

Housing for older and disabled people

Guides councils in preparing planning policies on housing for older and disabled people.

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Introduction

Why is it important to plan for the housing needs of older people?

The need to provide housing for older people is critical. People are living longer lives and the proportion of older people in the population is increasing. In mid-2016 there were 1.6 million people aged 85 and over; by mid-2041 this is [projected to double to 3.2 million](#). Offering older people a better choice of accommodation to suit their changing needs can help them live independently for longer, feel more connected to their communities and help reduce costs to the social care and health systems. Therefore, an understanding of how the ageing population affects housing needs is something to be considered from the early stages of plan-making through to decision-taking.

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Why is it important to plan for the housing needs of disabled people?

The provision of appropriate housing for people with disabilities, including specialist and supported housing, is crucial in helping them to live safe and independent lives. Unsuitable or unadapted housing can have a negative impact on disabled people and their carers. It can lead to mobility problems inside and outside the home, poorer mental health and a lack of employment opportunities. Providing suitable housing can enable disabled people to live more independently and safely, with greater choice and control over their lives. Without accessible and adaptable housing, disabled people risk facing discrimination and disadvantage in housing. An ageing population will see the numbers of disabled people continuing to increase and it is important we plan early to meet their needs throughout their lifetime.

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What range of needs should be addressed?

The [National Planning Policy Framework glossary](#) provides definitions of older people and people with disabilities for planning purposes, which recognise the diverse range of needs that exist. The health and lifestyles of older people will differ greatly, as will their housing needs, which can range from accessible and adaptable general needs housing to specialist housing with high levels of care and support. For plan-making purposes, strategic policy-making authorities will need to determine the needs of people who will be approaching or reaching retirement over the plan period, as well as the existing population of older people.

Similarly, disabilities can include, but are not limited to, people with ambulatory difficulties, blindness, learning difficulties, autism and mental health needs, which may generate a range of housing requirements which can change over time. Local planning authorities may also wish to consider groups outside of the scope of this definition in order to meet specific needs within their community. To enable disabled people to live more safely and independently, local planning authorities will need to consider their variety of needs in both plan-making and decision-taking.

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Identifying the housing requirements of older and disabled people

What evidence can plan-makers consider when identifying the housing needs of older people?

The age profile of the population can be drawn from [Census data](#). Projections of population and households by age group can also be used. The future need for specialist accommodation for older people broken down by tenure and type (e.g. sheltered housing, extra care) may need to be assessed and can be obtained from a number of online tool kits provided by the sector, for example [SHOP@](#) (Strategic Housing for Older People Analysis Tool), which is a tool for forecasting the housing and care needs of older people. Evidence from Joint Strategic Needs Assessments prepared by Health and Wellbeing Boards can also be useful. The assessment of need can also set out the level of need for residential care homes.

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What evidence can plan-makers consider when identifying the housing needs of people with disabilities?

Multiple sources of information may need to be considered in relation to disabled people who require adaptations in the home, either now or in the future. The Census provides information on the number of people with a long-term limiting illness and plan-makers can access information from the Department for Work and Pensions on the numbers of Personal Independence Payment (replacing Disability Living Allowance) / Attendance Allowance benefit claimants. Whilst these data sources can provide an indication of the number of disabled people, not all of the people included within these counts will require adaptations in the home. Applications for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) will provide an indication of levels of expressed need, although this will underestimate total need, as there may be a large number of people who would want or need an adaptation, but would not have applied to the DFG.

Engagement at all levels can help plan-makers identify the housing needs of people with disabilities. This could include with occupational therapists and specialist access or inclusive design officers. Discussions with disabled people and disabled people's groups can also provide insights into the types of impairments and number of people likely to require accessible homes in the future.

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How can the housing requirements of particular groups of people be addressed in plans?

Plan-making authorities should set clear policies to address the housing needs of groups with particular needs such as older and disabled people. These policies can set out how the plan-making authority will consider proposals for the different types of housing that these groups are likely to require. They could also provide indicative figures or a range for the number of units of specialist housing for older people needed across the plan area throughout the plan period.

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How can local planning authorities monitor the number of homes for older and disabled people?

Guidance on [plan-making](#) sets out the role of local planning authorities in monitoring progress with plan preparation and information collected which relates to indicators in the plan. Local planning authorities can include the provision of housing for older and disabled people when preparing the [Authority Monitoring Report](#).

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Accessible and adaptable housing

What are the benefits of accessible and adaptable housing?

Accessible and adaptable housing enables people to live more independently, while also saving on health and social costs in the future. It is better to build accessible housing from the outset rather than have to make adaptations at a later stage – both in terms of cost and with regard to people being able to remain safe and independent in their homes.

Accessible and adaptable housing will provide safe and convenient approach routes into and out of the home and outside areas, suitable circulation space and suitable bathroom and kitchens within the home. Wheelchair user dwellings include additional features to meet the needs of occupants who use wheelchairs, or allow for adaptations to meet such needs.

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Should plan-making bodies set minimum requirements for accessible housing?

Where an identified need exists, plans are expected to make use of the [optional technical housing standards](#) (footnote 46 of the National Planning Policy Framework) to help bring forward an adequate supply of accessible housing. In doing so planning policies for housing can set out the proportion of new housing that will be delivered to the following standards:

M4(1) Category 1: Visitable dwellings (the minimum standard that applies where no planning condition is given unless a plan sets a higher minimum requirement)

M4(2) Category 2: Accessible and adaptable dwellings

M4(3) Category 3: Wheelchair user dwellings

Planning policies for accessible housing need to be based on evidence of need, viability and a consideration of site specific factors.

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Specialist housing for older people

What are the different types of specialist housing for older people?

There are different types of specialist housing designed to meet the diverse needs of older people, which can include:

- **Age-restricted general market housing:** This type of housing is generally for people aged 55 and over and the active elderly. It may include some shared amenities such as communal gardens, but does not include support or care services.

- **Retirement living or sheltered housing:** This usually consists of purpose-built flats or bungalows with limited communal facilities such as a lounge, laundry room and guest room. It does not generally provide care services, but provides some support to enable residents to live independently. This can include 24 hour on-site assistance (alarm) and a warden or house manager.
- **Extra care housing or housing-with-care:** This usually consists of purpose-built or adapted flats or bungalows with a medium to high level of care available if required, through an onsite care agency registered through the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Residents are able to live independently with 24 hour access to support services and staff, and meals are also available. There are often extensive communal areas, such as space to socialise or a wellbeing centre. In some cases, these developments are known as retirement communities or villages - the intention is for residents to benefit from varying levels of care as time progresses.
- **Residential care homes and nursing homes:** These have individual rooms within a residential building and provide a high level of care meeting all activities of daily living. They do not usually include support services for independent living. This type of housing can also include dementia care homes.

There is a significant amount of variability in the types of specialist housing for older people. The list above provides an indication of the different types of housing available, but is not definitive. Any single development may contain a range of different types of specialist housing.

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How can plan-making authorities plan for senior co-housing communities?

Senior co-housing communities are created and run by residents, based on the intention to live with a group of people of a similar age. The sites often consist of self-contained private homes as well as shared community space. Some communities offer an additional option for informal care. Local planning authorities can plan for senior co-housing communities through their implementation of the [Self-build and custom-build legislation 2015](#), as some communities will be looking to build the development themselves. Plan-making authorities can also identify sites suitable for senior co-housing communities as part of their overall assessment of land available for housing over the plan period.

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Do plans need to make specific provision for specialist housing for older people?

Plans need to provide for specialist housing for older people where a need exists. Innovative and diverse housing models will need to be considered where appropriate.

Many older people may not want or need specialist accommodation or care and may wish to stay or move to general housing that is already suitable, such as bungalows, or homes which

can be adapted to meet a change in their needs. Plan-makers will therefore need to identify the role that general housing may play as part of their assessment.

Plan-makers will need to consider the size, location and quality of dwellings needed in the future for older people in order to allow them to live independently and safely in their own home for as long as possible, or to move to more suitable accommodation if they so wish.

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Do plans need to allocate sites for specialist housing for older people?

It is up to the plan-making body to decide whether to allocate sites for specialist housing for older people. Allocating sites can provide greater certainty for developers and encourage the provision of sites in suitable locations. This may be appropriate where there is an identified unmet need for specialist housing. The location of housing is a key consideration for older people who may be considering whether to move (including moving to more suitable forms of accommodation). Factors to consider include the proximity of sites to good public transport, local amenities, health services and town centres.

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How does the use classes order apply to specialist housing for older people?

It is for a local planning authority to consider into which use class a particular development may fall. When determining whether a development for specialist housing for older people falls within C2 (Residential Institutions) or C3 (Dwellinghouse) of the Use Classes Order, consideration could, for example, be given to the level of care and scale of communal facilities provided.

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How can the viability of proposals for specialist housing for older people be assessed?

[Viability guidance](#) sets out how plan makers and decision takers should take account of viability, including for specialist housing for older people. Plans should set out the contributions expected from development. This should include setting out the levels and types of affordable housing provision required, along with other infrastructure. Plans can set out different policy requirements for different types of development. These policy requirements should be informed by evidence of infrastructure and affordable housing need, and a proportionate assessment of viability that takes into account all relevant policies and local and national standards, including the cost implications of Community Infrastructure Levy and section 106.

Viability guidance states that where up to date policies have set out the contributions expected from development, planning applications that comply with them should be assumed to be viable. It is up to the applicant to demonstrate whether particular circumstances justify the need for a viability assessment at the application stage. Such circumstances could include types of development which may significantly vary from standard models of development for sale (for example housing for older people).

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What factors should decision makers consider when assessing planning applications for specialist housing for older people?

Decision makers should consider the location and viability of a development when assessing planning applications for specialist housing for older people. Local planning authorities can encourage the development of more affordable models and make use of products like shared ownership. Where there is an identified unmet need for specialist housing, local authorities should take a positive approach to schemes that propose to address this need.

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How should plan-making authorities count specialist housing for older people against their housing requirement?

Plan-making authorities will need to count housing provided for older people against their housing requirement. For residential institutions, to establish the amount of accommodation released in the housing market, authorities should base calculations on the average number of adults living in households, using the published [Census data](#).

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Inclusive design

How can planning and design promote access and inclusion?

An inclusive environment is one that can be accessed and used by everyone. It recognises and accommodates differences in the way people use the built environment and fosters social connections.

Good design can help to create buildings and places that are for everyone. It can help break down unnecessary physical and psychological barriers and exclusions caused by the poor design of buildings and places.

Inclusive design acknowledges diversity and difference and is more likely to be achieved when it is considered at every stage of the development process, from inception to completion. However, it is often mistakenly seen as a Building Regulations issue, to be addressed once planning permission has been granted, not at the planning application stage. The most effective way to overcome conflicting policies and to maximise accessibility for everyone is for all parties to consider inclusive design from the outset of the process. This is particularly important when considering historic buildings and conservation, and highways. Thinking at the design stage about how the completed building will be occupied and managed can overcome many barriers experienced by some users. Too often the needs of users, including disabled people, older people and families with small children, are considered too late in the day.

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How can places be designed to be age-friendly and accessible for all?

The inclusive and age-friendly design of public spaces such as town centres, and of individual buildings, including housing, has [clear benefits](#). Inclusive design can help older and disabled people live more independently and reduce health and social care costs.

Inclusive design should not only be specific to the building, but also include the setting of the building in the wider built environment, for example, the location of the building on the plot; the gradient of the plot; the relationship of adjoining buildings; and the transport infrastructure. As set out in the revised [National Planning Policy Framework](#), developments should address the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport.

Issues to consider include:

- ease and comfort of movement on foot and with mobility aids between homes, services and town centres;
- proximity and links to public transport and local amenities;
- parking spaces and setting down points in proximity to entrances;
- the positioning and visual contrast of street furniture and the design of approach routes to meet the needs of people with different needs, including wheelchair users, people who need to rest while they walk and people with visual impairments;
- whether entrances to buildings are clearly identified, can be reached by a level or gently sloping approach and are well lit;
- the accessibility of public spaces including step free spaces and seating; and
- the availability of public toilets.

Design principles such as those set out in the [HAPPI](#) report are applicable to housing for older people and age-friendly places including:

- Integration with the surrounding context
- Social spaces that link with the community
- Space standards that facilitate flexibility
- Enhanced natural light

- Priority for pedestrians in outdoor spaces

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How can for the needs of people with dementia be addressed?

Evidence has shown that good quality housing and sensitively planned environments can have a substantial impact on the quality of life of someone living with dementia. People with dementia need to have access to care and support to enable them to live independently and homes need to be designed with their needs in mind.

Local planning authorities should consider design principles when developing new housing in the context of the wider built environment, especially housing aimed at people with dementia. Characteristics of a dementia-friendly community include, but are not limited to:

- easy to navigate physical environment
- appropriate transport
- communities shaped around the views of people with dementia and their carers
- good orientation and familiarity
- reduction in unnecessary clutter
- reduction in disorienting visual and auditory stimuli

There should be a range of housing options and tenures available to people with dementia, including mainstream and specialist housing. Innovative and diverse housing models should be considered where appropriate.

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