**PRESS RELEASE**
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**Rural communities need more homes for an ageing population**

Government policies are overlooking the housing needs of older people in rural areas, according to a new report from an All-Party Parliamentary Group.

Published after a 9-month Inquiry organised by the APPG on Housing & Care for Older People, the report warns that growing numbers of older people in rural areas will face a ‘huge challenge to their independence and well-being’ as their family homes become increasingly unsuitable.

The gap between the average age in rural and urban areas is widening. In 20 years, nearly half of rural households will be headed by someone aged over 65.

The report states policy makers must recognise the growing housing needs of older people living in the countryside. It recommends that Local Planning Authorities ensure provision of new homes for older people, noting the value of both the building of small village developments – “perhaps six bungalows on an unused scrap of land” – or larger scale retirement schemes in towns close by.

The Chair of the Inquiry, Lord Best, said: “For all the advantages of living in the countryside, life can be pretty miserable if your home is no longer right for you: if you can no longer manage the steps and stairs, if maintaining the property is costing too much, if keeping warm is a trial and your energy bills a nightmare, if you can no longer tend the once-beautiful garden.” And in relation to the need for care, he went on “Indeed, if you need some support – and some company – but if these are not to hand, then country living can be tough.”

The report comments that the major housebuilders are unlikely to meet these needs since they concentrate on larger sites and family homes where young purchasers can obtain “Help to Buy” government support. So, to build the new, accessible and affordable homes tailor-made for older people, the report advocates an emphasis on housing associations, community-led initiatives, SME builders and local landowners.

Sue Chalkley, Chief Executive of Hastoe, England’s largest rural housing association, said:

“We have a ticking demographic time bomb in Rural England as our population ages rapidly. Failing to act now will mean more loneliness, isolation and expensive trips to hospital as rural areas will be left with a housing stock completely unsuitable for its population.”

“Policymakers must wake up to this challenge and ensure we have more houses suitable for the rural elderly and, crucially, the right sort of houses too. The recommendations in this report are an excellent place to start.”

-ENDS-

**Note to editors:**

The Rural HAPPI Report (and previous reports) can be accessed here:

<http://www.housingandcare21.co.uk/about-us/appg-housing-and-care-for-older-people/>

<http://www.housinglin.org.uk/HAPPI4/>

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**Additional information - Key recommendations**:

“Rural Housing for an Ageing Population: Preserving Independence”, sets out recommendations to remove barriers to more and better homes for the increasing numbers of older people in rural communities.

Using the so-called HAPPI design principles of space, accessibility, energy efficiency, etc. (from the original Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation, now the subject of official annual awards), new housing could preserve independence for older people and save NHS and social care funds. By encouraging a move to much more suitable homes, badly needed family accommodation – which is hard to replace in rural areas – would become available.

The Inquiry encouraged the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs to recognise the centrality of housing issues in rural areas, particularly the housing and care requirements of those retiring from a life in farming.

Recommendations to the Ministry for Housing, Communities & Local Government include restoring targets for its agency, Homes England, for housing in rural areas, progressively increasing the share of its funding until these areas receive comparable support – some 13% of the total – commensurate to their population.

The role of local authorities, with their extensive planning powers, is seen as paramount. The Inquiry wants to see more strategic planning that acknowledges that older people will constitute a very high proportion of the population in most rural areas in the years to come. More widespread use of Rural Exception Sites is recommended, as is support for Rural Housing Enablers who can make a dramatic difference to delivery of affordable homes in these places.

Further recommendations include incentives for landowners to bring forward sites and for the government’s agency Homes England to increase its support for schemes in villages that help older people to “right-size” and retain their independence.

**The APPG and previous “HAPPI” reports**

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Housing & Care for Older People organises a series of meetings that consider the interrelationship of housing, social care and health.

The Group has initiated several Inquiries with the theme of “Housing Our Ageing Population”. The reports from these Inquiries spell out the advantages to be gained from building more homes specifically for older people: new homes designed exclusively for later life can preserve independence, prevent the need for a move into residential care, improve health and wellbeing and save hard-pressed NHS and social care budgets. “Right-sizing” also leads to family homes becoming available for the next generation.

“Rural Housing for our Ageing Population: Preserving Independence” is the fourth in this series of publications, following:

Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation (2009)

Housing our Ageing Population: Plan for Implementation (2012)

Housing our Ageing Population: Positive Ideas (2016)