

Future of Ageing Conference: Communities Panel Discussion

Build, build, building community: Creating places that work for long lives

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Paul Goulden (Chair): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for joining this session on communities. I hope you had a refreshing break. My name is Paul Goulden, Head of Programmes and Partnerships at ILC. I'm delighted to facilitate this conversation about long-term thinking and communities.

When we talk about communities, we consider not just the environment but also the people, social capital, and cultural factors that support ageing in place. I'm honoured to be joined by our distinguished panel:

- **Professor Becky Tunstall**, Centre for Housing Policy, University of York
- **Zoe Garbett**, London Assembly Member
- **Alistair Smith-Agbaje**, CEO of Future Men
- **Judith Banjoko**, Director of Services, Shelter
- **Cynthia Bullock**, Deputy Director, Healthy Ageing Challenge, UKRI
- **Sarah Allen**, Head of Architecture and Urban Design, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

Thank you to UKRI for sponsoring this session. The format is as follows: each speaker will have five minutes to share their reflections on communities, long-term thinking, and longevity. If time permits, we will take questions from the floor.

Without further ado, over to Becky.

Professor Becky Tunstall (University of York)

Thank you, Paul. It's great to see such a large audience after lunch. I'm here to discuss housing, a crucial element of community.

Over recent decades, housing policy has focused on increasing homebuilding. In 2010, the Cameron government set a target of 200,000 homes per year, later increased to 300,000. Despite these ambitious goals, this number has rarely been achieved. While building homes is essential, we must also consider quality. The drive to meet numerical targets can lead to compromises in design, sustainability, and affordability.

Many new homes are not energy efficient and still rely on gas boilers, which will need replacing before their expected lifespan ends. While new builds contribute to meeting housing demand, we should focus on improving existing housing stock. Even if the 1.5 million homes target is met, 97% of the homes we'll have in the coming years already exist today. We must prioritise maintenance, accessibility, and affordability.

Older adults generally report high satisfaction with their homes, with many owning their homes outright. However, challenges persist, including:

- **Non-decent homes:** Over one million people aged 65+ in England live in substandard housing.
- **Private renting:** Increasing numbers of older adults live in the private rented sector, where affordability and security are significant concerns.
- **Accessibility:** Many wheelchair users live in inaccessible homes, while many accessible homes are occupied by people who don't need those adaptations.
- **Health and care:** Delayed hospital discharges due to inadequate home adaptations and care availability result in hundreds of thousands of lost hospital days annually.

To support ageing in place, we need investment in home adaptations, financial support for maintenance, increased funding for domiciliary care, and better-designed social housing.

Judith Banjoko (Shelter)

Thank you. At Shelter, we see an increasing number of older people facing homelessness. Since 2010, the number of people aged 55+ qualifying for homelessness assistance has risen by 51%.

Key statistics:

- **Private renting crisis:** Since 2010, the number of private renters aged 55+ has grown by 80%.
- **Financial strain:** 69% of private renters aged 55+ struggle with rent, often relying on fixed incomes like pensions.
- **Disrepair and fuel poverty:** Many older renters live in unheated, unsafe homes due to high costs and poor insulation.

We advocate for:

- **More social housing:** 90,000 new social homes annually for ten years.
- **Stronger tenant protections:** The Renters Reform Bill should include rent stabilisation and an end to income discrimination.
- **Increased local housing allowances:** Ensuring benefits reflect actual housing costs to keep people in their homes.

Zoe Garbett (London Assembly)

I hold the Mayor of London to account on housing and planning. The housing crisis affects different people in different ways. Too often, it has led to luxury developments that don't serve communities.

Key concerns:

- **Lack of accessible housing:** The London Plan requires 90% of new homes to be accessible, yet only 3% meet this standard.
- **Rent controls:** Without them, security measures in the Renters Reform Bill are undermined.
- **Estate regeneration:** Often displaces existing residents, increasing social rents and fragmenting communities.

We must empower residents in decision-making and protect vital community spaces, such as London's street markets, which serve as social hubs for older generations.

Alistair Smith-Agbaje (Future Men)

My organisation, Future Men, supports young men and fathers, but housing issues impact all generations. Poor housing conditions contribute to school exclusions, crime, and family instability. Many of the young people we work with face overcrowded living conditions, which affect their education, mental health, and opportunities for personal development.

Key challenges include:

- **Lack of dedicated youth spaces:** Young people need safe environments for mentorship and development.
- **Overcrowding and instability:** Many families struggle with unsuitable housing, which negatively impacts education and well-being.
- **Limited community resources:** Youth hubs are often poorly maintained or located in areas with little accessibility.

Future Men advocates for:

- **Increased investment in youth spaces** that provide mentorship, learning, and recreational opportunities.
- **Collaboration with local authorities and housing associations** to create better-designed homes for families.
- **Expanding outreach programmes** to support young fathers in building stable home environments for their children.

Through our work, we have seen how secure, well-designed housing and community spaces can create positive life outcomes. Investment in these areas is crucial for fostering resilience in young people and ensuring stronger, healthier communities.

Cynthia Bullock (UKRI)**

At UKRI, we fund business-led innovation. Our Healthy Ageing Challenge invested £98 million into solutions for housing and ageing. Notable projects include:

- **Blackwood Homes (Scotland):** Accessible, adaptable housing integrated with digital health support.
- **Bron Afran (Wales):** Co-housing communities to reduce loneliness and encourage active ageing.
- **Aeon Energy:** Smart home adaptations that don't compromise aesthetics.

Successful projects highlight:

1. The economic case for investing in ageing-friendly housing.
2. The importance of cross-sector collaboration.
3. The need to embed user experiences in policy design.

Sarah Allen (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government)

Government policy is increasingly focused on improving housing quality alongside increasing supply. Our key initiatives include:

- **Updating national design guidelines** to prioritise accessibility and sustainability.
- **A new National Housing Audit** to assess housing quality.
- **Encouraging higher-density developments** near transport and amenities.

Successful examples include:

- **New Earswick (York):** An award-winning extra-care housing scheme.
- **John Morton Centre (Greenwich):** Winner of the Sterling Prize for excellence in housing design.
- **Appleby Blue Arms House (Birmingham):** A celebrated housing scheme that prioritises community and design quality.

Closing Remarks (Paul Goulden) Thank you to our panel for such insightful discussions. You've outlined both the challenges and potential solutions. Unfortunately, we are out of time for questions. Please proceed to your breakout sessions, and be back by 3:20 for our keynote speaker.

Thank you again to all our speakers and attendees.