

# Planning for elderly care – a crisis or an opportunity?

*The UK, as with many other European countries, is an ageing society. In 2009, 16% of the population were aged 65 and over. The fastest population increase, however, has been in the number of those aged 85 and over. By 2034 it is forecast that the number of people aged 85 and over will be 2.5 times larger than in 2009, reaching 3.5 million and accounting for 5% of the total population, writes Ruth Harding, Paris Smith planning consultant*

Although we are living longer, we are generally leading more healthy and active lifestyles than previous generations, and our society now demands more choice in housing and care options. The number of traditional residential homes/care homes has dwindled in recent years due to rising costs and changing care standards, thus making it more difficult for elderly people to access such facilities.

Against this background, traditional models of elderly care in care homes or sheltered housing have given way to a whole spectrum of different care models involving the provision of essentially purpose-built accommodation in which varying amounts of care and support can be offered and where some services and facilities are shared.

Retirement villages, also known in the business as continuing care retirement communities (CCRs), are one such example of these new models of elderly housing. Still relatively new to the UK, retirement villages are generally large-scale developments (over 100 units), and characterised by the following features:

- Self-contained flats or bungalows designed to allow residents to retain independence for as long as possible. Some CCRs also include close/extra care units comprising communal accommodation with a greater level of care and support and separate nursing homes
- Provision of a care package, tailored to meet the resident's individual needs
- Catering facilities
- 24-hour staff care and support available on site
- Comprehensive and extensive range of facilities such as restaurant, lounge, activity room, library, gym, medical room
- A wide range of social and leisure activities
- Mobility and access assistance.

The emphasis is for older people to lead independent and active lives but with a high level of care and social support on-hand (catering, leisure activities, hairdressers, libraries, gyms, medical rooms etc).

Planning authorities are gradually getting to grips with dealing with these developments, however, due to their diverse nature, development proposals tend to be complex requiring a careful and balanced consideration of a wide range of factors.



*This continuing care retirement village is typical of the new models of elderly housing*

The main planning considerations include:

- whether the development meets the strategic and/or local elderly housing 'needs' of the area;
- whether the development has a sustainable location (many villages are in semi-rural areas and must demonstrate green credentials to promote non-car forms of transport);
- the landuse classification of the development? ie whether the development falls within a dwelling-house use class (C3) or a residential institution (C2). Certain land use classifications will determine which planning policies apply, and particularly whether or not social/affordable housing is required;
- whether the development provides a mix of accommodation and tenure (to ensure a balanced mixed community);
- the type and level of care; proposals must meet the CSCI standards (National Minimum Standards for Care Homes for Older People);
- details of the community facilities and whether or not they are available to the wider community, in order to enable integration with the wider community and prevent the creation of 'gated communities';
- external design features such as drop-off points in front of main entrances, the availability of accessible parking, level and covered walkways, access to local transport, lighting schemes, security and privacy for residents and amenity space.

There are many benefits of retirement villages for its residents, the local community and the local economy alike in that they provide security and freedom from stresses of family care; help maintain independence and contribute to the physical and mental well-being of residents; provide job creation; reduce demands on local health and social care; improve the provision of facilities for the use of the wider community; and free up general needs housing.

It is likely that retirement villages will be viewed as a growth market and a way of providing flexible care and accommodation for our ever-growing elderly population.

*Harding has considerable knowledge and experience of health care developments, including new retirement villages, re-development of hospital sites, new private care homes/dementia units (and extensions to existing establishments) and is able to provide advice on a broad range of issues within the health care sector.*

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