



Home & Community: The Ageing Tsunami

By 2035 the numbers of people in the UK aged 85 or over will have increased by 250%, forming more than 5% of the total population; those over 65 will make up nearly 25%, significantly more than the corresponding numbers of children. On present showing, by far the largest numbers of home owners will be found in this massively expanded cohort, commanding a huge proportion of the nation's wealth. They will have real economic, and political power. We can continue to retain our stereotypical image of older people, as passive, disadvantaged and 'in their declining years', and go on responding ineffectually and with surprise and dismay through failing repeatedly to grasp the realities of change.

Alternatively, this Viewpoint suggests that we can accept the challenge of meeting the aspirations and wishes of older people, enabling them to plan their own futures, enhancing and enjoying the four, or more, decades of their later lives. We need to create the scope for their on-going, active participation in the dynamic life of society, with the availability of choice and opportunity. It will only become possible if we address, with urgency the forms both of housing and community that we create now.

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Introduction: the nature of 'home'

In 1963 in *'Community and Privacy'*, Serge Chermayeff and Christopher Alexander quoted Lewis Mumford, writing twenty-five years earlier in *'The Culture of Cities'*. He said:

"... the child is no less entitled to space, room for play and movement, a place for quiet retreat and study, other than his bed. No housing standard is adequate that provides only sleeping cubicles ... for the child, or forces him into the company of adults."

Had he been speaking of those who are at the other end of the spectrum of life he may well have said:

"... the older person is no less entitled to space, room for recreation and safe movement, a place for quiet retreat and study, other than his bed. No housing standard is adequate that provides only sleeping cubicles for the older person, or forces him into the company of other older people."

In 1938, Mumford was already concerned, not just with the 'right' to occupy a dwelling, but the right to enjoy the benefits of life in the space of a home of one's own. Anything less, he argued, is not acceptable. With the elapse of time few would seek to challenge that proposition.

If the need for fundamental change was already evident in 1938, it has continued since then to accelerate ever more rapidly. The massive upheaval and damage of the 2nd World War, with the general displacement of huge populations, proved to be a potent engine for change. There followed radical alterations in family structure, racial and cultural diffusion, and the emergence of new patterns of housing tenure. However, the demographic shifts to an ageing population which are currently occurring indicate that even faster and more fundamental widespread changes are well under way. They are energized by medical advances, the redistribution of wealth, improved diet, universal systems for social care and support, and improved mobility. The changes are truly dramatic, being rapid, inexorable and on a massive scale.

In 1950, Walter Gropius, one of the founders of the Bauhaus wrote of his childhood in Germany, less than half a century earlier:

*"When I was a boy, my family was living in a city apartment with open gas-jets, individual coal-heated stoves in each room, including the bathroom, where warm water was heated for the bath each Saturday: that took two hours. There was no electric street-car, no automobile, of course, no plane. Radio, film, gramophone, X-ray, telephone were non-existent."*¹

We are only a single generation away from those for whom that was the norm. At the same time, as the last national survey shows; *"By 2035 the number of people aged 85 and over is projected to be 2.5 times larger than in 2010, reaching 3.6million and accounting for 5per cent of the population"*.²

At first sight, this 'tsunami' of change to the balance of the population appears overwhelming. And yet the means of managing it may lie with those most directly affected if only they can be enabled to harness at least some of the power that rests in their own hands. We all need to re-think what 'ageing' means.

¹ Walter Gropius (1950), *Design and industry*

² Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys

Stereotyping is one of the most insidious impediments for older people; it also presents the greatest challenge.

In spite of the fading, passive images of many older people, the present generation can truly be said, for the first time, to be generally 'home-owning', even if many continue to live in unsatisfactory accommodation with their 'wealth' tied up in 'bricks and mortar'. Nonetheless, as recently highlighted in the *'English Household Survey'*³, large numbers do live 'mortgage-free' and command both economic and thus political power. They still need income, many also harbouring a desire to pass on their 'wealth' to their children, but they remain denied choice of alternative housing and the opportunity to plan for their future.

In spite of the potential for a huge market for well-designed and well located accommodation to meet the needs of active older people, successive Governments, institutional investors, and the construction industry have all continued to focus pre-eminently on the production of homes for families and younger individuals. Yet, greater availability of the suitable homes that older people wish to live in could free up huge amounts of capital, and make many existing family houses available. As evidenced by the still unprecedented levels of emigration for the want of such accommodation, significant numbers of more affluent active older people make the radical decision to move to a more benign climate where desirable housing is available. But the majority 'stay-put', often in their under-occupied, unsuitable houses.

Meanwhile, as the demographics show, the number of active older people grows inexorably, creating an expanding market. It is thus possible to see older people, many of whom have considerable resources, as an economic asset, not a burden. Indeed, they are active consumers in an increasingly greying market, long recognized by successful organizations like Saga, Stannah, and McCarthy & Stone.

Successive Governments, confronted by the fast expanding cohort of 'pensioners', complacently have largely remained indifferent to their aspirations and ignoring many of the key policy issues which loom. But 'Equality Law' is being amended as 'ageism' comes under scrutiny. Attitudes are softening to the rigidity of 'retirement' practices. The idea of older people continuing in full, or part-time employment into their 70's is no longer novel. Nonetheless, for some older people, being in employment is a bar to eligibility for social housing designated for 'the elderly'; meanwhile, conversely, being in receipt of state benefits is a positive advantage. Furthermore, the notion that older people want to think about and plan for their future still seems largely to remain incomprehensible to successive governments, many non-governmental agencies, and far too many Local Authorities. In fact, I applaud the Housing Learning and Improvement Network as it is one of the few organisations that seeks to inform and influence policy makers, commissioners and developers on the 'virtue' of developing housing in old age.

However, 'old age' is still broadly used as a blanket term for the later stages of life. There is a pressing need to think differently about an ageing population; it will be more realistic to refer to two distinct and frequently extended periods of later life. In my view, they can best be described as 'active older age' and 'less active older age'.

³ DCLG (2012), *English Household Survey*

‘Home’ and ‘Community’: ‘Active’ and ‘Less Active’ Older People

If accommodation is to be provided to meet the requirements of such a hugely increasing sector of the population it will need to have certain characteristics. Many of those characteristics are considered and discussed in the influential *‘Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation’*, or (HAPPI) report.⁴ Perhaps most significant is such flexibility in design, adaptability and construction of each dwelling will serve to meet the aspirations of the ‘active older people’ who will be the initial occupants. It will be just as important however to ensure that it can continue to remain suitable for meeting their needs as they become ‘less active’. The resulting time span can extend for twenty, thirty, or frequently even more years. It is vital therefore to understand what is actually meant when talking about ‘home’ and ‘community’ in the context of meeting older peoples’ needs.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a ‘home’ as:

“A place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household“,
and goes on to describe it contextually as:

“A place where something flourishes, is most typically found, or from which it originates”,
and,

“A house or an apartment considered as a commercial property.”

What is beyond dispute is that every individual, from birth to death, needs a home; indeed the lack of one can lead to any individual being designated as having - ‘No known address’ - resulting in their losing their legal, social and economic status.

The Dictionary also defines a ‘community’ as:

“A group of people living together in one place, especially one (such group) practicing common ownership,”

and goes on to describe it contextually as:-

“All the people living in a particular area or place, or

A particular area or place considered together with its inhabitants, or

The people of a district ... considered collectively, especially in the context of social values and responsibilities.”

It also offers a further definition of ‘community’ as:

“A group of people having a religion, race, profession, or other particular characteristic in common,”

and as:

“A feeling of fellowship with others as the result of sharing common attitudes, interests and goals.”

If dwellings that are suitable for meeting the present and future needs of older people are to be provided, and communities created in which they choose to live, then what is required is not just more houses, but accommodation offering the potential to become a *home* where an older person can live permanently as a member of a household, and where they can flourish. I believe that such *homes* will need to be located and grouped together to become core components of *communities* where the older people living there can enjoy a feeling of fellowship as the result of sharing common interests and goals. Amongst those goals will be the assertion of independence and autonomy by the individual.

⁴ HCA (2009), *Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation*

If one of the effects of progressing from being 'actively' older to 'less actively' older is for personal mobility to diminish, it is all the more important that individuals can sustain relationships within their community; 'Care Aware' design of older people's housing is thus of vital importance. Either inherently in the design, or by ensuring that it is achievable through the scope for adaptation, it will ensure that the levels of care required by individuals can be adjusted to meet their needs as they arise. At the same time, it will avoid the necessity for their transfer to nursing accommodation for as long as possible, perhaps completely.

The ability to 'stay at home' will also help protect the integrity of each individual's unique personality; the sense of retaining 'ownership' of their home, whatever its form of tenure, will be fundamental in sustaining their autonomy and independence. By doing so, the containment of demand on the public purse will offer the scope for using precious resources as effectively as possible.

The HAPPI Report and 'active elderly people'

As a member of the HAPPI Panel, we stressed the importance of design, and identified ten elements that they saw as critical to achieving age-inclusive housing. These are:

- generous internal space standards, including general availability of 2 bedroom apartments
- plenty of natural light in the home and in circulation spaces
- balconies in outdoor spaces, avoiding internal corridors and single aspect flats
- adaptability and 'care-aware' design which is ready for emerging telecare and telehealthcare technologies
- circulation spaces that encourage interaction and avoid an 'institutional feel'
- shared facilities and community 'hubs' where these are lacking in the neighbourhood
- plants, trees, and the natural environment
- high levels of energy efficiency, with good ventilation to avoid overheating
- extra storage for belongings and bicycles
- shared external areas such as 'home zones' that give priority to pedestrians

To these ten elements many members of the Panel would now add "*Location at the heart, rather than on the periphery of the broader community*".

The All Party Parliamentary Group which has recently published '*Housing our Ageing Population: Plan for Implementation*' (or HAPPI2) has considered how the recommendations of the original Report can most effectively be refined and progressed. What has become clear in the three years since the original Report was published is that the force of arguments that it presented, the inexorability of the demographics of both early onset dementia and a fast growing population of older people, together with acceleration of 'retirement housing' as a lifestyle choice, including 'shared ownership' and 'co-housing' options, are all contributing to the beginnings of real growth of provision, in spite of it not being helped by the most adverse economic conditions for more than half a century.

A number of valuable pointers are emerging. At Governmental level, both the '*National Planning Policy Framework*'⁵ and '*Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*'⁶, make encouraging reference to the importance of housing for older people designed along HAPPI lines. Furthermore, the recent Department of Health Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund, a £300m capital investment programme being administered by the Homes and Communities Agency and Greater London Authority (GLA) refer to HAPPI in the bidding criteria.

In addition, the HAPPI category is in its third year of the National Design Awards⁷ and there is evidence of growing co-operation between Local Government and the house building industry, with HAPPI design principles influencing the production of schemes. The need for partnership between the providers of accommodation and the providers of care support is increasingly accepted. For example, Sunderland City Council, in particular, in adopting policies based on HAPPI principles, has helped achieve the following outcomes:

- keeping couples together within their own homes
- enabling older households to live in their own homes independently for longer
- giving people a choice of tenure which best meets their financial circumstances
- offering sustainable accommodation which is well insulated, warm and efficient
- resolving under-occupation by providing accommodation which meets the needs and aspirations of older households
- delivering more personalized care to individuals
- reducing carer fatigue with increased support to carers from care staff and peers
- delivering accommodation which prevents bed-blocking in hospitals enabling people to be re-skilled and re-abled in a domestic setting before returning to their home

Nonetheless, the welcome adoption of HAPPI principle still urgently needs to generate much more 'joined-up' thinking. In London, the GLA in its recently published '*Supplementary Planning Guidance*' refers to the '*London Housing Design Standards*' and requires that, "*account is taken of the changing age structure of London's population and in particular the varied needs of older Londoners*". It also requires that, "*attention is paid to the concept of 'Lifetime Neighbourhoods' with places and spaces designed to meet the needs of the community at all stages of people's lives and meet the Lifetime Neighbourhood criteria*". The references to 'home' and 'community' could hardly be clearer.

And yet in the London Borough of Newham, the biggest single housing development of more than 8,000 dwellings in London since the Second World War has now been embarked upon by the London Legacy Development Corporation in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park but virtually no regard is being paid to the needs of older people at all. In the brief for this major scheme, there are only two passing mentions of the needs of older people, one specifically in the context of 'Lifetime Homes Standards'.

For someone who knows the area well, older people have traditionally played a particularly full part in the life of the East End. Many of those who have moved away into Essex, the

⁵ DCLG (2012), *National Planning Policy Framework*

⁶ DLCLG (2011), *Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*

⁷ Department of Health (2012), *Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund*

north London Boroughs, or to Hertfordshire, have done so only because there is so little suitable accommodation for them where they have their roots and their families. The creation of housing designed in accordance with the principles proposed in the HAPPI Report could give many older people the opportunity to 'stay put' and enrich the social mix and diversity of the community in the Park.

At the same time, by vacating family housing in the vicinity these same older people could free up much needed family accommodation in the area. The development of properties on the HAPPI model is tenure neutral offering the scope for ownership or rental. The success of this approach has already been demonstrated in the scheme privately developed and funded by Berkley Homes at Kidbrooke, Greenwich, on the South side of the River – a winner of the HAPPI award in 2010.

And finally, there is still time for re-appraisal and change - it is certainly needed if places like Newham, when planning for housing growth, is to gain the benefit of homes and communities that meet the needs of the fastest growing, and in many ways most vibrant sector of our population: older people.

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

Previously responsible for managing the Department of Health's Extra Care Housing Fund, the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) is the leading 'learning lab' for a growing network of housing, health and social care professionals in England involved in planning, commissioning, designing, funding, building and managing housing, care and support services for older people and vulnerable adults with long term conditions.

For further information about the Housing LIN's comprehensive list of online resources and shared learning and service improvement networking opportunities, including site visits and network meetings in your region, visit www.housinglin.org.uk

The Housing LIN welcomes contributions on a range of issues pertinent to housing with care for older and vulnerable adults. If there is a subject that you feel we should cover, please contact us.

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