

Helen Whately MP,
Minister for Social Care
DHSC
39 Victoria St,
London
SW1H 0EU

15th December 2022

Dear Minister,

SPECIALIST HOUSING FOR OLDER PEOPLE: HOW BETTER USE OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM CAN INCREASE PROVISION

According to the 2021 Census 9% of the population of England and Wales is aged 75 or over. 18% of the population is aged 65 or over. But specialist housing for older people which provides support and/or care constitutes just 2% of annual newbuild properties.

Specialist housing for older people¹ could help to meet many of the UK's pressing social and economic policy challenges. It can maintain and improve health, free up underoccupied family housing and reduce demand for care home beds. Older people also spend more money in local shops. Specialist housing schemes located in cities, towns or villages can therefore help to strengthen local town centres.

RHGuk is a not-for-profit membership organisation. Its objectives are to increase housing choices for older people in the UK by advancing and promoting the case for retirement housing. RHGuk members include the top three largest specialist housing providers in the sector (McCarthy Stone, Churchill and Lifestory). RHGuk members over the period from 2017-2021 between them developed more than two-thirds of all specialist older persons housing provided in England

RHGuk has undertaken an analysis of the EAC specialist housing database (attached) which shows that.

- The total supply of specialist housing for older people has not kept pace with the ageing population, falling from 139 units per thousand people aged 75 or over in 2015 to 110 units per thousand people aged 75 or over in 2021, a 21% fall over this period.
- Supply per head is much higher in the South East, South West and London, meaning residents in much of the Midlands and the North of the country – including key levelling up areas – face poor housing choices in later life.

¹ Also known as retirement housing or retirement communities, and includes housing with support and housing with care

Addressing this imbalance so people in all parts of the country have more options when it comes to choosing where they live in later years should be a key part of the Government's levelling up agenda, bringing the considerable social and economic benefits linked to specialist retirement housing to parts of the country that most need it.

RHGuk believes that provision of specialist housing for older people needs to increase to 30,000 units per year (10% of the government's housing target of 300,000 units per year), up from current provision of c.7,000 units per year.²

There are many possible reasons why supply of specialist housing lags behind the need but planning delays and poor understanding of the product among local authority planners appear to be a contributory factor. RHGuk has carried out a member survey which **shows that specialist housing schemes for older people face an average 36 week delay in getting a decision from local planning authorities. This compares with 88% of major applications being decided within the statutory 13 weeks.** The survey also showed that providers of specialist housing for older people have a high success rate at appeal with more than half of all appeals being successful. This success rate is significantly higher than for general needs housing. In 2020/21 only 33% of major dwelling appeals were allowed

A series of achievable policy asks to ensure the planning system meets the needs of our ageing population are highlighted in this document. Our key recommendations are summarised below, and we believe the proposed Ministerial taskforce on housing for older people is the best platform to take them forward. We call for the taskforce to be launched immediately.

Four key asks – of policy makers

As a general principle local authorities and public funding bodies should be required to proactively plan for specialist older persons housing – and to monitor delivery.

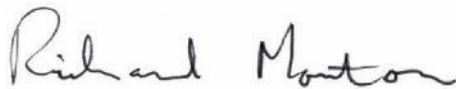
- Local housing needs assessments should always include an assessment of the need for all forms of specialist housing for older people by type and tenure.
- Local plans should seek to ensure that a minimum of 10% of all new housing is specialist housing for older people unless the local authority can demonstrate why this is not appropriate for their area, (so 30k of the 300k national target for new homes). This is a step change from current

² Indeed. Professor Les Mayhew has found the need could be as high as 50,000 new units a year, as noted in the Mayhew Review, published in November 2022.

provision of c.7,000 units a year, and should encourage new entrants to the sector.

- 10% of Homes England's and GLA housing fund delivery should be for specialist housing for older people, including shared ownership and affordable rented housing with support and care.
- The Government needs to address the long-term issue of viability and the impact of CIL, Planning Obligations and Affordable Housing on the delivery of specialist housing for older people. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill should include a legal requirement for Local Authorities to specifically address this issue in setting local Infrastructure Levies.

As a nation we need to address the very real challenges in the town planning and funding systems that make it difficult to deliver specialist housing for older people and deter new market entrants into this sector of the housing market. RHG.UK is keen to work with central and local government to make this happen and to ensure that the housing and care needs of our ageing population are met.



Richard Morton Chair of RHGuk

www.retirementhousinggroup.co.uk

cc

The Right Hon Lucy Frazer, Minister of State Housing and Planning DLUHC
Will Garton Director General Levelling Up DLUHC
Conrad Smewing Director of Planning DLUHC
Joanna Averley Chief Planner DLUHC