



Getting off the ground: Bungalow living – an attractive alternative for downsizers?

There is little choice for older people who want to make their last house move into a dwelling that is future proof. The majority of owner-occupiers live in a 3-bed home; couples want space from each other as they spend more time in the home rather than out at work, spare rooms are used for hobbies and to accommodate visits from children and grandchildren, and they want space for their treasured possessions. It is hardly surprising therefore that a 2-bed flat seems a step too far. The best housing for older people in later life increases wellbeing, reduces care home admissions and offers major savings to the health service. However, the amount of such stock is reducing in proportion to the rapid increase in older people.



This viewpoint looks at the viability of a revival of the bungalow as a desirable, affordable option which could attract older people to downsize from a family house.

Written for the Housing Learning & Improvement Network by
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Background

In summer 2013, Demos published a report called 'Top of the Ladder' which evidenced the chronic undersupply of appropriate housing for older people and the massive gains to be made for families if pensioners downsized. Their survey found that more than half of over 60s households were interested in moving, although only 3% of 65-74 year olds do so each year and a quarter of those would consider renting rather than owner occupying. This came hard on the heels of the Planning Minister's revised advice to local authorities to provide for an increase in housing suitable for older people through local plans. This in turn had been prompted by a paper by the Policy Exchange on 'Housing and Intergenerational Fairness' which argued for a relaxation in high density targets set for housing developments to enable more attractive and less controversial layouts to be put forward.

One problem with much of the literature is the definition of 'old'. For many people, a final move has been precipitated by needing housing where care is available and this is usually in the over 80s cohort not the over 60s. Although statistics show that, on average, pensioners spend half of the rest of their lives in ill health, most people will continue to live in the family home. Currently the 'younger old', or 'extended middle age' as the title of the final Hanover@50 report put it, are unlikely to be tempted into a typical Extra Care scheme or other purpose-built retirement housing but may be looking for more sustainable housing which allows them to release equity to supplement income. A larger range of developers are recognizing this trend and the offers for 'last-time buyers' are beginning to widen.

The Housing LIN viewpoint 47, 'Older People: The New Kids on the Block', picks up on the positives of bungalow living. "*Communities are often more accepting, and sometimes positively welcoming, of developments which include bungalows for their older people*". It acknowledges the limitations of the Lifetime Homes Standard which is widely flaunted as the answer to accessibility issues in houses. However, it assumes that residents will be able to use a stair lift and sleep on an upper floor which is not the case for wheelchair users or many people in very old age.

Bungalow sizes and the density question

The latest English Housing Surveyⁱ reveals that 9% of dwellings are bungalows – that's 2 million properties. However, only 2% of all dwellings that were given planning permission during 2012 were bungalows – 1,700 new homes – compared to more than 27,000 bungalows being built each year during the 1980s.ⁱⁱ There were a lot of bungalow estates built in the mid-20th century that are now a target for developable land so the numbers are likely to fall in the future.

Why don't developers like building bungalows? They are regarded as too land hungry:

- A typical accessible (wheelchair friendly) 2-bedroomed bungalow has a floor area of 72m² with an internal width of 7.4m. The plot size, with a parking space and a small rear garden is on average 220m². Adding the access roads and paths, this generates a development land take of 275m²/plot giving a density of 36 units/ha.
- In contrast, a developer building two-storey housing in a suburban area can expect to achieve 38 units/ha where parking is arranged off a cul-de sac or 56 units/ha where the majority of dwellings use existing highway access.

ⁱ English Housing Survey 2012-13, DCLG

ⁱⁱ Should Britain build more bungalows to cope with the ageing population?, Intergenerational Foundation Sept 2013

- Retirement Living is currently focusing on apartments which are popular in urban areas and also viable in towns with a thriving older person's community. They complement and can stimulate existing facilities such as shops and churches and commonly include an adjacent care home. A typical accessible 2-bed apartment of 68m² will have an internal width of 8.6m in a single aspect. Arranged in a block with Extra Care facilities where there is a parking ratio of 1:3 and a mix of 1 and 2-bed flats over 2-3 storeys the density will be around 90 units/ha.

What is the private sector's response to the demand for Retirement Living?

- The 'up-market' sector recognises that older people want to downsize, particularly their garden, and not all of them will be attracted into a retirement village community or a 'care-ready' apartment block. Retirement properties marketed as 'Cottages' tend to be traditional 2 or 3-bedroomed houses with small gardens e.g. Cognatum (English Courtyard) developments.
- Some 0.5% of the UK's over 65s live in retirement villages and there is often an offer of cottages (defined as 2-storey homes) and bungalows (defined as single storey homes) as well as the apartment building (often a converted former mansion) and shared clubhouse.
- A more recent initiative has recognized the desire for a ground floor bedroom opportunity and cottages offer a 'third bedroom' which doubles as a dining room on the ground floor, e.g. Warren Close, Bristol by Blue Cedar; Millbrook Village, Exeter by Renaissance Villages. Where these developments stand alone, as at Warren Close, the density is 21 dwellings/ha.
- There are some 68,000 residential park homes in the UK. The vast majority are owned by retired or semi-retired people and many of the 2,700 sites are specifically dedicated as retirement parks. This is an affordable option for older people and most will release equity to boost their pension income. Park Managers often live on site and encourage social activities, although the scale of the site will limit the facilities available.

Is there an alternative for people who do not want or cannot afford to buy in an age exclusive community?

- The ground floor plan of a two bedroomed accessible chalet bungalow or cottage is 53.5m² and the upper floor plan in the roof space will be 27-37m² (above 1.5m wall height) to accommodate an en-suite master bedroom and storage. In terraced form, the internal width is 5m. The plot size, with parking space and a small rear garden is 132m² and a typical development land take in a mix of narrow and wide frontages will be 225m²/plot giving a density of 44 units/ha.
- This can be a viable alternative for suburban areas or villages where there will still be a capital gain from downsizing from a 3 or 4 bedroomed house.
- There are benefits to bungalow developments being adjacent to an Extra Care scheme in addressing social isolation and loneliness, but this is not essential. The leaseholder can have a role in signposting residents to 'virtual' extra care and the density and neighbourliness of a terrace or cul-de-sac can prompt informal care and social activity. Residents welcome being able to see the world go by.

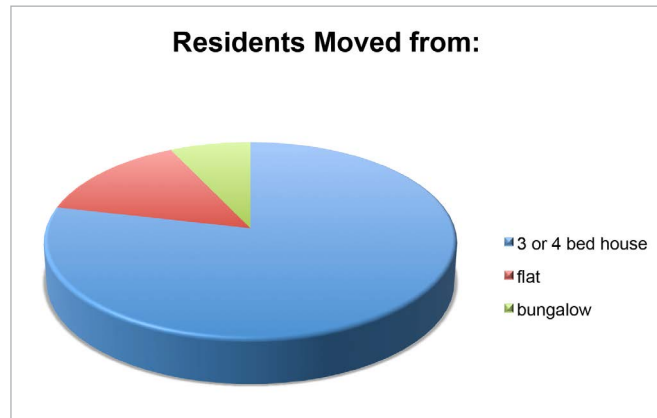


Klondyke Avenue, bungalows, Lydney

Chalet Bungalow Survey

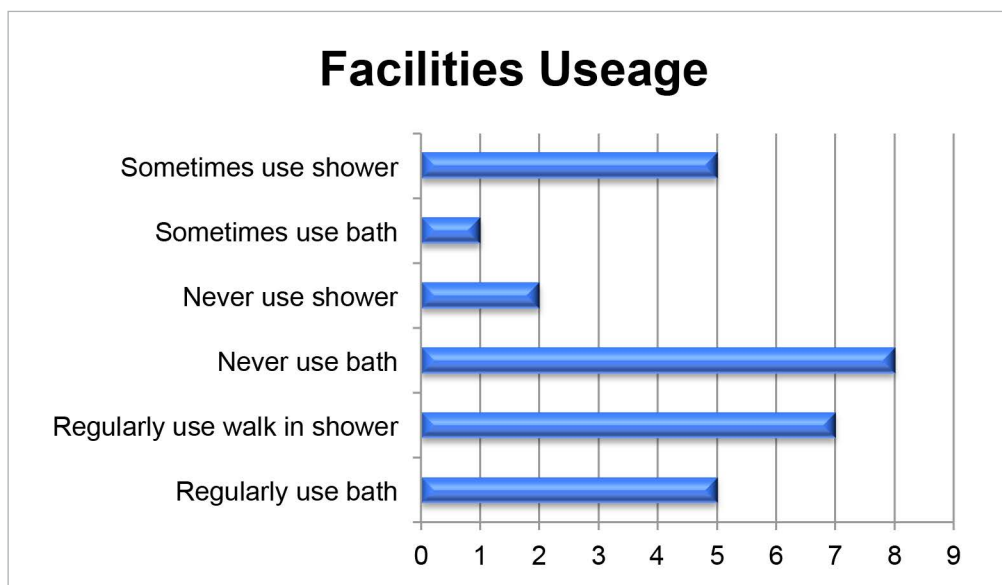
Introduction

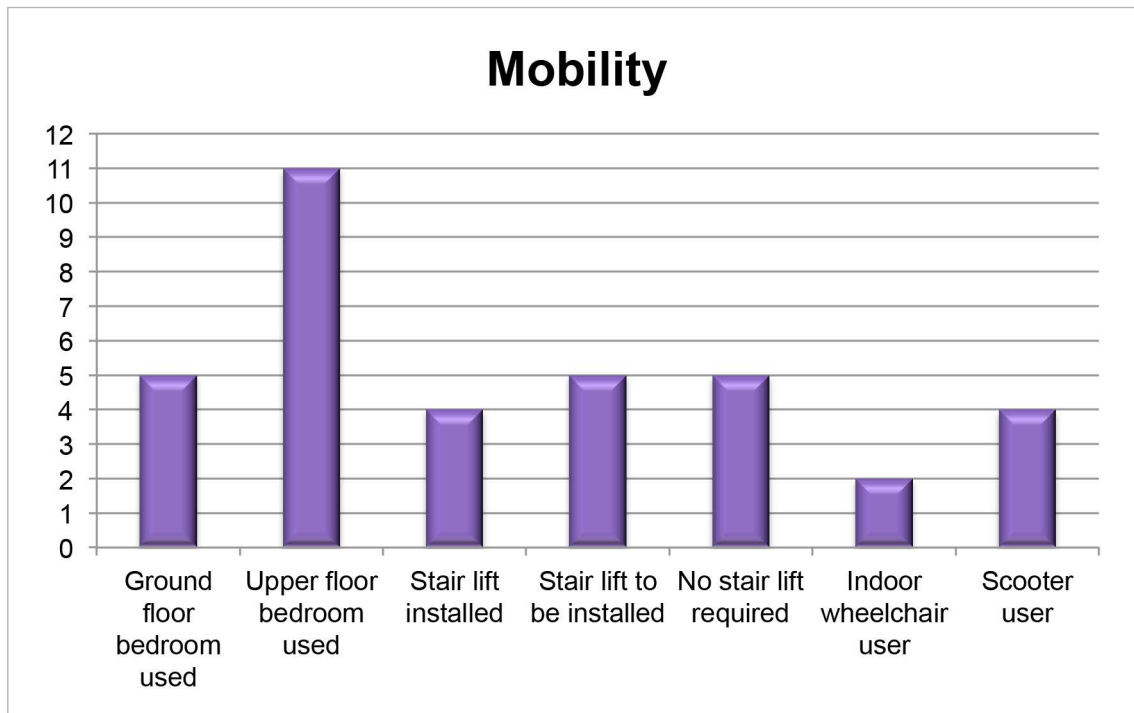
In 2010, Quattro designed two schemes of retirement chalet bungalows for clients in the Bristol area. In 2014, these were the subject of a post-occupancy review to find out whether this style of dwelling was meeting the needs of purchasers and could be replicated elsewhere.



This is an analysis of a survey from two chalet bungalow schemes in suburban areas adjacent to extra care schemes. All the dwellings are either owned outright or in shared ownership with the leaseholder. One scheme is managed by the Extra Care provider (Housing&Care 21) and levies service charges at the same rate as the adjacent flats. The other leaseholder is a charity (The Anchor Society) with no connection to the neighboring scheme. In all there are 18 dwellings. 14 households were interviewed, all but one had moved in from new and the length of occupancy varied from 6 months to 30 months. 6 are single people, 8 are couples.

We met and spoke personally with the residents and asked them a number of varied and probing questions. Our findings are illustrated below:-





However, more powerful than anything were the comments used to describe their feelings about their new surroundings, a selection of them are below:-

“our friends would love to live here”

“I could have a live-in carer here”

“I like the ground floor bedroom and can manage without sticks at night”

“I looked for a ground floor flat but now I would definitely recommend this”

“we looked at flats but were put off by the travel distance to the car, this couldn’t be better”

“I love the upstairs bedroom”

Future Proofing

All residents expect to stay forever; a few people were already using restaurant or hair dressing facilities at the neighbouring extra care scheme.

Key Learnings

- This style of dwelling attracts downsizers.
- The size of the dwellings at 91m² for the narrow frontage and 79m² for the wide frontage is more generous than the equivalent apartment in Extra Care.
- The configuration of the layout with a ground floor bedroom of about 10m² which will take a double bed and a walk in shower in the cloakroom makes the dwelling more suitable as a Lifetime Home than the traditional 2 bed cottage with equal sized floor areas.
- The large, en-suite, attic bedroom is much appreciated by downsizers.
- The ability to install a stair lift was an option that the majority of residents would take up.

- When a bath, as well as a shower, is offered it is used. However, the shower over the bath was not often used.
- An efficiently planned small kitchen with accessible storage is more important than a larger room. Pull-out larders are popular.
- Built in bedroom storage would be popular, 3 households had added their own.
- Patio gardens are popular with paving or chippings, raised beds or tubs, tool storage as a shed or storage unit, water butt and an outside tap. Lawns are not wanted.
- These residents relied on a car, either their own or a relative/carer visiting and parking it adjacent to the house was important. Only one person asked for a carport, there is a general assumption that cars are kept outside.



Chalet bungalows in Yate

- Pets are often a reason for not downsizing into an apartment where restrictions are applied so having outside space for them is appreciated.
- New dwellings will always be well insulated. A narrow frontage terraced bungalow with a room in the roof has a similar amount of external wall to a single aspect apartment. There are also opportunities for a PV array for each dwelling if the orientation is suitable.

Conclusion

In 2014, the equity that older owner occupiers have in their houses is rising but static interest rates affecting investment income and utility bills exceeding inflation mean that disposable incomes are falling. This is prompting more interest among older people to consider downsizing and providers will need to respond with a variety of different offers. In my view, the chalet bungalow is an attractive option which fulfills a number of key criteria to suit active older people looking for a future proof last move.

About the author

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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 on designing housing for older people can be found at:

www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design_building/

In addition, to participate in our shared learning and service improvement opportunities, including 'look and learn' site visits and network meetings in your region, visit:

www.housinglin.org.uk

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