



Housing LIN

Connecting people, ideas and resources

Viewpoint 121

Wise words: In conversation to demystify and de-stigmatise – Is this the key that unlocks development potential?

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Written for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by **Dominic Hailey**,
Director, Collado Collins Architects



Introduction

We inhabit a world where the focus on housing – its design, delivery, occupancy, and politics – is immense, and the criteria defining what makes ‘good’ homes (safe, secure, accessible) are ever more closely regulated and scrutinised. While on the one hand regulation and legislation such as the [Supported Housing \(Regulatory Oversight Act\)](#) is helping achieve better quality homes for people who may not have access to mainstream housing, on the other the level of legislation and regulation, and the language we use to describe Supported Housing, acts as a deterrent for many housing developers, especially those who work at a smaller scale.

I sat down with Claire Wise, Director of Support at MTVH, to learn more about the challenges a large affordable homes provider faces on a daily basis, and how by developing and communicating a clear understanding of what makes good Supported Housing, she is looking to stimulate more development activity in this underserved sector.

Wise is an expert on the subject, having started her career as an Occupational Therapist working on housing adaptations, completing a Master’s Degree in Accessibility and Inclusive Design, and moving into Local Authority work developing and implementing the London Accessible Housing Register Toolkit, as featured in this 2012 [Housing LIN viewpoint](#). Some 20 years later her trajectory has brought her to her current position where she oversees over five and a half thousand homes and tenancies either for independent Later Living, Extra Care, or Supported Housing in various forms, with the accompanying services offer that is necessary to keep things running smoothly.

With the regulations around housing and the protection of occupants with the Fire Safety Act also requiring ever more consideration, and the controls around landlord activities with the Renters Rights Act rolling out to Housing Associations in late 2027, Wise describes how there is no such thing as a moment to pause and take stock. Instead, the provision of Later Living and Supported Housing is a world of assessment, repairs, remediation, and reconfiguration of existing stock often adapted from period properties, alongside the development of design guidance and new buildings to expand the offer to support an ever-growing need.

Amid this ever-evolving landscape the development of new housing often falters, with the result being an undersupply of appropriate accommodation.

One of the core issues, says Wise, is the language we use. Call something ‘specialist housing’ and immediately it sounds more complicated than ‘general needs housing’. Call the stages of occupancy ‘emergency’ or ‘temporary’ and you undermine the very people you are looking to support, add to the stigma around social housing, and remove them from the mainstream linguistically and psychologically.

But purpose-built Supported Housing is not that different – the same principles apply here as they do across all housing. Space to sleep, wash, cook, eat, and relax in privacy and with dignity – these are fundamentally the same regardless of tenure type, age, or route into housing.

So, what does 'good' look like?

According to Wise it is very simple: Housing should provide a platform for independence without being so bespoke to one individual that it has either a stigmatising effect, or it becomes unsuitable from an asset management point of view when that individual moves on, requiring extensive remodelling for the next occupant.

One typology is clusters of 8-12 one-bedroom en-suite rooms or self-contained flats, two of which would be designed to meet M4(3) accessibility requirements, with a communal area ideally with the footprint of a dwelling that could be flipped back to a home if needed, and decent quality space for staff. The key is to develop using inclusive design principles. Buildings should have the capability of accommodating accessibility aids and specialist technology depending on the needs of the customer group. With the digital switchover deadline looming, all that is needed as standard a lot of the time is a Wi-Fi signal. Just get the basics right and the homes become universal, capable of providing for a variety of needs groups.

Such a model requires only small-scale sites, rather than needing to be forced into larger masterplans, which opens up the field to smaller developers and landowners. Instead of major brownfield regeneration projects, consider infill sites, garage plots, and 'backlands' as opportunities.

Rather than development pipelines in the hundreds, create a framework for a provision of homes in smaller numbers from multiple sources to stimulate new supply, including the 10-year Homes England's and the GLA's [social and affordable housing capital programme](#).

If we can be clear about what is required, remove the stigma of language, and demonstrate that it works as a viable development model then we can potentially unlock an improved supply of appropriate, accessible, and ultimately tenure-blind and desirable housing that could support young and old alike.

In an exciting development and with the GLA's [draft London Plan](#) specifying the need for a range of supported housing solutions, Wise and her team have secured funding to develop the MTVH Design Guide for Supported Housing, covering both new-build and retrofit, into a pan-London document that can be used by as many Housing Associations and Funders as possible to understand and communicate what Supported Housing is, and help stimulate capital funding into the sector. As that guidance emerges and becomes more widely adopted, the opportunities to increase the supply and quality of housing are immense. We just need to spread the word.

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 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 developments
- 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 services for people of all ages.

If you found this Viewpoint of interest, the Housing LIN curates dedicated webpages on supported housing at: <https://www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Housing/Supported-Housing/>

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Housing Learning and Improvement Network
c/o PRP, The Ideas Store
10 Lindsey Street, Clerkenwell
London EC1A 9HP

Email: info@housinglin.org.uk

Web: www.housinglin.org.uk

LinkedIn: [@Housing-LIN](https://www.linkedin.com/company/@Housing-LIN)

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