Foreword by the Chairs of the Housing and Collaborative Spatial Planning Work Sectors

Challenges and issues associated with an ageing population are shared across the British Irish Council (BIC) Member Administrations. They are also shared across the Planning and Housing professions. This booklet aims to provide key advice for those working in Housing and Spatial Planning and shares some best practice examples of how places and the housing within those places can be developed to meet the needs of our ageing populations.

The publication builds on the recent cooperative working between the two BIC work sectors of Collaborative Spatial Planning & Housing and draws upon the key learning from a BIC Symposium which was held in Belfast in November 2019. That Symposium was the first joint-sectoral event held within the framework of the British-Irish Council and provided a useful forum for Member Administrations and stakeholders to come together to discuss the challenges faced by an ageing population, and how we can develop policy approaches to address these.

The profound demographic changes which are already in train and which lie ahead will greatly affect how we live our lives in years to come, and need to be planned for today. It is incumbent on us to create environments where our people are able to participate fully in the social, economic, cultural and public life of their communities.

We need to look collectively at the challenges which we face in creating an inclusive future vision for our ageing population. The framework provided by the BIC and the synergies which already exist between Housing and Spatial Planning provide a strong foundation from which we can continue to work in partnership across the BIC Member Administrations.

As the NI Executive chairs the BIC Housing and Collaborative Spatial Planning work sectors, we are pleased to endorse this joint booklet on ‘Creating an Inclusive Future Vision for our Ageing Populations’, and hope that it will inform relevant policy approaches going forward.

Overview

The British-Irish Council (BIC) is an intergovernmental Council bringing together Ministers and officials from across all eight administrations. Membership of the Council comprises representatives of the Irish and UK governments, Northern Ireland Executive, Scotland, Wales, Guernsey, the Isle of Man, and Jersey.

The Council provides a forum for members to exchange information and reach agreement on matters of mutual interest. The Council remains responsive to evolving policy priorities and its current work programme prioritises eleven specific work sectors where it can deliver for citizens and stakeholders.

It is in this context that two of these work sectors, Housing and Collaborative Spatial Planning (CSP), both chaired by the Northern Ireland Executive, have been working together to address issues of mutual concern, with a recent focus on the implications of the changing demographic of the BIC administrations and the potential impact on the housing and spatial planning sectors.

This collaborative working culminated in a Symposium which was held in Belfast on 29 November 2019, to mark the 20th anniversary of the formation of BIC. The Symposium provided an opportunity to look to the next 20 years, and consider how some of the key spatial planning and housing challenges, associated with an ageing population that might be encountered to 2040, could be addressed. This event was able to build upon the efforts of a previous BIC work sector, Demography, which issued a detailed report in 2016 mapping demographic changes across all eight Member Administrations until 2037.

The Symposium’s message was clear: the profound demographic changes which lie ahead will not only affect how we think about and live our lives in years to come, but need to be planned for today.

This non-statutory booklet has been jointly developed by officials in the CSP and Housing work sectors to capture some of the key thinking of those experts who participated and shared their personal experience at the Symposium and to provide a number of key principles to challenge the thinking of stakeholders in the spatial planning and housing fields.

...the profound demographic changes which lie ahead will not only affect how we think about and live our lives in years to come, but need to be planned for today.
Demographic context

The age profiles of the BIC jurisdictions demonstrate the challenge that policymakers and decision-takers face. These profiles are represented below and show the distribution by age and sex of the population with each bar in the pyramid representing a single year of age and the length of the bar relating to the number of people of that age in the population. These population profiles indicate a mature population with an ageing profile. Population projections to 2037 demonstrate the need to consider how our future populations will both support and place demand on the spatial planning and housing spheres.

The World Health Organisation suggests that “the ageing of the world’s populations is the result of the continued decline in fertility rates and increased life expectancy. This demographic change has resulted in increasing numbers and proportions of people who are over 60.”* Population ageing is of relevance both in the policy development space and in the delivery of public services both of which will need to adapt and be flexible.

An ageing population will alter the requirements placed on the welfare, pension and healthcare systems...

*www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/population-ageing
Housing and Spatial Planning Policies should be developed through an ageing lens

Policy development needs to be age aware or age attuned if it is to address the challenges presented by our changing demography. Good policy approaches can make a real difference in this space, but poor policy approaches can have a detrimental impact.

Housing and spatial planning policy should not only seek to enhance the quality of life of older people but should be developed in an integrated way to make it accessible and responsive to the specific needs of an ageing population.

Older people should be directly involved in the development of policies that impact on them in order to give them a real say in what happens in their own lives and what happens in the areas in which they live.

Design places for people

Public spaces designed with an ageing population in mind can have a positive impact on how people feel, they create opportunities for health and encourage participation. They provide a sense of security and enhance quality of life.

As people age, physical and cognitive changes can impact on mobility. The ability to interpret the built environment can also be impacted. The way in which places and buildings are configured, patterns of movement through and within space, and the ability to easily access useable open space therefore becomes more important.

A well designed public realm will promote ease of access and be inclusive regardless of age or ability. It will also support healthy ageing by offering opportunities for an active and interactive lifestyle. Attractive, useable spaces that are perceived as safe encourage use, enhance the confidence and motivation of older people in using them, and promote active and connected living. Incorporating age friendly accessible design and adaptability into new developments will also have a positive impact.

Practically, this means integrating key design principles into our urban areas such as passive surveillance; frequent crossing points; reduced clutter from street furniture; and areas to rest.

A well designed public realm will promote ease of access and be inclusive regardless of age or ability.
The Convent Court low-rise project in Jersey is a plan to construct 21 new social rented units of accommodation for households over-55s due for completion in mid-2021. It will include a bespoke facility for Age Concern on the ground floor. The location of the flats as part of the Age Concern headquarters will provide residents with the opportunity to make use of the facilities provided by the charity and increase their opportunities for social and community interaction.

The development’s location in Jersey also benefits from being within easy walking distance to the centre of St. Helier, communal facilities such as the Millennium Park, and link to the island’s bus network with a bus stop located directly outside the building.
Offering older people a better choice of accommodation to suit their changing needs can help them live independently for longer, feel more connected to their communities and help reduce costs to the social care and health systems. Older people want to stay in their homes as much as possible, or if this is not possible, remain within their existing community. There are therefore implications for the general needs housing being built as they will need to be easily adaptable. This is something to be considered from the early stages of policy-making through to decision-taking.

The housing needs of specific groups, such as older people and people with disabilities with particular requirements, should be addressed through the development of clear policies. There are different types of specialist housing designed to meet the diverse needs of older people. Plans will need to provide for specialist housing where a need exists and seek to be innovative and diverse.

Many older people, however, may not want or need specialist accommodation or care, and policy-makers will therefore need to identify the role that general housing may play, and linked to this, will need to consider the size, location and quality of dwellings needed.

Older people want to stay in their homes as much as possible, or if not possible, remain within their existing community.

Social isolation / loneliness

Public policy concerning loneliness and social isolation appears to be shifting towards viewing loneliness as a public health problem, with older people at risk of experiencing protracted periods of isolation.

Whether in general needs housing, or in purpose-built accommodation, such as sheltered/retirement housing or extra care, it is more important than ever to deploy safe and appropriate systems that enable connectedness, from the landline to digital, to the internal design and layout of schemes, and to building more resilient care and support networks.

It has been argued that older people know loneliness is a looming part of retirement and should take steps to offset it. This argument has many similarities with providing housing for older people. Insufficient preparation during periods of good health in later years might translate to an increased risk of a crisis movement during later life, in which options are more limited and where older people are more likely to live in poor accommodation.

Research shows that half a million older people regularly experience protracted periods of isolation...

Le Vieux Jardin is a housing development in Guernsey with flexibility of tenure across a range of needs, which is within easy walking distance of the extra care facility, La Nouvelle Maia stance. The full mobility standards of the ground-floor flats allow residents to remain in their home in spite of any mobility issues they may develop. Research has shown that enabling individuals to remain in their homes as they age, with suitable adaptions made as needed, has significant health benefits. The design of the general needs flats at Le Vieux Jardin facilitates this and enables residents to live there independently for longer.

Le Vieux Jardin is a housing development in Guernsey with flexibility of tenure across a range of needs, which is within easy walking distance of the extra care facility, La Nouvelle Maia stance. The full mobility standards of the ground-floor flats allow residents to remain in their home in spite of any mobility issues they may develop. Research has shown that enabling individuals to remain in their homes as they age, with suitable adaptions made as needed, has significant health benefits. The design of the general needs flats at Le Vieux Jardin facilitates this and enables residents to live there independently for longer.

There are different types of specialist housing designed to meet the diverse needs of older people. Plans will need to provide for specialist housing where a need exists and seek to be innovative and diverse.

Many older people, however, may not want or need specialist accommodation or care, and policy-makers will therefore need to identify the role that general housing may play, and linked to this, will need to consider the size, location and quality of dwellings needed.

Older people want to stay in their homes as much as possible, or if not possible, remain within their existing community.

Flexibility of tenure

Offering older people a better choice of accommodation to suit their changing needs can help them live independently for longer, feel more connected to their communities and help reduce costs to the social care and health systems. Older people want to stay in their homes as much as possible, or if this is not possible, remain within their existing community. There are therefore implications for the general needs housing being built as they will need to be easily adaptable. This is something to be considered from the early stages of policy-making through to decision-taking.

The housing needs of specific groups, such as older people and people with disabilities with particular requirements, should be addressed through the development of clear policies.

Le Vieux Jardin is a housing development in Guernsey with flexibility of tenure across a range of needs, which is within easy walking distance of the extra care facility, La Nouvelle Maia stance. The full mobility standards of the ground-floor flats allow residents to remain in their home in spite of any mobility issues they may develop. Research has shown that enabling individuals to remain in their homes as they age, with suitable adaptions made as needed, has significant health benefits. The design of the general needs flats at Le Vieux Jardin facilitates this and enables residents to live there independently for longer.

Le Vieux Jardin is a housing development in Guernsey with flexibility of tenure across a range of needs, which is within easy walking distance of the extra care facility, La Nouvelle Maia stance. The full mobility standards of the ground-floor flats allow residents to remain in their home in spite of any mobility issues they may develop. Research has shown that enabling individuals to remain in their homes as they age, with suitable adaptions made as needed, has significant health benefits. The design of the general needs flats at Le Vieux Jardin facilitates this and enables residents to live there independently for longer.

There are different types of specialist housing designed to meet the diverse needs of older people. Plans will need to provide for specialist housing where a need exists and seek to be innovative and diverse.

Many older people, however, may not want or need specialist accommodation or care, and policy-makers will therefore need to identify the role that general housing may play, and linked to this, will need to consider the size, location and quality of dwellings needed.

Older people want to stay in their homes as much as possible, or if not possible, remain within their existing community.

Le Vieux Jardin is a housing development in Guernsey with flexibility of tenure across a range of needs, which is within easy walking distance of the extra care facility, La Nouvelle Maia stance. The full mobility standards of the ground-floor flats allow residents to remain in their home in spite of any mobility issues they may develop. Research has shown that enabling individuals to remain in their homes as they age, with suitable adaptions made as needed, has significant health benefits. The design of the general needs flats at Le Vieux Jardin facilitates this and enables residents to live there independently for longer.

There are different types of specialist housing designed to meet the diverse needs of older people. Plans will need to provide for specialist housing where a need exists and seek to be innovative and diverse.

Many older people, however, may not want or need specialist accommodation or care, and policy-makers will therefore need to identify the role that general housing may play, and linked to this, will need to consider the size, location and quality of dwellings needed.

Older people want to stay in their homes as much as possible, or if not possible, remain within their existing community.