



**Evidence to the House of Lords Select  
Committee on National Policy and the  
Built Environment**

**from Care & Repair England**

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3rd October 2015

## 1. About Care & Repair England

1.1. Care & Repair England is an independent charitable organisation set up in 1986 which aims to improve older people's housing. Its vision is that all older people have decent living conditions in a home of their own choosing. It innovates, develops, promotes and supports practical housing initiatives and the related policy and practice which enable older people to live independently in their own homes for as long as they choose, particularly for older people living in poor or unsuitable private sector housing.

## 2. The focus of Care & Repair England's evidence

2.1. The focus of this evidence is the failure to take account of the 'demographic revolution' underway in England in the fields related to shaping the built environment - planning, architecture, building regulation and control. We would draw the Committee's attention to the headline conclusion of the House of Lords '*Ready for Ageing?*' report (2013):

*"The UK population is ageing rapidly, but we have concluded that the Government and our society are woefully underprepared. Longer lives can be a great benefit, but there has been a collective failure to address the implications and without urgent action this great boon could turn into a series of miserable crises."*

2.2. Our central argument is that there is a critical need to shape a built environment to support positive, active ageing and that failure to do so will result in costs to society eg through higher health and social care costs.

2.3. We note that the aspiration of the vast majority of older people is to live safely and independently at home for as long as possible, usually in general/ mainstream housing. People wish to remaining socially engaged, to get out and about in their neighbourhoods, stay involved with family, friends and the wider community. The shape of the built environment is critical to achieving that aspiration.

2.4. The design, quality and suitability of homes and the wider built environment in enabling safe, healthy ageing is of paramount importance in terms of public expenditure as well as individuals' quality of life. There is a causal, quantifiable relationship between housing conditions and many of the most common chronic & acute health conditions. Failure to plan a built environment for an ageing population thus has a direct impact on the NHS.

2.5. Housing conditions have a significant and quantifiable effect on health. The Building Research Establishment quantifies the costs to the NHS of specific aspects of poor housing as over £1.3b pa. Many of the chronic health conditions experienced by older people have a causal link to, or are exacerbated by, particular housing conditions. This housing/ health link becomes more important with age, as people become more prone to trips and falls and more susceptible to cold or damp related health conditions.

### **3. Questions posed by the Committee: *Policymaking, integration and coordination***

1. *Are the decisions that shape England's built environment taken at the right administrative level? What role should national policymakers play in shaping our built environment, and how does this relate to the work and role of local authorities and their partners?*

2. *How well is policy coordinated across those Government departments that have a role to play in matters such as housing, design, transport, infrastructure, sustainability and heritage? How could integration and coordination be improved?*

3. (Q1) No, they are not.

(Q2) Policy is not co-ordinated and there are particularly weak links between housing/ planning and health, the latter bearing the consequences of a poor built environment.

National minimum housing standards are necessary to create an all-ages accessible, inclusive built environment that supports inclusion and healthy active ageing at home. As a starting point this would require all new homes to be built to a new minimum set of design standards. These would build on those originally created as 'Lifetime Homes Standards' and also apply the large international evidence base (eg WHO) concerning health and the built environment.

3.1. Only 4% of UK homes meet even the basic accessibility standard (*Level access, flush threshold, wide doors & circulation space, WC at entrance level*). This is in stark contrast to the growing number of people with restricted mobility and whose lives would be transformed by accessible buildings.

3.2. The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing [ELSA Wave 6] reported that 46% of women and 36% of men aged 75-79yrs received help with mobility (defined in terms of activities of daily living - washing, dressing, preparing a meal etc). This rises to 71 & 55 for those over 80yrs. Most of these activities can be made easier through home adaptations / built environment modification.

3.3. The legal obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act to make the public/ commercial built environment accessible has made a very significant difference. Whilst the Lifetime Homes Standards' (LTHS) obligations previously placed upon social housing providers [under Code for Sustainable Homes] and requirements for all new homes in London, has result in the building of more homes which meet LTHS, this will now cease outside London.

3.4. Exhorting the building industry to apply such standards without legal obligation has resulted in no discernible level of adoption - rather the reverse as ever smaller, and increasingly un-adaptable homes are built.

3.5. In a competitive market place leaving each individual local authority to make the case for a higher design standard in their locality is both wasteful in terms of duplication and also unrealistic in areas outside London and the Southeast where land is at a premium and where local authorities are competing to attract builders of new homes.

### **4. Questions posed re: National policy for planning and the built environment**

3. *Does the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provide sufficient policy guidance for those involved in planning, developing and protecting the built and natural environment? Are some factors within the NPPF more important than others? If so, what should be prioritised and why?*

4. *Is national planning policy in England lacking a spatial perspective? What would be the effects of introducing a spatial element to national policy?*

5. *Is there an optimum timescale for planning our future built environment needs and requirements? How far ahead should those involved in the development of planning and built environment policy be looking?*

4.1. (Q3, 4,5) There needs to be a specific requirement in the NPPF for all planning decisions to specifically address population ageing and to make homes and neighbourhoods healthy places for all ages, setting minimum space and design standards for domestic dwellings.

4.2. At the current rate of replacement, homes would have to last many hundreds of years, hence anyone involved in shaping the built environment need to be tasked with making homes as flexible as possible, rather than the current 'niche' build/ market segmentation which presumes that people will move home each time they reach a new phase of life (eg, form life partnerships, have children, grow older) rather than being able to live in a home long term in a future shape of society that we can only begin to guess.

## 5. **Questions posed: Buildings and places: New and old**

6. *What role should the Government play in seeking to address current issues of housing supply? Are further interventions, properly coordinated at central Government level, required? What will be the likely effect upon housing supply of recent reforms proposed for the planning system?*

7. *How do we develop built environments which are sustainable and resilient, and what role should the Government play in any such undertaking? Will existing buildings and places be able to adapt to changing needs and circumstances in the years to come? How can the best use of existing housing stock and built environment assets be made?*

8. *To what extent do we make optimum use of the historic environment in terms of future planning, regeneration and place-making? How can more be made of these national assets?*

5.1. Please note points made in (4) above re key role of government in setting housing standards, taking the long view concerning resilience to change/ sustainability, creating flexible places.

5.2. With regard to making best use of the existing housing stock/ built environment assets, there needs to be a fresh look at the role of government in stock maintenance, addressing disrepair and area regeneration. This issue has fallen totally off the policy radar in recent years, but this disconnection brings risk of stock decline.

## 6. **Questions posed: Community involvement and community impact**

11. *Do those involved in delivering and managing our built environment, including decision-makers and developers, take sufficient account of the way in which the built environment affects those who live and work within it? How could we improve consideration of the impacts of the built environment upon the mental and physical health of users, and upon behaviours within communities?*

6.1. The primary driver for those involved in shaping the built environment today, particularly the building of homes, is profitability. There are decreasing government controls over the quality and standards of the built environment, particularly housing, with regard to addressing mental and physical health of future occupants, especially with regard to the

ageing of the population and there is a lack of vision about creating positive, sustainable, mixed communities for all ages. Hence we build amongst the smallest homes in Europe, which are poorly adapted to ageing in both size and construction, particularly at the 'lower' end of the market.

6.2. A significant body of international knowledge and research about creating, designing and building healthy, inclusive, flexible places is not utilised.

## 7. **Financial measures**

Q13 Are there fiscal or financial measures potentially available which would help to address current issues of housing and land supply? Are there financial or other mechanisms that would encourage better design and place-making by private sector developers?

7.1. The current major programme of disposal of public land offers a unique opportunity to look in considerations of long term social gain from any planned building on public land disposed of. Unfortunately, the primary driver for the programme is to secure the greatest immediate financial return (ie the highest price) with no consideration of long term consequences.

7.2. With regard to 'encouraging' better design & place making, nearly two decades of exhorting the private sector to do so without regulation eg. lifetime homes standards, has resulted in minimal take up - it is only when a standard becomes mandatory that we see widespread application. In commercial terms this makes absolute sense.

7.3. We are also told anecdotally that unless there is a 'level playing field' when it comes to setting local standards for new homes, areas outside London/ SE which have to work very hard to attract builders will not feel able to set higher local standards if the response of developers is likely to be to go to another locality where such standards are not required.

## 8. **In summary the Committee is asked to consider:**

1. The importance of creating a built environment that supports healthy ageing at a time of unprecedented demographic change.
2. The link between the quality of the built environment and the long term costs to the state of housing/ built environment that is low quality, fails to support health and well being, noting that improved national, mandatory standards bring corresponding health/ social care gains.