



Kent Older Persons Housing Research

Working Paper 4: Survey of Local Authority Planning Practitioners

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Contents

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Feedback from Planning Professionals	1
3.	Conclusions	5
	Appendix 1 – Consultees	6



1. Introduction

DTZ has consulted senior personnel across the Kent and Medway Planning Authorities to explore how well the existing land use planning system copes with proposals for development of new accommodation targeting older people, including housing and care homes; the mechanism for liaison with care commissioning bodies; and how the system for supporting the development of new residential accommodation for older people might be improved.

This working paper summarises feedback from local authority contacts related to:

- What degree of recognition is given in local authority strategies (housing and planning) of the growing population of older people, and what strategic response is proposed in terms of housing provision (often linked to care).
- What development of new homes/housing/care homes for older people has been undertaken, what form this has taken, and learning for future applications
- What applications have been refused for new accommodation for older people; the reason for refusals and learning for future applications
- What are the issues and challenges raised/faced by schemes for development of new accommodation for older people? How might these be resolved?

2. Feedback from Planning Professionals

The Need for a Co-ordinated Strategic Response

The interview process itself has revealed that to date there is limited evidence of co-ordination in the response to older persons' accommodation needs across Kent and Medway. This has manifested itself in a number of local authorities where several contacts needed to be pursued in order to gain a holistic response. There is not a specific contact with an overview of the accommodation needs of older persons and the strategic planning response to these needs.

Older persons' accommodation needs are not always set out explicitly in policy or strategy - with reference in the Core Strategies or Housing Strategies often limited to recognition of lifetime homes standards and mobility standards - and little evidence of specific site allocations for older persons' accommodation.

Although Housing Needs Studies estimate sheltered accommodation needs of older people in some boroughs; and some Strategic Housing Market Assessments include a section on understanding the needs of older people; however these are not translated to specific accommodation targets. Instead, provision tends to fall within the wider strategic theme of achieving a mix of housing types. Dartford however has developed an Older Persons Housing Strategy to assess need now and in the future and to set out an Action Plan for new provision.¹

¹ http://www.dartford.gov.uk/housing/documents/op_housing_strategy_with_cover.pdf



Applications tend to be assessed on an individual basis which led one respondent to comment that ***'The planning system is reactive rather than strategic'***

The Needs of Older People

The evidence base suggests that the majority of older people prefer to remain in their own homes. Beyond this, there is limited understanding about older peoples' preferences regarding specialist accommodation. One respondent commented that the understanding of what older people want needs to be better understood and this would be helped by actively engaging older people in helping to develop policy.

Work undertaken by Canterbury City Council involving focus groups with council tenants (in residence for 20 years or more) found the majority seek:

- to stay in the same area, maintain their social network and GP
- live in accommodation large enough to meet their needs with a spare bedroom
- separate kitchen and dining areas
- parking
- outside space

There is under-occupation in all sectors and a commonly held view that most public sector provision does not tempt people to move out of their own homes. There is a need for greater quality provision across all tenures. In the private sector there are issues for those that are asset rich, but cash poor. Fuel poverty and thermal inefficiency are reported to be significant issues in private sector accommodation especially in areas such as Herne Bay where two bedroom bungalows are popular with older persons but thermal efficiency of the housing stock is poor.

Provision

Numerous local authority sheltered housing schemes are in need of renovation having failed to keep pace with aspirations. Sheltered housing units are deemed to be too small and the standard of accommodation below the expectations of many. A number of schemes have been identified as unsuitable for conversion to Extra Care facilities. Some schemes are being remodelled via the Kent PFI. Otherwise, local authorities and RSLs have limited funding to deliver improvements to existing stock.

Most new-build schemes are privately developed. Feedback from local authorities is that they believe they have limited opportunities to influence private sector provision, but there is a need to explore options for people who wish to downsize in future but remain outright owners with extra bedroom space for carers/relatives/visitors/storage.

Another question to explore is whether there is potential to open up general housing stock for older people. For example, installing lifts/other facilities to flatted accommodation could make a significant proportion of existing stock more suited to older peoples' needs.

Provision of care is also important. As well as better intelligence on the aspirations of older persons, there is a requirement to understand better future need for social care services. One respondent identified the need for shared intelligence on trends in dementia and the number of people on the social care register. Information is needed on how the size of these groups

is changing and the impact on future need. The respondent recommended the need for better engagement between social care and housing professionals to understand the common need.

Planning Issues

The designation of C2 and C3 uses is a contentious issue among local authorities and affects affordable housing contributions.

- C2: Residential Institutions – Provision of residential accommodation and care to people in need of care
- C3: Dwelling Houses

Local authorities claim that developers argue for C2 designation for schemes on the basis of providing extra care facilities – but this does not necessarily apply to all cases. Schemes that declared C2 are often deemed to be C2 use in perpetuity. The nature of care tends to be visiting care as opposed to round-the-clock supervision. Local authorities argue that this represents C3 use and that there is no established means of monitoring the nature of care. Therefore the perception is that this could be a strategy by developers to avoid affordable housing contributions.

The perception is that developers provide a minimal extra-care aspect to overcome planning technicalities of affordable housing provision, which causes local authorities problems missing out on 40% affordable housing contributions. Some respondents were sceptical about whether there is a continued need to favour extra care schemes, over dwelling units targeted at older people.

There is confusion between different terms used for extra-care accommodation and many respondents highlighted the need for standard definitions to be used by both developers and local authorities for a better common understanding from the outset. In Medway the council has adopted a 'Guide to Developer Contributions' which offers guidance on S106 planning contributions². Housing and Planning professionals at Medway believe that setting their stall out early means there are fewer problems since developers know where they stand prior to submission.

There are also practical issues regarding the integration of affordable provision in an extra care scheme due to difficulties managing service charges across varying tenures but also perception that developers are reluctant to mix tenures over concerns their clients would not integrate.

One respondent commented on practical issues such as the fact that leasehold charges for communal areas are charged at market rate and not subsidised like rental costs, which can be paid for through housing benefit. Anyone in affordable units therefore can have difficulty affording the communal costs. This affects the viability of a mixed-tenure scheme. One proposed solution to this problem is to provide a separate entrance to the development. However unless the developer submits a separate application, this cannot be forced upon at appeal and is hence disregarded.

² http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/final_approved_guide_may_08.pdf



Schemes have been approved with provision of off-site affordable housing contributions to avoid on-site tenure mix at the request of the developer. In another scheme, the local authority accepted a corner of the site to be developed as general housing to reflect the local need for family homes.

Green Belt

Rural countryside is often seen as an attractive setting for older peoples' accommodation. The Kent countryside has an above average proportion of green belt land. However rural parishes in Kent are tightly constrained and land availability within the village boundaries is limited.

To date development in the greenbelt has been argued on grounds of an evidence base need. If demand for new-build specialist accommodation exceeds available supply, and the supply gap is complimented with a reasonable evidence base, there may be grounds for the release of green belt land for extra care accommodation. In this case, information and advice would have to be made available to parishes to explain the growing need.

On the other hand certain rural schemes have been refused permission on grounds of sustainability and transport due to the isolated nature of the site location. For rural schemes to come forward local authorities require a clear evidence of need. Local authorities believe this isn't always provided by developers. An issue here may be the difference of need and demand; need may be thought of as the demand arising from local residents, when developers seeking to satisfy demand that may come from across quite a large area.

Other issues

In some areas, local authorities are sceptical about the regeneration benefits of developing older persons' accommodation. For example, there are fears over how the long term economic future of Herne Bay could be influenced by over-provision of older persons' accommodation given the current level of interest. There is a need to preserve a balanced community. In addition, this is impacted by marketing of private sector developments nationally, which limits take-up by local people.

3. Conclusions

Feedback from consultations raises some key issues and questions over how best to deliver schemes that are viable, gain consent and meet the aspirations of older persons.

Firstly, in response to the perceived lack of co-ordination of planning, housing and social care professionals:

How can the local authorities manage a more co-ordinated response within the current funding environment? Is there scope to achieve this by:

- *Setting up a Working/Practice Group focussing on older persons' accommodation. This could comprise housing, planning and social care practitioners across Kent and Medway.*
- *Should the delivery of older persons' accommodation gain greater prominence in the remit of the KPOG and KHG or sub-groups within these groups?*

The above would need to include close working with the private sector Kent Retirement Housing Group in order to generate a common understanding and achieve a realistic framework for development.

There would undoubtedly be benefits of a greater shared understanding between private sector developers and local authorities. This would ensure there is a clear understanding in determining standard definitions and terms and guidance on issues such as C2 and C3 use designations as well as realistic requirements around the release of green belt land and sustainability of remote rural scheme proposals.

More broadly there is a need to ensure that the needs of older persons' accommodation are considered at strategic sites in each borough as part of a more co-ordinated strategic planning response.

Appendix 1 – Consultees

Local Authority	Name	Position
Ashford	Ian Grundy	Planning Policy Officer
Ashford	David Jeffrey	Housing Enabling Officer
Canterbury	Gary Peskett	Strategic Policy & Improvement Manager
Dartford	Jackie Pye	Housing Policy and Development Manager
Gravesham	Wendy Lane	Principal Planner (Policy)
Medway	Brian McCutcheon	Planning Policy & Design Manager
Medway	Bryan Geake	Senior Planning Officer
Sevenoaks	Alan Dyer	Planning Policy Officer
Sevenoaks	Gavin Missons	Housing Policy Service Manager
Swale	James Freeman	Planning Officer
Swale	Amber Christou	Head of Housing Services
Thanet	Steve Moore	Policy Planner
Thanet	Simon Thomas	Development Control Officer
Tonbridge & Malling	Brian Gates	Head of Planning Policy
Tunbridge Wells	Gudrun Andrews	Planning Officer