



Setting Standards for
Retirement Communities

National Development Management Policy for Older People's Housing

ARCO Model Policy Proposal

November 2025

1 Introduction

With the UK's population ageing rapidly, the supply of new housing needs to adapt. Provision of specialist housing for older people has generally been low and the need for increased supply has become critical.

Specialist older people's housing can improve health and wellbeing, extend independence and healthy lives, as well as relieving pressures on the health and care systems. Conversely, under-supply of specialist housing can see older people unable to access suitable accommodation, resulting in negative consequences for their health and wellbeing, and preventing the freeing up of homes.

Within this context, proposals for specialist housing for older people that accord with the National Development Management Policy should be approved without delay.

The specific characteristics of proposals for specialist housing for older people should be taken into consideration when assessing them against other development plan policies including, for example, parking requirements, design standards and viability constraints. In all cases, the potential social, economic, and environmental benefits associated with such proposals should be given substantial weight in determining planning applications.

As part of their development plan preparation, all local authorities should undertake a robust assessment of existing and future needs in their area for all different forms of specialist housing for older people (as defined in the Glossary), taking account of the age, demographic, health and care characteristics of their older population. The assessment should take into account size, type and tenure of housing needed for older people.

Clear policies should be put in place to set out how any identified needs will be met, which could include targets and site-specific allocations. Measures should also be put in place to monitor provision as part of the Annual Monitoring Report.

Any policy requirements for financial contributions or affordable housing provision expected from proposals for specialist housing for older people should be informed by a robust and thoroughly tested viability assessment, which should also consider the different sizes, types and tenures of provision.

2 Policy Wording: Specialist Housing for Older People

- 1** Proposals for the different types of specialist housing for older people defined in the Glossary will be encouraged and supported, provided all the following criteria are met:
 - a** It meets an identified need for the type and scale of housing proposed; and
 - b** The development is well connected with good accessibility to shops, services, and amenity facilities appropriate to meet the requirements of residents and staff – either on-site, provided as part of the development; or off-site, accessible on foot or by existing or proposed transport services. Proposals for rural or edge of settlement sites should show how accessibility and integration will be addressed; and
 - c** The scale, form, design, access arrangements, and range of amenities, open space, and landscaping proposed as part of the development meet the requirements of the specific type of housing proposed and the needs of the people the housing is intended for, whilst being adaptable and responsive to changing needs over the lifetime of the development.
- 2** The specific and unique characteristics of the type of specialist housing for older people proposed should be considered when assessing the proposal against relevant development plan policies. A flexible approach to some policy requirements (such as those relating to vehicle and cycle parking, housing mix, design standards and viability) may be appropriate, which takes account of the potential social, economic, and environmental benefits that the proposal can deliver.

3 Glossary

There are different types of specialist housing designed to meet the diverse needs of older, which can include:

Age-restricted general market housing:

This type of housing is generally for people aged 55 and over and the active elderly. It may include some shared amenities such as communal gardens but does not include support or care services.

Retirement living or sheltered housing:

This usually consists of purpose-built flats or bungalows with limited communal facilities such as a lounge, laundry room and guest room. It does not generally provide care services but provides some support to enable residents to live independently. This can include 24-hour on-site assistance (alarm) and a warden or house manager.

Extra care housing or housing-with-care:

This usually consists of purpose-built or adapted flats or bungalows with a medium to high level of care available if required, through an onsite care agency registered through the Care Quality Commission (CQC). Residents are able to live independently with 24-hour access to support services and staff, and meals are also available. There are often extensive communal areas, such as space to socialise or a wellbeing centre. In some cases, these developments are known as integrated retirement communities (IRCs) or villages - the intention is for residents to benefit from varying levels of care as time progresses.

Residential care homes and nursing homes:

These have individual rooms within a residential building and provide a high level of care meeting all activities of daily living. They do not usually include support services for independent living. This type of housing can also include dementia care homes.

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