



A new era of accommodation for the Third Age: Constructing excellence

The construction industry is embracing emerging trends in building for older people, with a focus on flexibility and affordability.

This article by **Denise Chevin** first appeared in Construction Manager on 4 July 2013. It is reproduced with kind permission for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network

September 2013

Constructing excellence

Forget long dark corridors, an abundance of brick and chintz. Housing for older people is getting a makeover. Developers are hoping to attract the baby boomers with modern, light and airy apartments, complete with oversized balconies and sited close to amenities and good transport links.

They are bidding to appeal to downsizers in their early 60s looking to release equity, who want “well spec’d” and generously proportioned living space that will still work for them in their dotage, but above all else, doesn’t scream “retirement and old age”. As Patrick Devlin, partner at Pollard Thomas Edwards Architects, who is working on a number of these schemes, points out: “Many people aren’t actually going to be retiring.”

The provision of housing for the “silver slogger” generation is seen as a missing piece of the jigsaw of housing provision for the burgeoning older population, but is just one new aspect of a busy and rapidly changing sector.

As well as the startling demographic predictions, society is having to grapple with how to fund housing and care provision to meet differing demands. Better and more appropriate design is required, along with creativity in funding.

A parliamentary report on the ageing society published in March, *Ready for Ageing?*, flagged up how “woefully under-prepared we are as a society”. The Lords committee that produced it focused on the implications of an ageing population for individuals and public policy between 2020 and 2030. Key projections it highlighted about ageing included:

- 50% more people aged 65 and over in England in 2030 compared with 2010;
- 100% more people aged 85 and over in England in 2030 compared with 2010;
- Over 80% more people with dementia in England and Wales in 2030 compared with 2010 – up to 2 million.

And according to a report by Professor Michael Ball published by the University of Reading in May 2011, it is estimated that by 2033 there will be an extra 3.5 million households aged over 65, but at that time there were only 100,000 homes specifically for older people.

The good news is that more specialist accommodation is coming through planning and is being built in a variety of forms: high-end residential care through to “extra care” (housing for independent living designed with facilities and support as an option) as well as age-restricted housing for “younger” older people. There are numerous variations in between (see box below). The numbers will also be boosted with funding from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) which under Phase One of the Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund, has allocated a share of £300m for schemes for specialist housing for older people at the end of June.

Nursing home - Older person accommodated in their own room with ensuite. Communal shared facilities. All meals provided and looked after. Highly regulated.

Extra care accommodation - Apartment designed with wheelchair accessibility and more space. Often now in bigger developments of 150-plus units to provide enough scale for restaurant, laundry and a range of communal facilities such as a small gym. Often has a building manager or could be a care team on site. New way of giving people their independence and providing facilities to the community. Between 1,500 and 2,000 units are being built per year, according to the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

Retirement village - Provides full spectrum of accommodation types. Doctors' surgery and health centre with different types of provision on the same site covers all kinds of care.

Co-housing - Group of people come together to develop jointly owned scheme. Intention is that residents look after each other. In the scheme Co-housing Group of people come together to develop jointly owned scheme. Intention is that residents look after each other.

But as Anne-Marie Nicholson points out, investments are coming from all directions. She is a partner at PRP Architects, which is growing rapidly to accommodate all the projects it is winning in this area. It is working on 50 different schemes and has a 50-strong team specialising in housing for older people. "Investment is coming from all sorts of sources – for example, the Worshipful Company of Merchant Taylors – and charities and the private sector. Some of these new developments are replacing accommodation that is only 20 to 30 years old which the owners want to redevelop," she says.

One of these developers is housing association Central & Cecil, which owns a number of sites in prime locations that would benefit from redevelopment. One of its schemes is for 21 serviced apartments in Wimbledon, south London.

Craig Crowley, project manager at Central & Cecil, says: "Historically we developed sheltered housing, care homes and extra care for older people, knowing they often buy at a time when their level of support need grows. We also want to attract those who are making a proactive choice to live somewhere flexible as they grow older. Between six and eight of the flats will be for shared ownership at 75% of the sale value."

Subtle marketing

The trick for marketing these empty-nester schemes is to promote them as flexible accommodation for older people, to avoid scaring off those who aren't quite ready yet for slippers and Scrabble tournaments.

David Birkbeck, chief executive of Design for Homes, says that developing what are often luxury flats for this demographic is attractive for developers because usually the buyers don't need a mortgage and valuations are not knocked back by finance companies. According to research by Prudential Assurance in 2009, three-quarters of homeowners over the age of 65 have paid off their mortgages, and are sitting on £611bn of capital locked into their homes.

Caroline Dove, partner at architects HTA, which is also designing a range of different housing for older people, says the housing for baby boomers would normally meet Lifetime Homes standards. This means they have more floor and storage space than an average flat, and have features such as partition doors so that, for example, if a resident becomes bed bound, bedroom and living space can be opened up to make it more open plan.

All the ingredients of these principles were set out in government funded report by the HCA, the HAPPI (Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation) report, published in 2009, which called for a revolution in housing for the elderly. The report said that these homes should have "an appealing lifestyle vision", so that the "younger old" empty-nesters aspire and plan ahead to move into them. This downsizing shift would then release their large family homes, often with big gardens, for more suitable occupation by families with children. Some 37% of all UK homes are under-occupied, the report revealed, with half of these – 3.3 million in total

– held by those aged between 50 and 69. An All Party Parliamentary Group inquiry report, *Housing our Ageing Population: Plan for Implementation*, was published in November 2012 showcasing examples of best practice.

The co-housing alternative

Pollard Thomas Edwards architects has won planning permission for its first venture into co-housing, where a group comes together to develop a jointly owned scheme.

The new-build scheme, developed for Hanover Housing Association and Older Women's Co-Housing group (OWCH) with Housing for Women, is in Barnet, north London. The scheme will consist of 25 apartments, 17 of which will be for private sale and eight for rent.

The clients, 20 women aged between 55 and 80, were looking for a radically different approach to growing old, whereby they look after each other. "We put together a design process to coordinate their individual aspirations," explains Patrick Devlin, director at PTEa.

However, while the new generation of extra care facilities being built on these principles would usually have facilities such as cafes and communal space, some developers are leaving them out. They say it's because this new target audience doesn't want them, but it's also partly to make them stack up better financially. Communal areas take up a lot of space that would otherwise be used to build more flats.

The Department of Health's new £300m capital fund aside, housing associations are having to develop without grants, with many scaling up the number of homes they develop for sale, to subsidise the provision of affordable housing. For example, Hanover Housing Group, which specialises in housing for older people, plans to build about 1,250 units over the next five years, of which 900 will be for sale.

Bruce Moore, Hanover's chief executive, says it has switched all its developments from extra care to a downsizer offer. One of these is the co-housing development in Barnet (see box, page 22). "People have been going from general housing into care and then nursing homes. This fills a gap in the market. But the need is so huge there is plenty of room for different offers," Moore says.

McCarthy & Stone, which currently has 60-70% of the market for the provision of older people's housing for sale, has also launched its first foray for "younger" older people. At the moment, its two product types attract people in their late 70s and early 80s.

Expanding provision

The firm currently builds about 1,700 homes a year, but wants to double that number within five years, says head of public affairs, Paul Teverson. As well as providing for the younger end, it also wants to provide a full care spectrum.

Its new development for the downsizers is a 12-storey block in Poole, Dorset, designed to echo the art deco influences of other buildings in the area. "It will be age restricted, but will have a concierge and probably fewer communal areas," Teverson says. It has been designed by award-winning modernist architect Glenn Howells, and will have a four- to five-storey assisted living block alongside.

McCarthy & Stone builds all its own developments and has now taken the management of its buildings in-house too.

Traditional residential care homes appear to be off the menu and are being replaced with extra care schemes. Many local authorities have been doing this, or are looking to see how they can do this. This change is driven by current guidelines, which emphasise independent living as a better option for older people rather than care homes; in addition, local authorities have to pay for care provision out of the social services pot – with extra care, residents are allowed to claim housing benefit.

Debbie Waldron, care sector manager for Willmott Dixon (and the Housing LIN lead for East Midlands), says that growth for the company has come on the back of more extra care provision and it is working with local authorities on how to redevelop outdated residential care. However, despite the obvious need for more accommodation, she says fewer housing associations are providing extra care because of funding difficulties.

One new player in the market is Berkeley Homes, whose chairman Tony Pidgley was involved with the HAPPI report. It developed a 170-unit block for older people on its Kidbrooke Regeneration scheme near Greenwich, London, designed by PRP. It has now been handed over to Viridian housing association.

Planning for the future

Increasingly, housing schemes for older people are being seen as good to have at the heart of regeneration projects, because having older residents also provides customers for local businesses and facilities within the developments, such as hairdressers and cafes. This, in turn, makes the provision of these services more viable.

Saxon Weald housing association, which is working with Berkeley at its development in Horsham, West Sussex, hopes to get planning consent in July and will be handing over a number of units as part of the section 106 agreement. Mark Crosby, business development director at Saxon Weald, says: “Section 106 agreements tended to focus on general needs, but meeting a demand locally can free-up housing and release other accommodation and provide alternatives for older people living in under-occupied homes.”

James Wallace, a director at architects Hunter & Partners, says: “What’s happened is that the recession has allowed the care sector to come back because we can build homes at lower cost. Before, we might have been talking about £1,700 per sq. m., now that can be down to £1,000 per sq. m.”

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 should be addressed, please contact us.

Published by

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