

Adding Life To Years

New ideas and attitudes to
housing for older people

St. George's House, Windsor Castle



Consultation
28 - 30 April, 1998

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Introduction

Throughout the world people are now living longer, many of them to enjoy an active old age. What should be recognised as a human success story is rarely seen as such. Having an older population is perceived as a problem, imposing a huge and growing burden on health and welfare services. The potential benefits and opportunities to society of an older population have been largely ignored to date and the transition to a positive, active view of ageing, although difficult, is crucial.

This Consultation at St. George's House was organised by the Building and Social Housing Foundation to consider how the housing needs of older people can be met in order to add life to years and encourage independence, participation, choice and self-fulfilment. These concerns are brought into focus by the approaching International Year of Older Persons which is being celebrated in 1999.

Persons of experience and expertise were brought together from around the world in order to share and develop ideas freely and frankly on how to meet this vital challenge. A clear and simple Agenda for Action has been drawn up as a result of the deliberations of those at the Consultation, and sets out clearly the action to be taken in order to ensure that the housing needs of older people are met in a way that facilitates choice, independence and an improved quality of life.

Meeting the housing needs of older people has frequently been carried out without consultation or involvement of the user and without consideration of the total living environment. Choice of accommodation has been limited and the options for independent living have been restricted through inflexible and poor housing design. Lack of long-term and co-ordinated planning and action has exacerbated the situation.

The Consultation sought to identify ways in which the current choice and quality of housing for older people could be improved, recognising that this would need to be achieved without a dramatic increase in public expenditure. Successful and cost-effective approaches to housing provision were identified and a reallocation of existing funds in these directions urged. Genuine consultation with older people will also help to ensure that both public and private monies are spent where they have greatest impact.

Further information on all organisations referred to in the text can be found at the end of this publication.

The potential benefits and opportunities to society of an older population have been largely ignored to date. As populations around the world get older, a transition to a positive, active view of ageing is crucial.

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An Agenda for Action

The deliberations and discussions of the three day Consultation were distilled into an Agenda for Action. This identifies key areas of action to be taken at various levels, from the individual to the global, in order to better meet the housing needs of older people. The framework for action sets out those factors which will facilitate the implementation of the Agenda.

Setting a framework for action

- Recognise that the values of self-fulfilment, dignity, independence, care and participation are the underlying principles which add quality of life to persons of all age-groups.
- Take action on the basis of careful research, monitoring progress to see if the desired result is being achieved. Learn from the experience of others and seek to maximise the flow of information and life-long learning.
- Governments need to take a strategic, holistic and longer term view of the needs of older people, rather than the compartmentalised and short-term perspective so frequently employed. As well as being beneficial to older people themselves, this is also likely to result in a more efficient and effective use of public resources.
- There needs to be a genuine dialogue within and across government departments and agencies and both with, and within, local communities. Without this dialogue there is a lack of co-ordination and understanding, leading to an inefficient and ineffective use of resources.

Action at the local and individual level

(Individuals, households, community-based organisations, statutory local authorities)

- Encourage all those approaching their later years to give greater thought as to how they will use these years enjoyably and beneficially.
- Ensure that older people can continue living in their own homes as long as possible. In addition, promote a range of housing options, including mixed age developments, which provide opportunities for interaction and common support.
- Provide community facilities linked to sheltered housing schemes in order to enable greater contact between residents and the local community. (N.B. linked, not fully integrated.)

- Local authorities should seek to disseminate examples of good practice in the care and housing of older people, as well as providing examples to the government sponsored working group on Better Government for Older People.
- Local authorities to act as a clearing house for information on services and local organisations available for the support of older people locally. This information should be made easily and conveniently available (using on-line as well as more conventional methods)
- Establish and support existing local community forums which involve older people, to facilitate a cross-generational sharing of views and debate, etc. about the local neighbourhood.

Action by the professionals

(architects, housing, health and social care)

- Seek to reduce the exclusivity and remoteness of the professionals who deal with older people and foster greater understanding and less patronising attitudes.
- Require better integration and co-operation between all the professionals and agencies acting with older people, in particular between the housing and care agencies. If current structures are not effective, change the structures.
- Provide better information for older people on the housing options available to them, enabling them to make a more informed and independent choice.
- Involve users and potential users in the design of dwellings for older people in order to ensure that the dwellings are capable of meeting needs. Ensure that future needs can be accommodated through the use of barrier free design and built in flexibility.
q Encourage the increased use of Geographic Information Systems for improved physical and social planning of new dwellings for older people. In particular, seek to make town centres more attractive places for older people to live.
- Encourage the use of the latest information technology to help provide better information and services for older people, for example, local intranets, telecare, etc.
- Establish panels of older people to test personal and domestic gadgets and equipment coming onto the market.
- Recognise the 'preventive' aspects of good quality housing in helping older people to maintain independence and good health.

Action at the national level

(Regional, state and federal organisations)

- Request the Social Exclusion Unit in the Cabinet Office to extend its remit to consider the very real problems of social exclusion suffered by older people.
- Develop detailed guidance on good practice and innovative housing approaches and ensure that this is disseminated widely, further developing the work currently being done by the Housing Corporation. Consider the possibility of establishing a national prize to bring forward, recognise and reward new ideas.
- Include education on issues of later life and the role of older people in society as part of the school curriculum and encourage the employment or volunteering of older people in schools to share experience between the generations.
- Review downwards the age criteria at which people are eligible for sheltered housing, thus enabling those who wish to move into such accommodation at an earlier age to do so.
- Use of all media to promote the positive things that older people have to contribute to society and to increase awareness that we are all involved in issues of later life. The Millennium Debate of the Age organised by Age Concern is one such approach.
- Carry out a detailed investigation into the possible reallocation of all state resources currently used to meet the needs of older people, with a view to targeting the most successful and cost effective approaches. These include small group homes with extra care provision on the Abbeyfield model, as well as those approaches which are preventative in nature and which give older people a greater degree of control over the level and type of care they receive.
- Encourage the opportunities for volunteering by older people, through programmes such as the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme.
- Develop a national strategy for practical services, such as Care & Repair, which provide practical help with repairs and adaptations, which can enable people to continue to live in their own home.
- Give consideration to providing rewards and incentives to encourage families to take a greater degree of responsibility for their older members.
- Encourage the many national organisations dealing with the needs of older people to work together in the coming International Year, in order to make a greater impact and minimise duplication of effort.

- ❑ Consider the introduction of legislation to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of age, as a basis for beginning to change the culture of negative stereotypes of ageing.

Action at the international level

(Continental to global)

- ❑ Promote the positive things that older people have to contribute to a society of the future, as well as highlighting their contribution in the past.
- ❑ Share information and experience between countries, recognising the importance of a two-way exchange between developed and developing countries.
- ❑ Encourage existing networks to set the Agenda for IYOP to ensure a practical uptake of the year at the local community level, rather than lip-service only being paid by national governments.
- ❑ Co-ordinate and promote research into ageing.

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The challenge of Adding Life To Years

The countries of the developed world are in the vanguard of the global population shift from youthfulness to maturity. They are moving into an era where older people form a far greater proportion of the population than ever before. How they deal with the opportunities, benefits and problems posed by this new era will influence the behaviour of other countries as they reach the same stage.

Denying the stereotypes

Our society has inherited a particular attitude to age, ageing, older people and death. They are to be feared and rejected and avoided as much as possible. The fear of death is understandable, but not so the fear of age, ageing and older people.

We are living longer than ever before and yet the youth-bound values of fashion, novelty, beauty and fitness continue to dominate most cultures.

Older people are frequently regarded as objects of pity, as a burden on the financial resources of the state and no longer capable of managing their own lives. Popular stereotypes include the kindly granny busy with her knitting, the cantankerous curmudgeon or worse still, the helpless simpleton. Mobilising and encouraging older people to deny the stereotypes is an exceedingly difficult task, since prejudices go so deep and are so easily adopted by younger people. Those who do not conform to the stereotypes are regarded as unusual and exceptional. Popular television programmes, road signs depicting bent frail bodies relying on the use of walking sticks and youth-oriented advertising all serve to reinforce a negative image of later life.

Older people are not a deviant or special group of the population. They are simply ordinary people who happen to have reached a particular age.

It is frequently assumed that older people are a homogeneous group in society. This is not the case. There is no reason why those in the forty year age span from 60 to 100 years old should be assumed to have the same needs, expectations and capacities, any more than those in the forty year span from 10 to 50 years. Older people are not a deviant group or a special section of the population. They are simply ordinary people who happen to have reached a particular age. Their physical and mental capacity, social class, political and religious views, leisure activities and family situation vary just as much as in the population as a whole.

It is now beginning to be recognised that the human life course can be broadly divided into four ages:

- **First Age**
The age of childhood dependence, which extends up to the age when you can earn your own living.
- **Second Age**
The age of production, citizenship, parenthood, wealth-earning, responsibility and duty (often grinding).
- **Third Age**
The age free of the demands of child rearing and of the need to work for a living, when people are at leisure to achieve personal fulfilment.
- **Fourth Age**
The age of final dependence and decrepitude when, for some, physical and mental decline set in.

The great historical blunder has been to associate all old people with the Fourth Age and to fail to make the distinction between the Third and Fourth Ages. The proportion of older people in the Fourth Age is very, very small. Indeed, some people never experience this stage, and yet it is this image of older people that predominates in most societies. It is the Third Age that gives the opportunity for the raising of the cultural level and the independence of personality, the capacity for citizenship and sharing which every older person potentially possesses, just as much as their juniors.

There are no clear or fixed age limits defining the ages, nor are age and work related in a simple way. Payment is not always associated with productive work and those in the Third Age can make a substantial contribution to the health and well-being of the community as a whole, through a wide range of valuable volunteering services.

Professionals dealing with the needs of older people, whether they be architects, doctors or those working in social care and housing organisations, may tend to have somewhat fixed and patronising views of older people. This is partly due to the nature and length of professional training which instils a sense of superior knowledge, but also to the pressure on time and resources. Only recently has there begun to be an acceptance of the value and need to consult older people in decisions relating to their well-being and to deal with older people as individuals. In the field of housing. The home improvement agencies have pioneered the practice of dealing with the needs of individual households in a caring and comprehensive manner. Better integration and co-operation between the other agencies and professionals dealing with older people would ensure a more effective and efficient use of available resources.

Avenues for change

The transition to a positive, active view of ageing may well result from action taken by older people themselves, if only through the sheer force of their growing numbers and political and

economic influence. Existing and potential avenues to further promote this transition are identified below.

- Recent advances in technology, both in terms of mechanical helps and in computer assisted service provision (telephone banking, ordering of goods and services, on-line advice systems, etc.) are helping to break down former barriers by remedying the physical incapacities of older people. In the near future there will be an increased amount of support and information available through television channels and linkages through the Internet (for example, Senior Net in the United States) and a much greater proportion of older people will be conversant with the use of such facilities.
- The Universities of the Third Age are pioneering a change in attitudes, both as to how older people see themselves and how they are perceived by others. These organisations are concerned to mobilise active and forward looking older people and develop a new culture of the mature, the educated, the expert and the cultured. They also offer an opportunity to break down barriers between age groups. There are 350 such universities in Great Britain with 80,000 members and it is currently the fastest growing sector of education. These universities demonstrate how a body of later life persons can use their own resources to learn together. They show how the authoritarian model of traditional education and the distinction between teacher and the taught can be broken down, by making use of people's own life experience. The principal distinction of the Universities of the Third Age from all other intellectual organisations is that they are a learning exchange. Anyone who joins has to undertake to teach and to learn. Nobody is paid to teach, there are no exams, no teachers, no qualifications and no age limit.
- Older people can, and already do, make a significant contribution to society in a variety of ways. As an increasing number of people enter the Third Age, this contribution will expand in both scope and scale and will help provide that sense of value and purpose which, currently, seems to come only from paid employment. The role of older people in the voluntary sector of society will be of increasing importance in the future. A variety of organisations already exist to foster the use of such skills, for example the Retired Executives Action Clearing House (REACH) and the Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme (RSVP).
- The greater involvement of older people in society is one of the main ways in which negative stereotypes can be broken down. A successful approach in some European countries has been to involve older people in schools, either paid or as volunteers. This serves the purpose of increasing contact between the generations and passes on the skills and experience of the older people, as well as improving computer literacy for the older people.
- The ActiVAge network is aiming to promote new ways in which older people can make a positive contribution to society.

- At the age of 45, more than half of the remaining lifespan will be spent in retirement and yet little time or thought is given to how this part of life will be spent. The conventional view of retirement has been bound up with loss, emphasising what has been left behind, rather than the opportunities presented in the future. There is woefully little preparation during the Second Age for the many years to be spent in the Third Age. The life experience in the Second Age will be a key determinant of life-style in the Third Age, both in terms of the interests developed and the financial planning that has been possible. Responsibility for this preparation largely rests with individuals themselves but can be encouraged and facilitated by making guidance and support available.

- The introduction of legislation to prohibit discrimination on the basis of age would lead to a gradual change in the attitudes towards older people. This change will not be effected overnight, but if supported by more positive role models and attitudes in the media, current attitudes to older people will inevitably begin to change. The Amsterdam Treaty contains a clause (Article 13) on non-discrimination in which age is included.

The International Year of Older Persons 1999 - an opportunity for global awareness raising

In 1992 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the resolution to

"observe the year of 1999 as the International Year of Older Personsin recognition of humanity's demographic coming of age and the promise it holds for maturing attitudes and capabilities in social, economic, cultural and spiritual undertakings, not least for global peace and development in the next century"

The theme for the year is Towards a Society for All Ages and the objective of the year is the promotion of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

These principles are independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity and details are set out below.

Independence: Older people should

- have access to adequate food, water, shelter, clothing and health care through the provision of income, family and community support and self-help.

- have the opportunity to work or to have access to other income-generating opportunities.

- be able to participate in determining when and at what pace withdrawal from the labour force takes place.

- have access to appropriate educational and training programmes.
- be able to live in environments that are safe and adaptable to personal preferences and changing capacities.
- be able to reside at home as long as possible.

Participation: Older people should

- remain integrated in society, participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies that directly affect their well-being and share their knowledge and skills with younger generations.
- be able to seek and develop opportunities for service to the community and to serve as volunteers in positions appropriate to their interests and capabilities.
- be able to form movements or associations of older people.

Care: Older people should

- benefit from family and community care and protection in accordance with each society's system of cultural values.
- have access to health care to help them to maintain or regain the optimum level of physical, mental and emotional well-being and to prevent or delay the onset of illness.
- have access to social and legal services to enhance their autonomy, protection and care.
- be able to utilise appropriate levels of institutional care providing protection, rehabilitation and social and mental stimulation in a humane and secure environment.
- be able to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms when residing in any shelter, care or treatment facility, including full respect for their dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy and for the right to make decisions about their care and the quality of their lives.

Self-fulfilment: Older people should

- be able to pursue opportunities for the full development of their potential.
- have access to the educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources of society.

Dignity: Older people should

- be able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse.
- be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, disability or other status, and be valued independently of their economic contribution.

Four dimensions for exploration, debate and action have been identified. These are not prescriptive, but rather, they suggest how the concept of the society for all ages can be explored in relation to the International Year of Older Persons. The United Nations encourages its member states to design policies for all ages, developing and testing social technologies and policies to promote the society for all ages. This should be done against the backdrop of the four major conceptual dimensions set out below and will be supported by the research work carried out on the research agenda on ageing.

1. Situation of older people (in particular participation and care).
2. Multi-generational relationships (independence and interdependence are the main themes).
3. Interrelationship of ageing and development - how the ageing of society will affect the functions of those societies.
4. Lifelong individual development (individual responsibility for one's old age).

The role of the United Nations Secretariat is to provide conceptual content and suggest operational activities. The celebration of the year will be primarily at the local and national levels and there will be no global summit meeting. The Year will be launched on 1st October 1998 and last until the end of 1999. The substantive follow-up to the year will be considered by the General Assembly at its special Plenary Meeting in 1999, leading possibly towards establishing a long-term strategy for 2020.

The framework for specific action suggested by the UN to individual nations involves:

- raising awareness of the society for all ages.
- looking ahead by exploring policy approaches .
- reaching out to non-traditional actors such as academia, media, enterprises, trade unions, foundations, women and youth organisations.
- networking through research and information exchange.

As part of the dissemination of information the IYOP Secretariat has established:

- a web-site
(<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/iyop/htm>);
- a series of research projects on rural and urban ageing;
- a quarterly newsletter entitled Countdown to 1999;
- a database on national policies and good practice.

Further information on all of these can be found on the IYOP web-site.

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Housing in a society for all ages

A global view

The ageing of the world's population has commenced at different times in different countries and is proceeding at different rates. This transition from a youthful to a more mature society is occurring much faster in the developing countries than it did in the industrialised world. For example, the increase in the proportion of older people from 7 to 14 per cent of the population took 115 years in France but is estimated that it will take only 18 years in Jamaica and 15 years in Tunisia. In the year 2025, 1.2 billion people will be aged over 60. Seventy per cent of these will be in developing countries and given the current rates of urbanisation, the vast majority will be living in cities and towns.

The cities of the developing countries face serious problems, such as lack of adequate housing and poor infrastructure, as well as a scarcity of resources relating to health, education, employment and security. This is compounded by environmental challenges that confront almost all population groups, making the provision of adequate shelter and sustainable neighbourhoods for older people an extremely challenging task. While such basic necessities are important for the well-being of all people, they are vital for older people whose homes are the centre of virtually all their daily activities.

Adaptations to the home, and especially, the presence of a safe and healthy physical environment can make life easier for people whose mobility is comparatively restricted. It is in human settlements - primarily in urban centres - where such basic needs of older people will need to be addressed in the decades ahead. These basic needs and their possible solutions are identified in the table below.

Meeting the housing and basic needs of older people in both developed and developing countries will be a tremendous challenge to governments and to civil society in the decades ahead. Turning ideas into reality implies great financial costs and internal transfer of resources in all countries. Basic assumptions will need to be questioned, including social and economic policy, pension provision, health care and what is a family, community and public responsibility with regard to older people.

In the year 2025, 1.2 billion people will be aged over 60. Seventy per cent of these will be in developing countries. It is in human settlements - primarily in urban centres - where the basic needs of older people will need to be addressed in the decades ahead.

Basic needs of older people	Approaches to meeting those needs
Physical and mobility needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide assistance to older people in managing, maintaining and improving their existing homes. ● Provide practical domestic aids and equipment to facilitate daily living. ● Make town centres more attractive places for older people to live and use Geographic Information Systems to ensure improved physical and social planning for all new developments for older people. ● Consult with older people to identify detailed needs, both for housing design and domestic equipment. ● Ensure personal security and safety, both within the home and the neighbourhood. ● Design dwellings to ensure greater flexibility of use at all ages, in order to avoid older people having to move to obtain appropriate accommodation. ● Make existing residential neighbourhoods and dwellings more easily accessible to all ages. ● Encourage the adaptation of existing dwellings to include granny flats and garden suites for older family members.
Social and civic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Remove barriers to older people developing and maintaining a social network within their local community. ● Make available opportunities locally to utilise the potential and capacities of older people. ● Encourage volunteering of older people within their local communities.
Income needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that older people have sufficient income to sustain an acceptable quality of life. ● Review financial provision to enable older people to share in travel, entertainment, learning and other opportunities. ● Introduce reverse mortgaging arrangements to release some of the equity tied up in a house. ● Enable older people to be income earning for longer, if they wish to.

The Habitat Agenda developed at The Habitat II Conference in 1996 addressed the housing needs of older persons in 14 of its 214 paragraphs. Paragraph 17 emphasises the need for older people to remain involved in their communities:

"older persons are entitled to lead fulfilling and productive lives and should have opportunities for full participation in their communities and society, and in all decision-making regarding their well-being, especially their shelter needs. Their many contributions to the political, social and economic processes of human settlements should be recognised and valued. Special attention should be given to meeting the evolving housing and mobility needs in order to enable them to continue to lead rewarding lives in their communities."

To achieve this goal governments at international, national and local levels should combine their capacities and energies to help meet the needs and develop potential contributions of older people.

Retaining community links

Retaining links with their local communities and social networks is important for older people. Residential care has tended to create very closed communities, with little genuine interaction with the local community and although sheltered housing complexes offer greater potential for interaction, this is often not utilised.

Helping people to remain in their own homes is therefore one of the main ways of helping to retain the social and community links which are so important for older people in reducing isolation and loneliness.

3.4 million older people in the United Kingdom now live on or below the poverty line and it is very difficult for older people with little money to maintain, improve or adapt their homes. Home improvement agencies (sometimes called Staying Put or Care & Repair) were originally established to help those older people, who so wish, to stay in their own homes but have now expanded to provide help and support for both older people and disabled persons on a low income whose homes are in need of repair.

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There are 1.5 million dwellings in England that are unfit for human habitation i.e. they are in serious disrepair or do not have an inside toilet or have dangerous electric wiring, and a substantial proportion of these are occupied by older people. Although the number of unfit dwellings is being gradually reduced, the number of older people continues to increase and thus on balance the agencies find an ever increasing demand for their services as people get older in a home that is likewise ageing and they are faced with maintenance and improvement problems which they feel are beyond their capacity to deal with.

For many older people it is a great source of worry and distress to watch their home and garden fall into disrepair. If they wish to stay in their homes the support from a home improvement agency can be a lifeline. It is a hand-holding process, relieving people of the paralysis of not knowing where to start, or where to go for help.

The work typically carried out by such an agency includes:

- helping decide on the work that needs to be done;
- advising on, and arranging finance (although not directly providing it);
- organising all building work;
- sorting out personal and practical problems;
- withdrawing support sensitively;
- onward referral if necessary.

The service offered by home improvement agencies is a very simple service and is very low cost. The average amount spent on a house is £1,600. In 1996/97 home improvement agencies undertook £44.5 million worth of work for 27,000 people, 90 per cent of whom were aged 60 or over. The benefits of this work are wider than simply to the individual concerned. Private house renewal has an impact on the regeneration of a local area by improving the properties and stimulating local employment. This approach supports the Community Care approach to health care provision and is important in prevention of ill-health and accidents, as homes are made warmer, safer and healthier for the occupiers. The benefits for the older people are not simply an improved home, but rather, a whole package including social and mental improvement, so that people can start to look forward to life again.

Participation by older people

The involvement and participation of older people in the design and management of their own homes has only recently been acknowledged as a valuable approach to meeting the housing and social needs of older people; (although in some cases the move from lip-service to genuine implementation has still to be made). It is still however widely assumed, often by professionals, that older people are all the same and that the health and social care professionals know what is best for them.

From detailed research studies of the form that participation should take, older people clearly wish to be consulted on a range of issues, not simply those related to their own individual home. It is also clear that they do not necessarily wish to be involved by sitting on committees. What they do want, is to be able to:

- have a range of options;
- have information provided, which is of good quality and timely;
- have some control of costs;
- choose whether or not they are involved;
- choose for how long they wish to be involved.

Care has to be taken in establishing a participatory system. In particular it is important to look at who is setting the agenda for any discussion - is it the landlords, the builders, the residents or the local authorities? There is also the need for action to be seen to be taken as a result of the views expressed, otherwise the process will seem to have little point. Once a genuine process of involvement and participation has been created however, a new dynamic is established. A new set of relationships and expectations will emerge as the process gets underway and it is not possible to go back. Nor would one want to, as the process is part of building a future citizenship.

The use of advisory panels has been successful. This is where groups of older people come together for a short time to deal with a specific issue, for example a new building or a new product, and then disband when the work is completed. Although consumer testing has been carried out in the past, it has usually been a formality and little notice was taken of the results. An example of this can be found with the alarms used by older people to call for help in an emergency. Although an extensive range of these products have been on the market for sixteen years and many older people have one, they are rarely used because of their inconvenience, complicated method of operation or ease of triggering accidentally. Most older people who possessed one of these devices felt that it was an intrusion and made them feel more dependent, rather than giving them peace of mind and an increased feeling of independence.

The use of ballots may be another option for increasing participation of older people, since it brings on board a wider range of people other than those who are prepared to attend meetings (who are often those with a grievance and the articulate). This would be particularly important in the residential care setting where residents might be wary of expressing a concern or voicing a complaint.

Providing an informed choice and the opportunity of influencing their own well-being are crucial in enabling older people and their families to be able to make an informed decision regarding their future.

In the early 1980s sheltered housing was seen as the way forward for housing older people. Regrettably there was little, if any, consultation with older people as to how it should be designed and mistakes were made. It was assumed, for example, that because people are much of an age

that they will all get on and that the noisier and busier environments of mixed age developments would be less popular. This is not necessarily the case and mistakes could easily have been avoided if the users of the accommodation had been consulted and involved in the decision making process.

The involvement and participation of older people in the design and management of their own homes is a valuable approach to meeting the housing and social needs of older people.

The barriers to participation include

- ❑ the cultural phenomenon of paternalism and the sense that older people need to be looked after and told what is best for them.
- ❑ lack of education and confidence amongst older people who have little tradition of involvement or participation in their earlier life.
- ❑ practical problems of frailty, lack of income, accessibility and lack of energy.

Barriers can however be overcome and research currently being sponsored by the Housing Corporation for the Housing for Older People in Europe Network is seeking to identify practical ways in which this can be done.

Co-housing for older people

In Denmark there has been a shift of focus over the last fifty years in the approach to housing older people. In the 1950s and 1960s the emphasis was on building a large number of houses and flats. By the 1970s and 1980s this had shifted to providing quality rather than quantity and the accommodation provided was of a much higher standard. In the 1990s the emphasis has been more on the total quality of life for older people in general, with the focus moving away from the individual house or flat to that of quality of life in the local neighbourhood.

It is recognised that it is not the sole responsibility of government to make the necessary provision for older people. Quality is associated with cross-professional and cross-institutional work with many different actors working together - governments, professionals, tenant organisations and housing providers.



One of the innovative approaches that is now well established in Denmark is that of co-housing. Originally started to meet the needs of single young people, co-housing developed in the 1970s into a form of family housing with communal facilities.

In the 1990s there is a growing number of such co-housing projects being established for older people. One such project is the Mariendalsvej Project in Copenhagen, which provides 22 rental flats for persons aged over 50 years, plus a wide range of communal facilities.

This was initiated by a group of members in a pension retirement fund. The older people came together with the architects to develop their own housing project. They decided that the project should be entirely for older people rather than a wider mixed age development. The goals of the project were to combine good housing quality with an environmentally friendly design, with the overall aim of meeting the particular housing and social needs of older people.



There were monthly meetings and excursions to visit other projects in order to identify good practice that they wished to incorporate into their own accommodation. The design was carried out with the full participation of the future residents. The key determinants were felt to be the need for accessibility for the residents and of flexibility to enable residents

to allocate the space within their homes in the way they wished.

Scale models and full-scale mock-ups of kitchens were used and the designs were tested for ease of wheelchair use. A significant amount of space was given over to communal facilities even though this meant that the flats themselves were slightly smaller. These communal facilities included a kitchen, dining facilities, a small swimming pool (for body-care) and two guest rooms. The design incorporated both passive and active solar provision, the use of heat exchangers and the prudent use of water and rainwater. Recirculated water was used for a variety of purposes, including watering the green plants in all common areas.

The professional social care of the residents is run through the normal network of home nurses and helpers in the community. The building is not an institution for older people, but rather a normal apartment house where the quality of life is much improved through the built-in security of the sense of community that pervades it.



Next

Sources of further information

Abbeyfield Society

Abbeyfield House
53, Victoria Street
St. Albans
Hertfordshire
AL1 3UW
Tel: 01727-857536
Fax: 01727-846168
E. Mail: abbeyf@geo2.poptel.org.uk
Web-site: <http://www.vois.org.uk/abbeyfield>

ActiVAge Link

c/o Eurolink Age
1268 London Road
London
SW16 4ER
Tel: 0181-679-8000
Fax: 0181-679-6727
E.Mail: smitha@ace.org.uk

Age Concern

Astral House
1268 London Road
London
SW16 4ER
Tel: 0181-679-8000
Fax: 0181-679-6069
E.Mail: infodep@ace.org.uk
Web-site: <http://www.ace.org.uk>

Better Government for Older People

Programme
Development Centre
Coxwell Avenue
Wolverhampton Science Park
Wolverhampton
WV10 9RT
Tel: 01902-824270
Fax: 01902-824266

Care & Repair England

Castle House
Kirtley Drive
Nottingham
NG7 1LD
Tel: 0115-979-9091
Fax: 0115-985-9457

The Housing Corporation

149, Tottenham Court Road
London
W1P 0BN
Tel: 0171-393-2000
Fax: 0171-393-2111
Web-site: www.open.gov.uk/hcorp.

Housing for Older People in Europe (HOPE) Network

c/o Anchor Trust
Fountain Court
Oxford Spires Business Park
Kidlington
Oxford
OX5 1NZ
Tel: 01865-854164
Fax: 01865-854007
E.Mail: LynneHooper@compuserve.com

UN International Year of Older Persons Secretariat

Department of Economic and Social Affairs
1, UN Plaza
Room DC2-1358
New York
NY 10017
United States of America
Tel: 00-1-212-963-0500
Fax: 00-1-212-963-3062
Web-site: <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/iyop/htm>

Retired Executives Action Clearing House

27, Bankside
London
SE1 9ET
Tel: 0171-928-0452
Fax: 0171-928-0798
E.Mail: volwork@btinternet.com

Retired and Senior Volunteer Programme

237, Pentonville Road
London
N1 9NJ
Tel: 0171-278-6601
Fax: 0171-833-0149
E.Mail: 106167.2756@compuserve.com
Web-site: www.co.mo.md.us/services/volunteer/rsvphome.html

Senior Net

<http://www.seniornet.com>
<http://www.dibbs.net/explore/cyberseniors.html>

Staying Put

Further information can be obtained from
Care & Repair (see above), which is the national co-ordinating
body for all Home Improvement Agencies.

University of the Third Age

26, Harrison Street
London
WC1H 8JG
Tel: 0171-837-8388
Fax: 0171-837-8845
E.Mail: national.office@u3a.org.uk
Web -site: <http://u3a.org.uk>

**United Nations Centre for Human
Settlements**
PO Box 30030
Nairobi
Kenya
Tel: 00-254-625004
Fax: 00-254-2-623919
E.Mail: INTERNET:habitat@unchs.org
Web-site: www.undp.org/un/habitat/unchs

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Association of Retired Generals and
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Building and Social Housing Foundation

The Building and Social Housing Foundation is a research institute based in Coalville, Leicestershire. It is an independent research body which gained its financial endowment from a building organisation formed by a group of homeless and penniless ex-servicemen just after World War Two. The Foundation carries out research into all aspects of housing, concerning itself with the immediate and practical problems of housing today, as well as attempting to look to the future in a progressive and imaginative way. Of particular interest is the need to identify solutions rather than problems. In all its work it aims to avoid bureaucracy, eliminate the waste of resources and encourage self-help and self-reliance.



Building and Social Housing Foundation

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