



# An older person's perspective on the housing landscape in England

My involvement in housing spans twenty years. I currently Chair Future East, the Advisory Forum on Ageing East of England for UKAFA. I am also a Member of the Partnership Board of the Age Action Alliance and a member of the Safe Warm Homes working group and Housing Champion East of England, for Care and Repair England, having worked with Essex County Council Older Persons' Scrutiny Committee for a number of years as the Chair of the Older Peoples Planning Group, and now as part of Healthwatch, Essex.

In this viewpoint I have used my knowledge of housing to raise the problem of the shortfall of Extra Care Housing within the County, as this has an effect on many people with dementia and high care needs. This shortfall means that too many will only have the option of moving to a care home, which in most cases will cost more and not meet their needs. These could be met within the community in an Extra Care scheme. The time to change has come.

Written for the Housing Learning & Improvement Network by  
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## **Introduction**

On the 1st April 2013, I posed a question to Nick Clegg Deputy Prime Minister on housing for older people, specifically the lack of Extra Care Housing. This was no April Fool! However, his response reinforced my belief that there is a lack of understanding of the whole picture of housing and the place and importance of Extra Care Housing.

If we are to have social mobility in the housing sector in England a change must take place in understanding all aspects of housing and the part each plays in providing real choices for all, enabling people to make the right move at the right time.

## **Understanding the Housing Needs and Aspirations of an Ageing Population**

We live in a country with an ageing population and it is now widely acknowledged that this will have a dramatic impact on the future provision of suitable health and personal care for older people. Very little attention has been paid to the changing housing needs of older people and the challenges this will have on the combined budgets of housing, social care and health.

We are already experiencing a lack of Extra Care Housing. Currently the approach is for a person with care needs to stay in their own home with care provision delivered to them and then a move to a care home. For many older people, including those with Alzheimer's and dementia this is not the best choice or the most cost effective approach. I believe that there is a lack of research into the wellbeing of this growing sector of the population and the effects on their family carers and the real costs to society and the tax payers. Furthermore, we tend to forget or ignore the cost of caring for family members and the cost associated with this role.

From a personal view point, I want to have some choice in where my home is should I need to receive care in the future. I am 68 this year and in reasonable health right now; however, I may at any time need to receive care and as with an increasing number of older people in the UK I live alone with no close family. Given that in the county I live in there is a known shortfall of 2,000+ Extra Care Housing units of accommodation (a growing deficit) and an estimated<sup>1</sup> 73,000 nationally, what choices will be open to me? This is a question being asked by older people across the UK.

## **Understanding how Extra Care Housing plays its part**

Social mobility needs the right types of housing option to be available at the time it is needed. For the individuals and families with changing housing needs there is often a lack of understanding of the options available and the types of housing they might need. With a shortfall in Extra Care Housing, older people cannot access the right type of housing at the right time keeping them in homes which no longer meet their needs and halting choice and opportunity for the wider housing sector.

It is encouraging that developers are starting to build again, but the focus is on 2-4 bedroom, family houses, because this I suspect is where the profits are. Mostly units are being built, not communities, just building on to existing housing and filling spaces in cities and town centres as this is cheaper. Where are the new Sheltered Housing and the Extra Care Housing schemes?

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<sup>1</sup> Elderly Accommodation/Housing LIN (2013), *Strategic Housing for Older People Analysis Tool*

I was part of Baroness Andrew's review of Sheltered Housing<sup>2</sup> under the previous government which resulted in a number of good recommendations for the future of housing. The resultant HAPPI reports<sup>3</sup> show how Extra Care Housing can play its part. I maintain that we need a holistic approach to housing in the UK with housing for the elderly being an essential part of this.

## Conclusions

My view is that we need to bring Extra Care Housing to the forefront of discussion and debate with decision makers including national government, local planners and elected members to ensure housing is built to meet the needs of the local people as a whole not just what the developers make the most profit from.

Extra Care Housing developments need to be put into places which enable residents to be part of and contribute to their communities not stuck out of sight. How about a 150-200 unit Extra Care development in a place where it can be part of the local community with a café, fitness facilities, a base for local care provision and meeting rooms – A place of choice (as detailed in the HAPPI report).

There also needs to be a clear focus on the needs of individuals and families, enabling them to move at the right time in their lives rather than on the knee jerk cost cutting measures of authorities as it is in the long run a more costly choice for the tax payer.

The current government's policy of provision of care in a person's own home is time limited, there is too much emphasis placed on the family as carers with little or no support to the carers. Too often the carer can become ill and in need of health or social care before action is taken with the likely result that the individual being cared for moves to a care home. Instead, we need to understand how to ensure people have the right information to make informed decisions about their housing and care needs and that there are affordable choices available.

## Next Step

I will be looking to engage with others in the East of England, including the Housing Learning and Improvement Network, and nationally to further the better understanding of housing as a whole to ensure it forms part of all discussions and research on the needs of older people as our separate silo approach is only exacerbating the problem.

With a government now talking about "integration", it's time to start to change, to plan for the future, a need to research the needs of the sector and how it is part of the overall picture of health, social care and housing. Indeed, the time has come to stop looking at each part as a single issue and look at how each is interdependent and how we can achieve choice at a cost we can afford. It is a time to change the place of housing which includes Extra Care Housing in all its form and tenures.

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<sup>2</sup> CLG Ministerial Working Group for Sheltered Housing (2010); National Housing Federation (2010, *More than just a few kind words: Reshaping support in sheltered housing*)

<sup>3</sup> Homes and Communities Agency (2008). Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation. All Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Care for Older People inquiry report (2012), *Housing our Ageing Population: Plan for Implementation*

## 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](http://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 should be addressed, please contact us.

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