

Policy development: Overview of recent reports informing the work of MUCH

A. “Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation – HAPPI” followed up with “HAPPI 2 – Plan for Implementation” in 2012.

In 2008, the government published a national strategy for older people’s housing, “Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods” which laid out a vision for improving the quality of life of our ageing population, including by:

- challenging the perceptions of housing for older people and influencing the availability and choice of good housing;
- raising the aspirations of older people to demand higher quality, more sustainable homes;
- spreading awareness of the possibilities which innovative design can offer; and
- emphasising the importance of integrating housing for older people within the wider neighbourhood context.

In 2009, the Homes and Communities Agency, on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department of Health commissioned a further report, “Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation (HAPPI)” which considered how best to address the challenge of providing homes that meet the needs and aspirations of older people. The HAPPI exercise concluded with four key recommendations:

- The time has come for a national effort to build the homes that will meet our needs and aspirations as we all grow older.
- We should all plan ahead positively, creating demand for better choice through a greater range of housing opportunities.
- Housing for older people should become an exemplar for mainstream housing, and meet higher design standards for space and quality.
- Local Planning Authorities should play a key role to ensure delivery of desirable housing in great places, tuned in to local need and demand. Underpinning these recommendations, the HAPPI Panel stressed the importance of design, identifying ten elements that are critical to achieving age-inclusive housing:
 - generous internal space standards
 - plenty of natural light in the home and in circulation spaces
 - balconies and outdoor space, 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.

Three years later ‘HAPPI 2’ acknowledged that: “the economic context has changed. We now know that the downturn is not a temporary blip but must be expected to last for some years to come. Goals that seemed attainable then now look distinctly ambitious.” This led to a more cautious approach, stating, for example, that it may “no longer be practical, however desirable, to advocate a rapid expansion of Extra Care Housing with all the facilities and amenities these projects have so brilliantly incorporated.” It did, however, also acknowledge the need for more innovation, especially in terms of new technology:

“Inquiry Members noted that those with higher care needs, particularly dementia sufferers in the years to come, will of course need the extra security and support of a residential, if not in a nursing, setting. But for the mass market of retirement housing, more schemes will need to tie in with neighbouring amenities and draw in any care that is needed from (‘personalised’) visiting carers. Over the next decade huge technological advances can be expected through telecare and telehealthcare that will free up care staff for more sustained social contact, while prolonging independent lifestyles even for those with chronic health conditions.”

HAPPI 2 highlighted some of the challenges faced by those looking to develop alternative especially in terms of what it called: “Financial insecurities”, stating that “With deficit reduction as a national priority, this is a difficult time to secure public or private funding for investment in older people’s housing”, in particular:

- capital finance is harder to secure, with a significant reduction in grants for housing associations and greater difficulties for all providers in borrowing from banks and other lenders;
- in providing homes for sale, there are uncertainties about the market: prices have to be achieved that reflect higher space standards than younger households require, as well as covering the costs of shared communal areas and the expense of acquiring sites close to local amenities.

HAPPI 2 also had a number of more positive recommendations, especially in relation to housing associations, where it suggested that these could:

- bring forward more projects that accord with HAPPI standards and meet the breadth of retirement needs;
- take forward the emerging technological changes through telecare and telehealthcare that will support independence, security and wellbeing in retirement housing schemes;
- use their knowledge of shared ownership housing to provide for those elderly home owners in lower value properties for whom the full cost of new retirement apartments is too high;
- explore further the options for ‘senior living’ and ‘co-housing’ whereby a group of older people play an active part in the planning and subsequent management of their retirement accommodation.

B. The Co-operative Development Society report, “Keeping Control of Our Lives: Mutual retirement housing for older people” (2009) and “Plan of Action” (2013).

The 2009 report was followed up with further recommendations from a Round Table held on March 18th 2013 with Housing LIN (Learning and Improvement Network), Co-operative Development Society, Co-operatives UK and the UK Cohousing Network which produced a “plan for action” covering:

- Steps to raise awareness and understanding of co-operative and mutual models of housing for older people;
- Specific research to build the evidence base and to demonstrate the value of mutual care and support;
- Forms of partnership working to provide effective and sustainable development and funding arrangements for co-operative and mutual housing schemes for older people;
- Ways of taking advantage of the new opportunities for developing community based housing for older people.

C. IPPR North, “Silver cities: Realising the potential of our growing older population”, Dec. 2014.

This report covers a much wider range of issues about the policies and strategies required to support the changing demographics of the UK in relation to the older population. It has a large amount of useful data about these demographic changes, including:

- The overall UK population is expected to rise to over 73 million by 2037, with the average age rising from 39.7 to 42.8, and the number of over-80s to double to 6 million (ONS 2013a). This will result in a much older age profile across the UK population.
- It is estimated that the number of people who will be eligible for a state pension will increase by 31 per cent between mid-2012 and mid-2037 (ibid), and that income and wealth disparities within the older population will grow, to the benefit of some and detriment of others.
- The breakdown of the traditional three-generation model of family life, and major changes to intergenerational relationships and transfers of wealth and income, will have significant socio-economic consequences.
- There are important regional variations within these overall patterns of demographic change, with the three northern English regions expected to experience the lowest population growth between 2011 and 2036, and to have the highest dependency ratios by the end of this period.