



How can local planning authorities engage better with the housing needs of an ageing society?

This paper for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (LIN) sets out how local authority planners can work within the reformed planning system to improve the amount and types of housing for older people. The potential gains of meeting the increasing demand for housing for older people are significant: good health for longer, lower costs to the public purse, more cohesive communities and a better functioning housing market, to name a few.

Planners can better integrate information on older people's housing needs into their own plans through more explicit links to joint strategic needs assessments (JSNAs) and joint health and wellbeing strategies. They can align policy with this information to create a spatial framework and vision that includes older people's housing. And they can collaborate with housing and health colleagues and work with developers to devise the best ways locally to deliver this framework.

Written for the Housing Learning and Improvement Network by
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Introduction

Members of the Housing LIN will know that parts of the housing sector are engaged in a spirited debate about what needs to happen to increase the provision of more appropriate housing for an ageing population.

As reported in *The Economist* in January 2014,¹ it doesn't help that as a society we seem unwilling to plan sensibly for housing needs in older age. As a result, Lord Best, Chair of Hanover Housing Group and President of the Local Government Association, argues that:

*'Many... people delay moving home until crisis strikes, yet there are huge financial and health benefits to moving earlier.'*²

These benefits were set out in a 2012 progress report on the implementation of the findings of the HAPPI report, which highlighted the long-term value of providing high quality housing designed for older people.³ This included the potential for savings from:

- reducing the risks of falls
- protecting against the effects of cold homes and fuel poverty
- enabling earlier discharge from, and fewer readmissions to, hospital
- preventing the need (both temporary and permanent) for institutional residential care
- reducing ill-health costs associated with isolation and loneliness.

Increasing the amount of specialist housing for older people can also free up larger homes for families, which could be one important element to increasing housing supply at a time of acute shortages in some parts of the country.

These long-term benefits should chime well with the planning remit of local authorities. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires them to achieve 'sustainable development', promote 'strong, vibrant and healthy communities' and deliver 'a wide choice of quality homes'.⁴ Well-designed and located housing for older people could help local planning authorities (LPAs) achieve these objectives.⁵

And yet, planners have been criticised as being one of the barriers to more schemes getting approved and built. Bruce Moore, Chief Executive of Housing 21 and before that Chief Executive of Hanover Housing Group, has lamented that local authority planners put 'additional hurdles' in the way, arguing that:

*'Planners fail to understand the challenge of changing demographics and the opportunities good quality retirement housing can provide.'*⁶

¹ The Economist (2014) *'Don't Move, Older People! Planning laws make it harder for retirees to downsize'*. Accessed online 9 January 2014 at: www.economist.com/news/britain/21592620-planning-laws-make-it-harder-retirees-downsize-dont-move-old-people

² Lord Best (2013) *'Old age is changing – and housing associations must adapt too'*, The Guardian, 4 December. Accessed online 11 December 2013 at www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2013/dec/04/old-age-social-housing-change-lord-best?CMP=tw_t_gu

³ Porteus J (2013) *Housing our Ageing Population: Plan for Implementation (HAPPI2)*. All Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Care for Older People: London. Available to download at: www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/resource/?cid=8650

⁴ Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) National Planning Policy Framework, <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/blog/policy/>

⁵ For wider links between health objectives and planning for an ageing population see my recent publication with Michael Chang called *Planning for Healthier Places* published by the TCPA. Available to download at: www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/reuniting-health-with-planning-phase-2-project.html

⁶ Laura Sharman (2012) *'Housing association warns planners lack understanding of retirement housing'*,

A recent report from the London Assembly Housing Committee concluded bluntly that ‘the planning system often acts as a barrier to providing homes for older people.’⁷

This generalised criticism fails to reflect the variation in practice. For example, at the recent launch of Public Health England’s Healthy People, Healthy Places programme,⁸ James Cutting, Principal Spatial Planning Specialist at Suffolk County Council, spoke expertly about both what the county is doing to incorporate older people’s housing needs into future plans, and the challenges of doing so.⁹

However, if we assume that in many instances the planning system inhibits the provision of specialist housing for older people, what can be done to improve matters?

Integrate information, policy and practice

Information

The 2012 toolkit, ‘Housing in Later Life: Planning Ahead for Specialist Housing for Older People’, says that:

‘By including housing and planning in an area’s Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the Joint Health & Well-being Strategy (JHWS), local authorities and clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) can plan and commission services in an integrated way.’¹⁰

The converse also needs to happen: the data, findings and recommendations from the JSNA and JHWS must feed into the LPA’s local planning processes. The NPPF requires planners to work with public health partners and take account of local health and wellbeing needs and strategies. The statutory guidance from the Department of Health on JSNAs and JHWSs is considered to be a material consideration in the planning process.¹¹

Although it is crucial that local plans and JHWSs have shared objectives, anecdotal evidence suggests that the links between them are patchy at best. Housing and health professionals should not assume that a JHWS that is strong on the need to provide specialist housing for older people will be reflected by policies in the local plan.

One of the reasons why planners may overlook the data set out in a JSNA or JHWS is that it is rarely presented in ways that they find useful. The information needs to show the spatial variations locally so that ‘planners understand local inequalities and varying health needs’.¹²

Some places are addressing this: for example, Lincolnshire County Council has published its JSNA as an interactive website with all datasets mapped across the seven district areas.

The housing information that feeds into the preparation of a local plan comes via a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). However, there is currently no process within the SHMA

LocalGov, 20 September, Accessed online 11 December 2013 at:
www.localgov.co.uk/Housing-association-warns-planners-lack-understanding-of-retirement-housing/26317

⁷ London Assembly Housing Committee (2013) Homes for Older Londoners: Building healthy homes for a comfortable and independent retirement. Greater London Authority: London. Available to download at:
www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/publications/homes-for-older-londoners

⁸ For more information on this PHE programme visit: www.phe-events.org.uk/HPHP

⁹ The slides of this presentation are available to download at:
www.phe-events.org.uk/hpa/frontend/reg/tOtherPage.csp?pageID=98714&eventID=233&eventID=233

¹⁰ The toolkit is available to download at www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/resource/?cid=8654

¹¹ Department of Health (2013) Statutory Guidance on Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies, Available to download at:
www.gov.uk/government/consultations/health-and-wellbeing-board-duties

¹² Ross A with Chang M (2013) *Planning Healthier Places*

to link directly the need for affordable housing that arises from household changes of older people into the numbers for overall housing need.¹³ This means that in effect a whole chunk of potential housing need is not being picked up and fed into the planning process. This is important because private providers of older people's accommodation are finding it hard to meet the same percentage contributions for affordable housing as are required for standard residential development.

Policy

The APPG report says LPAs should ensure that 'local plans give prominence explicitly to meeting the needs of their ageing population.'¹⁴ These needs will be identified through the JSNA and JHWS; the local plan policies should reinforce these links and be developed from local evidence. The Knowsley Local Plan (submission version) reflects close working between housing, health and planning.¹⁵ Its policy on specialist and supported accommodation (CS16) sets out three actions:

- make better use of the current housing stock through improvements to its quality, remodelling or replacing existing accommodation to meet changing needs
- support non-accommodation-based interventions, intended to achieve sustainable independence for individuals
- develop integrated social wellbeing, housing and planning strategies which seek to holistically address specialist housing needs and demands.

The high level of joint working is reflected by policies that reflect links to both existing and new housing for older people.

The Central Lincolnshire Joint Core Strategy (publication version) also makes links to the Lincolnshire Extra Care Strategy and Central Lincolnshire Housing Growth Strategy, and includes a policy to meet the specific housing needs of older people.¹⁶

Practice

Aligning information and policy helps to create the potential for projects that better meet local need. There is an important role here for health and wellbeing boards to make the links and involve built environment specialists, a point picked up by the Public Service and Demographic Change Select Committee:

*'Health and Wellbeing Boards, on which local planners should be represented, should draw up plans for how communities can prepare themselves for older populations and involve housing associations and private developers to ensure that there is enough specialist housing, adequate transport and other easily accessible facilities for older people.'*¹⁷

¹³ James Cutting, Principal Spatial Planning Specialist, Suffolk County Council, personal communication, 12 December 2013

¹⁴ Porteus J (2013) *Housing our Ageing Population: Plan for Implementation (HAPPI2)*. All Party Parliamentary Group on Housing and Care for Older People: London. Available to download at: www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/type/resource/?cid=8650

¹⁵ Available to download at www.knowsley.gov.uk/residents/building-and-planning/local-plan.aspx

¹⁶ Available to download at <http://microsites.lincolnshire.gov.uk/centrallincolnshire>

¹⁷ House of Lords Select Committee on Public Service and Demographic Change (2013) *Ready for Ageing?* Available to download at: www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/lords-select/public-services-committee/report-ready-for-ageing/

There are inspiring examples of collaboration that demonstrate what is possible. In 2013, the housing provider First Ark, in partnership with Knowsley Council, won £2 million from the Department of Health's Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund (administered by the Homes and Communities Agency) towards the development of the £10.8 million Watchfactory extra care scheme in Prescot. The bid made a compelling case for higher investment in the short term to save healthcare costs in future years. The extra care housing will see a reduction in care costs of £438 per week per resident, which will amount to an annual saving of £1.18 million across the 54 residents who will have the full extra care support package. Ian Thomson, Executive Director of Customer Excellence at the First Ark Group, says that:

*'We would not have been successful with our bid for funding if we didn't have housing, health and planning working closely together.'*¹⁸

Reform system to reap long-term benefits

The Planning Minister Nick Boles famously said in 2013 that he would 'shoot' anyone who came to him proposing yet more changes to the planning system.¹⁹ However, he has also spoken of his desire to reform the planning system so that it is better at incorporating long-term objectives.²⁰ This should be the catalyst for suggesting modest reforms that would help to free up the planning system to achieve more specialist housing for older people.²¹

Creating communities that are flexible and resilient over time is a fundamental requirement of planning. However, the emphasis on achieving more housing growth via incentives and the viability test is being interpreted by some planners as putting short-term developer profits ahead of long-term community building.

Developers of specialist housing for older people are lobbying for reforms to the planning system that would relieve them of some of their financial obligations. The provision of specialist housing for older people is perhaps a special case where there is good evidence of the benefits that can accrue from providing high quality communal space and other facilities when a scheme is being developed. The HAPPI report stated that the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which is a tariff on development that LPAs can choose to prepare, risks:

'tipping the balance of viability of schemes for older people which will be inherently more expensive because they comprise large flats, with some communal space'

If developers can show that the CIL makes it financially unviable to provide these facilities then local authorities should think about factoring in the cost to the public purse of failing to provide good quality housing for older people over the long term, and take decisions accordingly. The Retirement Housing Group (RHG) has met with Nick Boles to discuss this, including a proposal to create a new Use Class Order within the planning system for housing for older people based on the definition set out in the NPPF.²²

¹⁸ Ross A with Chang M (2013) *Planning for Healthier Places*, TCPA: London. Available to download at: www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/reuniting-health-with-planning-phase-2-project.html

¹⁹ Cook B (2013) 'Boles says he'll 'shoot' anyone who proposes further planning changes', *Planning*, 9 May, Accessed (£ paywall) on 20 December at: www.planningresource.co.uk/article/1181757/boles-says-hell-shoot-anyone-suggests-further-planning-changes

²⁰ Nick Boles made these remarks at the TCPA Annual Conference on 20 November 2013

²¹ Ross A with Chang M (2013) *Planning for Healthier Places*, TCPA: London. Available to download at: www.tcpa.org.uk/pages/reuniting-health-with-planning-phase-2-project.html

²² For an up-to-date overview of use classes see the Parliamentary Briefing Paper called Planning Use Class Orders published in December 2013, www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN01301/planning-use-class-orders

The report 'Homes for Older Londoners', published in November 2013, called for similar reforms:

*'The Mayor should lobby Government for changes to Planning Use Classes that will remove retirement housing from being treated in the same way as conventional housing in terms of liability for financial contributions. This might involve considering changes that would incentivise low- to mid-value market retirement homes – for example by exempting the communal floor area from a range of planning obligations.'*²³

The government's response to the Lord Taylor review of planning practice guidance showed that it has no appetite to create more advice for planners;²⁴ all the momentum is with culling what is already there, so I would be surprised if ministers went down this route. But local authorities do have flexibility to set their own rules for the CIL, provided they have the evidence to justify it at examination.

Lead by example

If developers in London are feeling the squeeze, then spare a thought for the rest of the country. The Smith Institute found recently that house prices in London have risen by up to 43 per cent since 2007; in contrast, the north west has seen falls of up to 36.2 per cent (Knowsley in Merseyside).²⁵ Many LPAs will not even consider preparing a CIL because development profit margins are so low.

In these circumstances, public sector leadership, working with the private and community sectors, is critical. Despite the massive fall in the value of private sector housing in Knowsley, the housing association First Ark and Knowsley Council have been working together closely to improve the housing offer for older people. The council supported a £14.4 million extra care housing scheme in Huyton by selling the land to First Ark at below market rate. The scheme – Bluebell Park – includes 122 apartments and 9 bungalows, with a range of communal facilities, for people over 55, which will be available for the residents of the scheme and the wider community.²⁶

While property prices continue to spiral in the capital, the high cost of land can inhibit innovative new development. To help overcome this, London's Mayor, Boris Johnson, has used the Greater London Authority's property portfolio to begin to support innovative housing models. For example, the St Clements Hospital site in Tower Hamlets has been sold with a condition that the freehold for the site is held in trust by a community body. This has enabled the preparation of a Community Land Trust; this could set a precedent for the Mayor to show leadership to increase the amount of specialist housing for older people in London.²⁷

²³ London Assembly Housing Committee (2013) *Homes for Older Londoners: Building healthy homes for a comfortable and independent retirement*. Greater London Authority: London. Available to download at: www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/publications/homes-for-older-londoners

²⁴ Department for Communities and Local Government response to Lord Taylor's Review (2013), www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-planning-practice-guidance

²⁵ Smith Institute (2013) *The Great House Price Divide*. Available to download at: www.smith-institute.org.uk/file/The%20Great%20House%20Price%20Divide.pdf

²⁶ For more information see: www.bluebellparkapartments.co.uk/index.html

²⁷ London Assembly Housing Committee (2013) *Homes for Older Londoners: Building healthy homes for a comfortable and independent retirement*. Greater London Authority: London. Available to download at: www.london.gov.uk/mayor-assembly/london-assembly/publications/homes-for-older-londoners

Conclusion

Much has been made of the planning system acting as a 'drag anchor' on growth. But in the government's desire to sweep away those elements of the system that have been judged to be barriers, ministers risk interfering with what planning can be good at, which is facilitating and promoting long-term, cost-effective ways of creating high quality sustainable places for the communities of the future. The case for investing in housing for older people has been repeatedly set out by a number of organisations, including the APPG on Housing and Care for Older People. And yet the government is leaving councils to muddle through rather than provide clarity on a planning issue that has such important long-term implications for health, housing, public spending and community cohesion.

Far from being a drag anchor, planning could be at the forefront of collaborating with others to provide new types of housing for the future, and to facilitate a range of other economic, social and environmental benefits. As Lord Best puts it:

'Moving home earlier has many advantages for people... but they won't move unless really attractive, spacious accommodation is on offer. Addressing this demand should be the first step to tackling the thorny income and social care debates that are vexing our politicians.'²⁸

Note

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Housing Learning and Improvement Network.

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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, funding, building and managing housing, care and support services for older people and vulnerable adults with long term conditions, including dementia.

For specific information on planning, designing and developing housing for an ageing population, visit our 'Design Hub' at: www.housinglin.org.uk/Topics/browse/Design_building/. At the time of writing, we are further developing this content to improve access to relevant planning publications and useful resources.

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²⁸ Lord Best (2013) 'Old age is changing – and housing associations must adapt too', The Guardian, 4 December, Accessed online 11 December at: www.theguardian.com/housing-network/2013/dec/04/old-age-social-housing-change-lord-best?CMP=tw_t_gu