

Planning for Older Persons Housing: Latest planning challenges impacting the delivery



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About Us



WWA is an award-winning interdisciplinary practice based in Oxford and London offering:

Core Services

- Planning
- Architectural
- Urban Design
- Masterplanning

Expertise

- ✓ Older People's Housing
- ✓ Heritage
- ✓ Passivhaus Design

92% approval rate on planning applications over the past 3 years.

RECENT MILESTONES



Our Recent OPH Projects

New Build

Maidment Court, Poole



Refurbishment

Ashton Court, London



Knowledge

Extra Care Design Guide, Dorset



On-Site (2024)

Thurston, Suffolk



On-Site in Spring (2025)

Bulmer House, Hampshire



Passivhaus

Torrington, Surrey



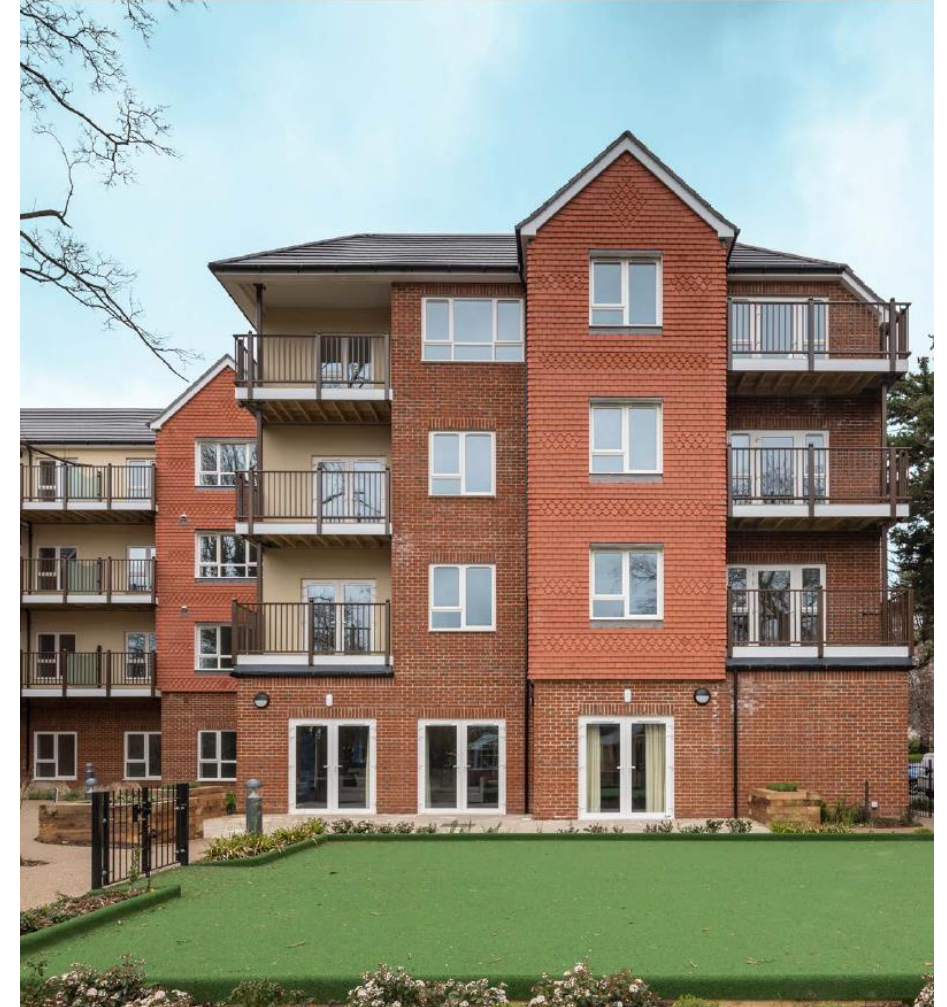
They designed a high-quality scheme taking a positive and proactive approach, highly professional throughout and communication second to none

Peter Smith – Housing 21

Older Persons Housing Needs



- ❑ Over 11 million people – 18.6% of the total population – are aged 65 years or older. By 2040, it is estimated that age 65+ will grow by 37.3%.
- ❑ At present, the vast majority of over 65s – more than nine out of ten – currently live in mainstream housing.
- ❑ An estimated 30,000 - 50,000 new OPH per year to meet this growth, but we are only building around 7,000 a year.
- ❑ In 2019, the NPG recognised that *"the need to provide housing for older people **is critical.**"*



Extra care - Beechwood Grove, Reading

What went wrong in the Planning Perspective?



Among many other factors:

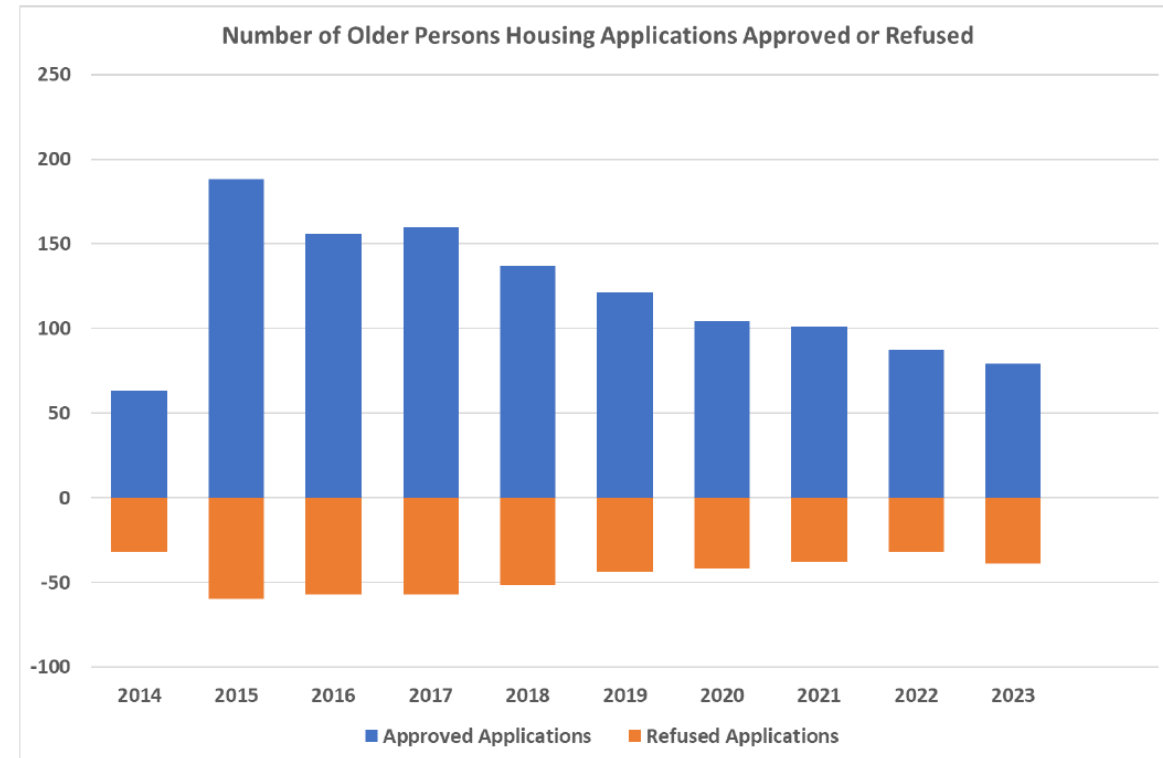
- 1) Overall Planning Applications
- 2) Operational Model OPH
- 3) Planning Policies



What went wrong in the Planning Perspective? – Overall Planning Applications



- ❑ Overall number of OPH units being applied for has decreased in recent years.
- ❑ For all sizes schemes, 81% approval for general housing vs 72% OPH.
- ❑ The trend is also for a higher number of refusals and appeals – because a lack of suitable sites subject to lesser planning constraints
- ❑ OPH applications take an average of 258 days to be determined.



Source: SPRU/Landinsight

Source: Research into Patterns and Trends in Planning Applications for Older Persons Housing (OPH)

What went wrong in the Planning Perspective? – Overall Planning Applications



- ❑ Over the years, there has been a reduction in the number of private developers of OPH.
- ❑ The approval rate for OPH schemes is 57% for all applications, but the refusal rate increases as the size of the scheme increases, with just 45% of schemes with over 120 units being granted planning permission.
- ❑ The broader point here is that withdrawn or refusal schemes still represent a cost to the industry.
- ❑ OPH schemes face significant viability challenges arising from the higher upfront and ongoing operational costs compared to mainstream housing.

Table 3.1: Planning Application Outcomes for Older Person Housing Schemes by size of scheme

Percentage of applications	All Applications	Under 10 units	Over 10 units	Over 50 units	Over 75 units	Over 100 units	Over 120 units
Pending (P)	9%	6%	11%	13%	15%	16%	15%
Approved (A)	57%	60%	55%	55%	50%	46%	45%
Refused (R)	21%	22%	21%	19%	21%	21%	24%
Withdrawn (W)	9%	10%	9%	8%	8%	8%	6%
Appeal Pending (AP)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Appeal Approved (U)	2%	0%	2%	2%	3%	3%	3%
Appeal Dismissed (D)	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%	4%	6%
Appeal Withdrawn (AW)	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: SPRU/Landinsight

Source: Research into Patterns and Trends in Planning Applications for Older Persons Housing (OPH)

What went wrong in the Planning Perspective? – Overall Planning Applications



Solutions:

- Develop a lite model able to compete with private housing developments
- Town Centre locations
- Fewer communal spaces required
- Concierge-style living and care delivery
- Excellent connection to transport and local amenities
- Boost to local businesses



What went wrong in the Planning Perspective? – Operational Model

- ❑ The size of the OPH scheme has also increased over time.
- ❑ For OPH schemes without care, the average size of the scheme has increased from 20 to 33 units, while for OPH schemes with care, it has increased from 50 to 75 units.
- ❑ Generally, brownfield sites within urban areas are not large enough to accommodate much-needed larger schemes and rely upon greenfield sites.
- ❑ Further challenges are that such developments have a different density and mass to traditional housing.



WWA Scheme - Maidment Court – 87 homes

What went wrong in the Planning Perspective? – Operational Model

Solutions:

- ❑ Many local plans will be reviewed in the coming months owing to NPPF changes
- ❑ To deliver housing targets there will need to be release of Green Belt/Grey Belt in many locations
- ❑ Estimate 2% average
- ❑ Now is the time to work with landowners to make local plan representations to boost delivery



WWA Scheme - Quarry House – greenfield site in Kent

What went wrong in the Planning Perspective? – Planning Policies



- ❑ At present, **only 36.2% of local plans** in England have a specific policy for OPH, and even fewer make any specific allocations. This leads to higher risk and uncertainty for developers.
- ❑ Inconsistency in decision-making - what weight is attributed to the decision, particularly when the proposal is considered contrary to local and/or national policies.
- ❑ Potential underestimation of need when considering the scale of allocations for OPH.
- ❑ OPH cannot compete for Greenfield allocations on the same basis as general market housing, which means such schemes may be diverted onto non-allocated Greenfield sites.



WWA Scheme - Lea Springs, Hertfordshire – edge of settlement location

Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 ("UCO") (as amended)

OPH straddle between two use Classes C2 and C3 as found in the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987.

Depending on the level of care and scale of communal facilities provided, PPG broadly defines four types of Housing for older people, but these are not definitive.

- Age-restricted general housing;
- Retirement living or sheltered housing;
- Extra care housing or housing-with-care; and
- Residential care homes and nursing homes.

Uncertainty over the application of affordable housing policies, CIL, and planning obligations seriously challenged the viability of private OPH.



Scope of HAPPI influence⁸



What went wrong in the Planning Perspective? – Planning Policies

Solutions:

- Undertake a pre-application advice request
- Early engagement with key stakeholders
- General awareness of OPH model to planning officers, Cllrs and general public



Quarry House – Councillors viewed project

Planning Recommendations



- The planning system should deliver a greater OPH volume by ensuring sufficient land is made available.
- LPAs should designate certain areas (i.e. town centre locations) where presumption in favour of the applications for OPH is applied.
- Planning decisions must be made within the statutory timeframe (8/13 weeks)
- To avoid ambiguity, clarify the definition and simplification of types of OPH and implement flexible planning policies.





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