



Housing LIN

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Viewpoint 118

Senior Cohousing has a lot to offer, but should we also consider the merits of intergenerational living?

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Introduction

As Britain faces an ageing population, rising social isolation, and increasing pressure on housing and care systems, cohousing has emerged as a potential alternative model that promotes community, mutual support, and resident participation. Two prominent forms are senior cohousing, designed specifically for older adults, and intergenerational cohousing, where residents of different ages intentionally live together. While both models purport to reduce loneliness and encourage social interaction, they differ significantly in their aims, benefits, and challenges.

What is senior cohousing

Senior cohousing is designed primarily for people aged over 50 or those who have reached retirement age and wish to maintain independence while benefiting from a supportive community. Residents occupy self-contained homes but share communal facilities such as gardens, kitchens, and social spaces. One of its perceived strengths is its ability to reduce loneliness, which remains a major concern among older adults in Britain. The intentional design of senior cohousing encourages frequent social contact without compromising privacy, helping residents maintain emotional wellbeing and reducing the risk of social isolation. Research by Hudson et al (2021)¹ suggests that senior cohousing enables older people to “age in place”, thereby delaying or avoiding the need for residential care by providing informal support networks among neighbours.

At present in the UK, we have only two fully established senior cohousing projects, [New Ground](#), North London, and [Rupali Court](#), near Birmingham – as featured in this recent [Housing LIN case study](#) - but there are many more in the forming and development stage. The residents of New Ground describe their relationships as one of ‘*looking out for each other, but not looking after each other*’ – differentiating between elements of informal care such as shopping, offering lifts, or companionship; and more formal care such as dressing, washing or medical care. According to Moss ([writing for Cohousing UK](#)) even light touch informal support may reduce dependence on overstretched health and social care services, aligning with British policy ambitions to promote independent living for older people.

Senior cohousing is a model that grew out of intergenerational cohousing as a response to the needs of elders who may be looking for a more tailored form of housing. However, communities composed solely of older adults may also include vulnerabilities, for example residents experiencing declining health simultaneously which may in turn reduce capacity for reciprocal support over time. Some evidence from [the Netherlands](#) where senior cohousing is more established suggests that boundaries around care can be difficult to maintain, especially when long-term friendships are formed, and that the benefits of cohousing can tail off as care needs increase.

These last factors are also found within intergenerational communities with what is termed the ‘care gap’ arising when physical or cognitive frailty becomes severe, necessitating residents needing to move out to receive formal, institutional care.

Intergenerational Cohousing

Intergenerational cohousing is increasingly recognised as a progressive housing model that can also support healthy ageing by integrating older adults within mixed-age communities. Unlike age-segregated housing, it combines private living spaces with shared facilities and collaborative governance, encouraging sustained interaction across generations (Brenton, 2025).² Although not set up specifically to meet the needs of people in later life, through fostering meaningful relationships - as evidenced by [Bridport Cohousing](#) - intergenerational cohousing can recreate the feel of a small village with the diversity of children, young adults and elders in one place. Older residents may contribute experience, mentoring, and light touch childcare support, while younger residents may assist with physical tasks, digital technologies, or transport (although in my experience community elders are quite often found within all these roles). This reciprocal exchange reflects principles of social capital, strengthening networks of trust and cooperation that benefit all age groups rather than a single demographic.

Unlike senior-only communities, responsibilities and mutual support are distributed across residents with varying abilities and life stages. Children can bring vitality to communal spaces, while working-age adults can contribute skills and resources that complement the experience of older residents. This diversity mirrors broader society more closely, potentially reducing age-based stereotypes and encouraging social inclusion. A recent [international study](#) carried out by Savannah Fishel (and previous Housing LIN Blogger) found that intergenerational communities can foster social connections and increased wellbeing across the ages.

The Bigger Picture

As recognised in the APPG on Housing and Care for Older People Inquiry report, '[Creating Intergenerational Communities](#)', from a policy perspective, intergenerational cohousing aligns closely with contemporary British objectives surrounding social integration, preventative health, and sustainable communities. It may also make more efficient use of housing stock by accommodating households with differing needs within the same development (not all cohousing is new build). As Britain seeks innovative responses to demographic change, mixed-age intentional communities offer a model that promotes both social inclusion and resource sharing.

This is not to say that intergenerational cohousing is without its challenges. Cohousing in all its forms can be difficult to get off the ground; progress is slow and those in urgent housing need may find projects too lengthy to participate. Stable communities experience low turnover (people stay because they are happy), but this also means that age demographic can slowly creep up over time placing demands on a diminishing group of people as capacity changes. Intergenerational communities may not have planned for an ageing population, and houses designed for families may not be suitable as children leave and residents age. Finally, governance may become more complex due to competing interests between age groups - I have witnessed some very long meetings over community trampolines!

Concluding thoughts

Ultimately, both models offer valuable responses to Britain's housing and ageing challenges. Senior cohousing provides a highly supportive environment that enables older adults to maintain independence, reduce loneliness, and age in place through strong peer networks. Intergenerational cohousing, by contrast, offers broader societal benefits by promoting reciprocal relationships across age groups, strengthening community resilience, and fostering greater social integration. While senior cohousing may be more effective in meeting the specific needs of older adults, intergenerational cohousing arguably provides a more holistic and sustainable model for addressing Britain's long-term demographic and social challenges.

Rather than viewing the two approaches as competing alternatives, in my view, policymakers should recognise that both have an important role within a diverse housing strategy aimed at improving wellbeing and strengthening communities.

References

- (1) Hudson, J. et al. (2021) [“A Slow Build-Up of a History of Kindness”: Exploring the Potential of Community-Led Housing in Alleviating Loneliness](#), *Sustainability*, 13(20). doi:10.3390/su132011323
- (2) Brenton, M and Peace, S (2025) Conceptualising the continuum of Collaborative Housing, care and ageing: In conversation with Maria Brenton and Sheila Peace IN Fernandez Arrigoitia, M; Felstead, A; Hudson, J; Izuhara, M; Scanlon, K and West, K (eds) [Collaborative Housing, Ageing and Social Care, Lessons from Europe](#). Bristol University Press

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

About the Author

Dr Kirsten Stevens-Wood is an academic based at Cardiff Metropolitan University. She is interested in all things communal living from cohousing to low impact development, housing cooperatives to big house communes.

Kirsten's research focuses on the formation, lived experience and the experimentality of intentional communities. She is particularly interested in the ways in which intentional communities foster and engage with social and practical experiments and testing ways of living which can potentially influence wider social practices. This work includes a focus upon the process that enable experimentality, and the way in which being 'alternative' can facilitate real world change. She is the lead for the [Intentional Communities Research Network](#) and an editor for [Diggers and Dreamers](#) as well as being the current host for the [Diggers and Dreamers Podcast](#).

About the Housing LIN

The Housing LIN is a sophisticated network bringing together over 15,000 housing, health and social care professionals in England, Wales and Scotland to exemplify innovative housing solutions for an ageing population. Recognised by government and industry as a leading 'ideas lab' on specialist/supported housing, our online and regional networked activities, and consultancy services:

- connect people, ideas and resources to inform and improve the range of housing that enables older and disabled people to live independently
- provide access to intelligence on the latest funding, research, policy and practice
- raise the profile of specialist and supported housing with developers, commissioners and operators, and
- attract business to help and support clients plan, design and operate aspirational housing and developments operators, and services for people of all ages.

If you found this Viewpoint of interest, the Housing LIN curates dedicated pages on cohousing at: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Housing/HousingforOlderPeople/Cohousing/>

And another on intergenerational housing at:

<https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Housing/HousingforOlderPeople/intergenerational-housing/>

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