern appliances,
- good natural light and large windows,
- sufficient storage to enable downsizing without loss of dignity,
- layouts that support everyday living and socialising.

Design and housing professionals reinforced this, warning that under-estimating expectations leads to homes that are harder to let and less successful long-term. Many emphasised that compact homes can still be generous, comfortable and dignified if well designed.

Key learning: Compact housing must still support “normal life” and personal dignity.

Outdoor space and nature strongly support wellbeing

Access to outdoor space such as private gardens, shared courtyards or green views, was one of the strongest themes among older people and widely supported by sector partners. Older people described gardens as supporting:

- routine,
- relaxation,
- physical activity,
- mental wellbeing.

Professionals additionally highlighted the role of small, shared spaces in encouraging informal social contact, reducing loneliness and supporting community interaction when designed carefully to balance privacy and connection.

Key learning: Even small, well-designed outdoor spaces have disproportionate wellbeing benefits.




Garden Homes and small scale Community Infill housing fill a clear gap in the system

While awareness of Garden Homes varied initially, once explained they were widely recognised, by older people and wider stakeholders, as a viable way of addressing a missing middle between remaining in unsuitable housing and moving into sheltered or extra-care schemes.

Key shared findings include:

- There is significant differences in understandings, and at times misunderstandings, about what Garden Homes are which needs to be addressed if future developments are to be deemed acceptable.
- Garden Homes are particularly suitable for those wishing to age in place near family and support networks.
- Small scale Community Infill clusters (typically 4–6 homes) can offer independence alongside informal companionship.
- These models work best as part of a broader housing offer, not as a replacement for supported housing where higher needs exist.



Key learning: No one housing type meets all needs and Garden Homes and Community Infill sites complement existing provision. Individuals and communities can be receptive to alternative housing ideas provided time is taken to outline what these might look like.

Poor housing increases health and care pressures; good housing reduces them

There was strong alignment between lived experience and professional insight on the health impacts of housing. Poor or unsuitable homes were linked to:

- falls,
- worsening chronic conditions,
- loneliness,
- mental ill-health,
- earlier use of formal health and care services.

Conversely, warm, accessible, community-embedded homes were consistently seen as supporting:

- independence for longer,
- reduced GP and hospital visits,
- improved mental wellbeing,
- stronger community support and “looking out for each other”.



Key learning: Age-friendly microsite housing is a preventative investment, not just a housing intervention.



Co-Design improves outcomes and reduces risk

Both older residents and sector partners strongly endorsed early co-design. Older people valued being listened to as experts in their own lives, while professionals highlighted tangible benefits including:

- better design quality,
- reduced objections,
- stronger community buy-in,
- increased confidence among future residents,
- clearer evidence for planning decision-making.

Organisations noted that schemes developed with communities rather than for them were more likely to succeed.



Key learning: Co-design is a delivery tool as much as an engagement principle.

Planning and viability are the main barriers - not lack of need

Knowledge-sharing evidence was clear that the primary challenges to delivery are:

- planning policy barriers and inconsistency,
- neighbour objections,
- higher per-unit costs on small sites,
- land availability.

However, there was also strong agreement that these barriers can be mitigated through:

- early engagement with planners,
- strong local evidence of need and health impact,
- integration with existing housing stock,
- community-led and place-based approaches,
- access to grant funding or low-cost land.



Key learning: The case for delivery is strong; the challenge is system alignment, not demand.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are intended to support the effective delivery of age-friendly microsite housing, including Garden Homes and small-scale Community Infill developments. The recommendations emphasise design quality, partnership working, preventative health outcomes, and long-term system change. They position microsite housing not as a marginal or temporary intervention, but as a legitimate component of a broader strategic response to population ageing, housing need, and community resilience.

Position Garden Homes and Community Infill housing as a core part of the local age-friendly housing offer

Garden Homes and small-scale infill developments should be formally recognised as complementary housing/development types within local age-friendly housing strategies. Rather than viewed solely as niche or transitional accommodation, these models have the potential to expand housing choice for older residents while enabling individuals to remain connected to established social networks, services, and neighbourhoods.

Such approaches may be particularly appropriate for older people seeking to rightsize from homes that no longer meet their needs, while not requiring high levels of formal care or support. Equally, they offer opportunities for neighbourhoods characterised by underused land, large residential plots, or small vacant sites to accommodate additional housing in ways that remain proportionate to local character and scale and without adding undue pressure to existing infrastructures.

To support wider acceptance and legitimacy, these, and potentially other microsite housing models, should be embedded within local housing, ageing well, and public health strategies. Communication and engagement activities should frame Garden Homes as positive and dignified housing choices that support independence and autonomy, while clearly distinguishing them from temporary, low-quality, or substandard forms of accommodation

Garden Homes and small-scale Community Infill developments are particularly well suited to:

- Older people wishing to remain close to family, friends and services,
- Residents living in homes that are no longer suitable, but who do not require high levels of support,
- Neighbourhoods with under-used land or large gardens.

Action points:

- Embed microsite housing within local housing, ageing well and health strategies.
- Promote Garden Homes as a positive, dignified choice rather than a last resort.
- Ensure messaging clearly distinguishes Garden Homes from temporary or substandard accommodation.

Prioritise age-friendly design standards from the outset

Design quality is critical to acceptability and long-term success. Homes must still support everyday living, social connection and changing needs over time. Design quality is fundamental to the acceptability, usability, and long-term success of microsite housing. While smaller Garden Homes may offer practical and financial advantages, reductions in floor area should not result in compromised quality, functionality, or dignity.



Age-friendly design principles should be incorporated from the earliest stages of project development. Homes should, wherever possible, provide step-free or single-level access, strong thermal performance, and low ongoing energy costs. Consideration should also be given to natural light, generous window placement, intuitive internal circulation, and layouts that support changing mobility needs over time. Practical kitchens, adequate worktop space, sufficient storage capacity, and bathrooms designed to minimise falls risk are also requested. The distinction between private and shared space is also essential in supporting both independence and social connection.

Local authorities and delivery partners should develop clear design briefs for Garden Homes and small infill schemes, aligned with recognised age-friendly housing frameworks such as HAPPI or Lifetime Homes^[1] principles. Delivery partners should avoid assumptions that older residents are willing to accept lower standards of space or quality in exchange for smaller accommodation.

Design principles should include:

- Single-level or step-free layouts wherever possible.
- Warm, well-insulated homes with low running costs.
- Good natural light, generous windows and clear internal circulation.
- Functional kitchens with adequate worktop space, storage and room for modern appliances.
- Sufficient internal storage to enable rightsizing without compromising on living standards.
- Accessible bathrooms and layouts that reduce falls risk.
- Clear separation between private and shared spaces.

Action points:

- Develop a clear local design brief for Garden Homes and Community Infill schemes.
- Align design standards with lifetime homes, HAPPI, or equivalent age-friendly principles.
- Avoid assuming older residents will accept reduced space or quality.

Embed outdoor space and connection to nature as standard

Access to outdoor space consistently emerged as one of the strongest determinants of wellbeing, independence, and everyday quality of life. Outdoor environments were associated not only with physical health benefits, but also with emotional wellbeing, opportunities for social interaction, and continued connection to place.

Community infill developments should integrate access to private or semi-private outdoor areas wherever feasible, including gardens, terraces, or balconies. In clustered developments, shared green spaces and communal courtyards may further support informal social interaction and neighbourhood cohesion. Visual access to greenery from within the home was identified as an important consideration for wellbeing and comfort.

The design of external spaces should include seating, lighting, accessible pathways, and welcoming thresholds that support both safety and usability. Outdoor space should be regarded as essential infrastructure rather than discretionary amenity provision. Equally, landscaping and boundaries should carefully balance opportunities for privacy with opportunities for neighbourly interaction, while ensuring that maintenance demands remain manageable for residents over time.

[1]The HAPPI design principles focus on creating homes that are attractive, flexible, and easy to live in as people age, including accounting for space and flexibility, natural light, balconies and outdoor space, adaptability and 'care-ready' design, positive circulation space, shared facilities and community hubs, plants, trees, and nature, energy efficiency and sustainability, storage, and safe external spaces and 'home zones (Housing LIN, no date). The Lifetime Homes standard intends that homes remain usable throughout a person's life, regardless of age or disability. Core principles include inclusivity, accessibility, adaptability, sustainability, and good value (see for example Ambrose, 1997).



Design should include:

- Private gardens, terraces or balconies where possible.
- Shared green spaces or courtyards in small clusters.
- Views of greenery from inside the home.
- Seating, lighting and safe, welcoming thresholds.

Action points:

- Treat outdoor space as essential infrastructure, not optional amenity.
- Balance privacy and social interaction through careful boundary and landscape design.
- Ensure outdoor areas are accessible and low-maintenance.



Use co-design as a core delivery method, not a consultation add-on

Early and meaningful co-design with older people and neighbours improves outcomes, builds trust and reduces risk. There is value in involving future residents in decisions relating to site selection, layout, accessibility, and day-to-day functionality.

Co-design approaches can strengthen alignment between housing provision and lived experience, while also improving usability, design quality, and long-term resident satisfaction. In addition, collaborative engagement processes may help to reduce planning objections, build local trust, and increase community acceptance of infill development.

Delivery partners should adopt co-design as an integral component of project development rather than a late-stage consultation exercise. Older residents and neighbouring households should be engaged from the earliest stages of scheme development, with lessons captured systematically to inform future projects, policy development, and local design guidance.

Benefits include:

- Better alignment with real lived experience.
- Improved design quality and usability.
- Reduced planning objections.
- Stronger community buy-in and acceptance.
- Increased confidence among residents considering a move.

Action points:

- Involve older people from site selection through to design and layout decisions.
- Engage neighbouring households early to shape solutions together.
- Capture learning from co-design to inform future schemes and policy.



Focus early pilot projects on demonstration value, not unit numbers

Small-scale pilot schemes provide important opportunities to test delivery models, understand resident experiences, and evaluate broader community impacts before wider replication. Initial delivery should prioritise proving quality, acceptability and impact, rather than scale.

Pilot projects should demonstrate high standards of design quality, successful integration within existing neighbourhoods, and positive resident wellbeing outcomes. They should also generate transferable learning regarding planning, partnership working, and delivery feasibility.



Local authorities and partners should identify a limited number of pilot sites where there is strong evidence of local demand and supportive conditions for delivery. Pilot programmes should explore both individual Garden Homes and small Community Infill clustered developments. They should rigorously and systematically documenting outcomes through resident narratives, wellbeing indicators, and transparent community feedback mechanisms.

Pilot schemes should demonstrate:

- High design quality at a small scale.
- Integration within existing neighbourhoods.
- Positive resident experience and wellbeing outcomes.
- Clear lessons for replication.

Action points:

- Identify one or two pilot sites with strong local demand.
- Use pilots to test both single Garden Homes and small cluster models (4–6 homes).
- Document outcomes through resident stories, health and wellbeing indicators, and community feedback.

Strengthen planning alignment and policy support for microsite housing

Planning policy and regulatory processes were consistently identified as significant barriers to delivery, despite recognition of growing demographic need and wider public value. Greater policy alignment will therefore be necessary if microsite housing is to move from isolated projects toward mainstream adoption.

Early engagement with planning processes through pre-application discussions may help to identify site-specific issues and reduce uncertainty. At a strategic level, local authorities should strengthen the evidence base relating to older people's housing needs, health outcomes, and community support for age-friendly microsite housing.

Consideration should also be given to recognising Garden Homes within specialist or age-friendly housing classifications where appropriate. Greater flexibility may be required for small sites where proposals demonstrate clear design quality, local need, and wider social benefit. Neighbourhood plans and local plan policies may need to be reviewed to ensure that they explicitly support appropriate forms of age-friendly microsite development.

Action points:

- Engage planning officers early through pre-application discussions.
- Build a clear local evidence base demonstrating housing need, health benefits and community support.
- Explore classification of Garden Homes as specialist or age-friendly housing where appropriate.
- Encourage planning flexibility for small scale Community Infill sites where quality, need and community benefit can be demonstrated.
- Align neighbourhood plans and local plan policies to explicitly support age-friendly microsite housing.



Improve viability through partnerships and land strategy

Although microsite developments may deliver significant social value, smaller sites often face viability challenges associated with higher per-unit costs and limited economies of scale. Strategic partnerships and innovative land approaches will therefore be essential to support delivery without compromising quality.

Priority should be given to sites located adjacent to existing housing and infrastructure, including underused garage sites, large residential gardens, and community-owned land assets.

Delivery partners should also explore opportunities for grant funding, reduced land costs, and land contribution models that enable high-quality schemes to remain financially viable.

At the same time, the development of repeatable design approaches may help reduce costs and improve delivery efficiency, provided sufficient flexibility is retained to respond appropriately to differing site contexts and community needs.

Action points:

- Prioritise sites adjacent to or within existing housing stock.
- Explore use of under-used land, garage sites, large gardens and community-owned assets.
- Seek grant funding, gifted land or reduced land costs to protect quality.
- Design repeatable layouts where possible while allowing site-specific adaptation.



Embed health and prevention outcomes into the business case

Age-friendly innovative housing provision has the potential to deliver wider public value beyond housing provision alone. In particular, such developments may contribute to preventative health agendas by supporting independence, reducing loneliness, and mitigating pressures on health and social care systems.

Housing providers and local authorities should work collaboratively with health and social care partners to identify measurable outcomes associated with wellbeing, mobility, social connection, and service use. This should include both quantitative indicators and resident-reported experiences.

Positioning Garden Homes and Community Infill housing developments as a preventative health and wellbeing intervention may strengthen future funding applications, planning negotiations, and opportunities for scaling delivery. Robust outcome evidence will also be important in demonstrating the broader social and economic value of age-friendly housing investment.

Action points:

- Work with health and social care partners to define measurable outcomes (e.g. reduced falls, reduced loneliness, improved wellbeing).
- Capture resident-reported outcomes alongside service-use data where possible.
- Frame delivery as a preventative health and wellbeing intervention, not housing alone.
- Use outcome evidence to support funding bids, planning decisions and future scaling.



Develop a long-term age-friendly microsite housing strategy

Garden Homes and Community Infill housing should be developed as part of a long-term, place-based approach rather than standalone projects. Sustainable delivery will require coordination across housing, planning, health, and community sectors, alongside a clear understanding of local demographic change and housing demand.

Local authorities should identify neighbourhoods characterised by ageing populations, under-occupation, and unmet housing need, while developing a pipeline of potential microsites for future delivery. Learning from pilot projects should be systematically integrated into local policy frameworks, design guidance, and delivery models.

In the longer term, building institutional knowledge and delivery capacity among local partners will be essential in enabling microsite housing approaches to be replicated, adapted, and embedded within mainstream age-friendly housing policy and practice.

Action points:

- Map neighbourhoods with high concentrations of older residents and unmet housing need.
- Identify a pipeline of potential microsites for development.
- Integrate learning from pilots into policy, design guidance and delivery models.
- Build capacity among local partners to replicate and adapt the approach over time.



CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Garden Homes and small-scale Community Infill housing represent a credible, high-quality and community-rooted response to the housing and ageing challenges facing the UK. With the right design standards, partnerships and policy alignment, they can support older people to age well in place, strengthen communities and reduce long-term pressures on the housing and health systems. Garden Homes and infill development have considerable potential to contribute to addressing the housing needs of the UK's ageing population by providing accessible, community-integrated, and sustainable housing within existing neighbourhoods. These models present a significant opportunity to deliver age-appropriate housing while supporting sustainable patterns of urban growth and enabling older adults to remain within established communities. However, realising this potential requires commitment to community engagement and long-term strategic coordination across planning, housing, health, and social care sectors, supported by inclusive design standards, affordability measures, and sustained investment in local infrastructure and community empowerment mechanisms.

While this report has not addressed planning frameworks and legislation at national and local levels, planning policies must explicitly recognise and support the housing needs of an ageing population and facilitate the delivery of later-life housing through the identification and allocation of suitable sites. This includes reducing barriers to planning approval for small-scale developments and ensuring that local housing strategies integrate demographic considerations alongside broader objectives relating to sustainability, health, and social care.

It is important to deliver housing that is accessible, adaptable, and responsive to changing needs over a lifetime. Garden Homes and Community Infill developments offer further examples of lifetime home principles, incorporating inclusive design principles, including step-free access, adaptable layouts, high levels of energy efficiency, and safe external environments. Such measures are essential to supporting independent living and enabling residents to age in place, thereby reducing future pressures on health and social care systems.

The integration of Garden Homes and Infill housing within existing communities is also critical. The evidence presented here demonstrates that older adults value proximity to established social networks, local services, healthcare facilities, and public transport infrastructure. Development(s) should prioritise walkable and well-connected locations that support continued participation in community life and reduce the risk of social isolation, and smaller-scale microsite housing models may provide particularly appropriate solutions within established residential settings.

Meaningful community engagement will ensure that infill developments respond effectively to local needs and aspirations. Participatory and co-design approaches can improve the suitability and acceptability of proposed schemes, particularly where concerns exist regarding increased density, changes to neighbourhood character, or pressures on local infrastructure. Involving older people directly within the design and decision-making process can contribute to more inclusive and responsive housing outcomes.

The success of Community Infill development in particular, and Garden Homes to an arguably lesser degree, depends upon adequate infrastructure and service capacity. Increased residential density within existing urban areas must be accompanied by investment in healthcare provision, transport connectivity, green space, digital infrastructure, and social care services. Without such investment, infill development risks exacerbating existing pressures on local communities and public services.



Finally, issues of affordability cannot be avoided. To address housing need effectively, homes must provide a range of affordable and flexible tenure options that are accessible to older people across different income groups. This may include support for community housing and land trusts, and other less-traditional approaches to financing new homes, as well as affordable ownership schemes, social and intermediate rental housing offered through housing associations and local authorities, and financial incentives that support rightsizing without substantial economic disadvantage. Without appropriate affordability measures, the potential social benefits of later-life housing provision are likely to remain limited. Effective delivery mechanisms, financial support and flexible governance structures are required to facilitate implementation. Community-led organisations, housing associations, and small and medium-sized developers can face significant financial and regulatory barriers in realising innovative age-friendly housing projects. Removing such barriers is vital to enable such innovation. Targeted funding, cross-sector partnerships, and strategic support at local, regional and national governance levels is thus required to unlock the delivery potential of the housing models discussed here.



NEXT STEPS

Building on the evidence and learning from this project, the following steps are recommended to move from feasibility into delivery:

Identify and progress pilot sites

- Identify one or two pilot locations within neighbourhoods showing strong demand and clear community connections.
- Prioritise sites that are adjacent to or integrated with existing housing stock, community land or under-used spaces.
- Explore both a single Garden Home model and a small infill cluster (4–6 homes) to test different approaches.

Undertake feasibility, design and co-design work

- Carry out site-specific feasibility assessments addressing access, servicing, drainage, refuse and environmental constraints.
- Develop designs through early and meaningful co-design with older residents and neighbouring households.
- Ensure designs demonstrate high standards of accessibility, energy efficiency, outdoor space and long-term quality.

Engage early with planning and statutory partners

- Initiate pre-application discussions with planning officers at an early stage.
- Share clear evidence of local need, community support and health and wellbeing benefits.
- Explore how Garden Homes and Community Infill sites can be supported within existing planning policy frameworks or specialist housing classifications.

Secure funding and delivery partnerships

- Identify funding routes to support feasibility, design and capital costs, including grant funding and low-cost or gifted land.
- Formalise partnerships between housing providers, community-led organisations, local authorities and health partners to support delivery.
- Ensure long-term affordability and management arrangements are embedded from the outset.

Develop an evaluation and learning framework

- Agree clear success measures for pilot schemes, such as around resident wellbeing, independence, housing satisfaction and community impact.
- Capture both quantitative indicators (e.g. reduced falls, service use) and qualitative outcomes (resident stories and experience).
- Use findings to strengthen the evidence base for future schemes and inform planning and funding decisions.

Build a pipeline for scaling and replication

- Use pilot learning to develop repeatable design principles, delivery processes and partnership models.
- Map additional microsites across neighbourhoods with high proportions of older residents.
- Integrate learning into longer-term housing, ageing well and prevention strategies to support wider roll-out.



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