

News

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Blog: Older People's Housing is a Force for Good!



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Whatever they are branded (extra care, retirement villages, elderly supported housing); and whatever the tenure (leased apartments, mixed tenure or rented) these communities maintain peoples independence, combat loneliness, reduce A&E admissions and help stave off dementia. These developments, or rather the communities they create, enable older people to live happier, healthier, more fulfilling lives into very old age.

I recently met a lady in her 80s in Newport, South Wales who had moved into her extra care apartment with her husband after he had suffered from a debilitating stroke. The scheme allowed her to stay living with her husband, avoiding the enforced separation that a care home would have caused. Whilst her husband has since passed away, she told me "This place gave me two years of my marriage that I would have never had." Powerful stuff.

With continued pressure on the public purse, both NHS and social care budgets of Local Authorities, these communities can save significant cost through improving people's lives. Preventing falls through improved strength and balance gained in the communal gym or on-site fitness classes leads to less admissions to hospital and bed blocking. By providing a high quality integrated care and housing product, larger homes can be freed up to return to the local housing supply. Integrating elderly people into communities helps with loneliness and mental health. So why aren't there more of these high quality developments coming to market?

I am often asked the question "What can a Local Authority do, as a market shaper, to encourage developers and housing providers to bring forward more older-peoples housing projects?"

Nowadays I have a pretty well-rehearsed answer on that point, which largely focuses on ensuring that extra care developers can compete with the standard house builders when buying land. My advice to local authorities consists of the following:

1. Have an up to date older peoples housing strategy with demand (by both tenure and locations in the area) clearly set out. This valuable resource will mean developers can quickly focus their attention on where there is need and save significant time and money on undertaking the initial research.

2. Make sure the Local Plan specifically addresses the need for older peoples housing and allocates appropriate sites.

3. Make extra care and retirement developments exempt from CIL payments normally charged by the local authority. This will reduce development costs, meaning that extra care developers can better compete for land that would otherwise be snapped up by standard house builders.

4. Grant relief from affordable housing provision. Putting aside the planning use debate (sites with C2 planning use are exempt from affordable housing), this is perhaps more contentious – particularly given that some of the homes in an extra care scheme could be affordable. But the financial burden of affordable housing is stifling many smaller scale and mid-market developments. The benefits, as set out above, are arguably a great enough reward to forego affordable housing in many locations. Industry gossip is that the London Mayor’s position to apply affordable housing to retirement schemes of all descriptions is leading some of the sector’s developer’s to avoid the capital altogether right now.

5. Bring forward Local Authority owned/controlled land for extra care development – through partnership working. In a market where supply of appropriately sized and located sites is scarce, publicly owned land that suits this use should be earmarked for elderly housing developments, wherever there is strong demand.

At MSI we are working with Local Authorities and NHS Trusts to develop older people’s housing projects on publicly owned land for a variety of tenures. The public sector provides land; whilst we provide project development, funding and expertise. We’ve seen a marked increase in interest in older peoples housing from our public sector partners over the last couple of years - such as in Burton on Trent where our partnership with University Hospitals of Derby and Burton NHS Foundation Trust has received planning permission for a health village. The health village will include both extra care housing and step-down accommodation (for patients able to leave hospital but not able to be discharged home due to their care packages).

My hope is that by Local Authorities implementing the measure that I’ve outlined above, we’ll be doing a lot more of these types of projects in the coming years; and given that they’re a force for good, that can only be a good thing.

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