



Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable

Comments Submitted to Communities and Local Government
By Care & Repair England

September 07

CONTACT DETAILS FOR CARE & REPAIR ENGLAND

The Renewal Trust Business Centre
3 Hawksworth Street
Nottingham NG3 2EG
Tel/Fax: 0115 9506500
e-mail: info@careandrepair-england.org.uk
www.careandrepair-england.org.uk

CONTACT: Sue Adams (Director)
Direct email : sueadams@freenetname.co.uk

1. About Care & Repair England

1.1. Care & Repair England is a national charity established in 1986 to improve the housing and living conditions of older and disabled people.

1.2. Its aim is to innovate, develop, promote and support housing policies and initiatives which enable older and disabled people to live independently in their homes for as long as they wish.

1.3. The main focus of Care & Repair England is housing for older people in private sector housing. Our comments are primarily about the implications of this green paper for the future housing of this growing sector of the population.

2. Basis of our Response

2.1. For a number of years we have been working with local older people's groups in order to consider housing needs and aspirations during retirement and to identify shortcomings in the current provision of housing for an ageing population.

2.2. We have worked with local authorities and older people with the objective of shaping local housing strategies in ways that are rooted in the everyday experience of older people.

2.3. We also completed a specific project entitled '*Should I Stay or Should I Go*' which aimed to enable more older people make an informed choice about moving to more suitable housing in older age.

2.4. Through *Should I Stay or Should I Go?* and the linked pilot services that were set up in different parts of England, we identified a lack of suitable housing for an ageing population and an inadequate variety of suitable local housing options in all areas.

2.5. The Director of Care & Repair England is the independent Chair of the Government's Advisory Committee on Housing and Older People and in that capacity has been involved in the consultations and meetings that have informed the emerging '*Housing Strategy for an Ageing Society*'.

3. General Comments on the Building of New Homes

3.1. We welcome the increasing focus of government policy on housing as an important social issue.

3.2. The commitment to building new homes in order to meet housing shortages is welcomed.

3.3. However, we do have concerns that, in general, new house building is not addressing, and shows no sign of addressing in the near future, the housing needs and aspirations of an ageing population. Uniquely in the developed world, there has been a fall in space and design standards over the past 20 years. A consequence of this is that more of the housing stock is unadaptable to a person's needs should they become less mobile.

3.4. As the green paper points out (P59), “*Older people will make up 48% of all new growth in households to 2024*”. In fact, when the figures are examined in more detail, if the exceptional situation of London is removed, this growth level is closer to 60%.

3.5. However, this major social change is not being addressed in mainstream housing policy, remaining either an afterthought or not considered at all in design, location or the planning of new housing or the improvement of the existing stock e.g. through the Decent Homes Programme.

3.6. We welcome the inclusion of a page (59) about housing for an ageing population in the green paper but we are very concerned by the subsequent lack of reference to demographic trends, population ageing and the serious implications of this social change for future housing supply and demand in the remainder of the green paper. Overall this is sending out a message to the housing sector that they should be building homes for families with children.

3.7. The housing needs and aspirations of an ageing population will become an even more critical market driving force than it is already and hence needs to be taken account of in every aspect of housing and planning policy.

3.8. Already:

- 30% of all households include a person of 60 or over – and this is set to increase significantly.
- 90% of older people live in general housing stock.
- 70% of all households are owner occupied. This is even higher amongst the newly retired, amongst which group there is 84% owner occupation in rural areas.
- One of the major social changes of the last 20 years has been growth of owner occupation amongst lower income groups; half of all poor households are now owner occupied.
- As such households retire on low pensions, issues about the cost of home maintenance and finding affordable alternative housing as they get older will come to the fore.

3.9. Failure to plan for such inclusive buildings and neighbourhoods will also have a significant impact on demand for health and social care services.

3.10. *It is therefore crucial that all government housing and planning policy is firmly set within the context of current and future demographic trends.*

3.11. Only through acknowledgement of this major, growing force in housing markets will housing and planning policies be effective in delivering a sustainable housing supply and an inclusive environment for the wider community.

3.12. Only through the creation of ‘future-proofed’ housing and neighbourhoods will the needs and aspirations of older people wishing to live a positive, contributory and fulfilling life be met.

4. Comment on the Green Paper with Regard to the Existing Stock

4.1. Whilst the green paper is primarily about new housing, there is clearly a link between the scale and condition of the current stock and the need for new house building.

4.2. We therefore welcome the comment that the Decent Homes programme in the social rented stock will continue with the aim of eliminating non-decent homes in this sector.

4.3. However, the majority of non decent homes remains in the private stock. Slower progress has taken place in reducing the level non-decent homes, private sector homes occupied by vulnerable groups, particularly amongst low income, older home owners.

4.4. We would therefore call on the Government to increase the target for bringing the homes of vulnerable people in the private sector up to a decent homes standard. Inclusion of such a target in the subsequent housing white paper would send a key message to local authorities that the condition of private sector stock, particularly for vulnerable householders, is an area for priority action.

4.5. Again, with the growing numbers of older people, particularly low income older people in private sector housing, there is a knock on effect on health and social care policies if their housing is not in a decent state to support a healthier older age and independent living.

5. Response to Specific Consultation Question: Chapter 6

Do you consider that any additional tools and or mechanisms are now needed to deliver the design policies in order to achieve our aspirations for an up-lift in quality and to improve inclusive design?

5.1. For all of the reasons stated above, we believe that it is absolutely essential to make Lifetime Homes Standards mandatory in all new build, across all tenures.

5.2. Unless Government sets minimum standards for the building industry, standards with regard to adaptability will not rise. The concept of Lifetime Homes Standards (LTH) as a standard that homes should be built to has been around for over a decade. It was only following the introduction of Part M of the Building Regulations that even small steps were made towards making homes more accessible.

5.3. It will only be through regulation that remaining LTH standards will be introduced into the design of new homes. Without a level playing field, there is no incentive for builders to incorporate these design features, and a 'bottom line' will prevail – it is the role of Government to set that bottom line for all.