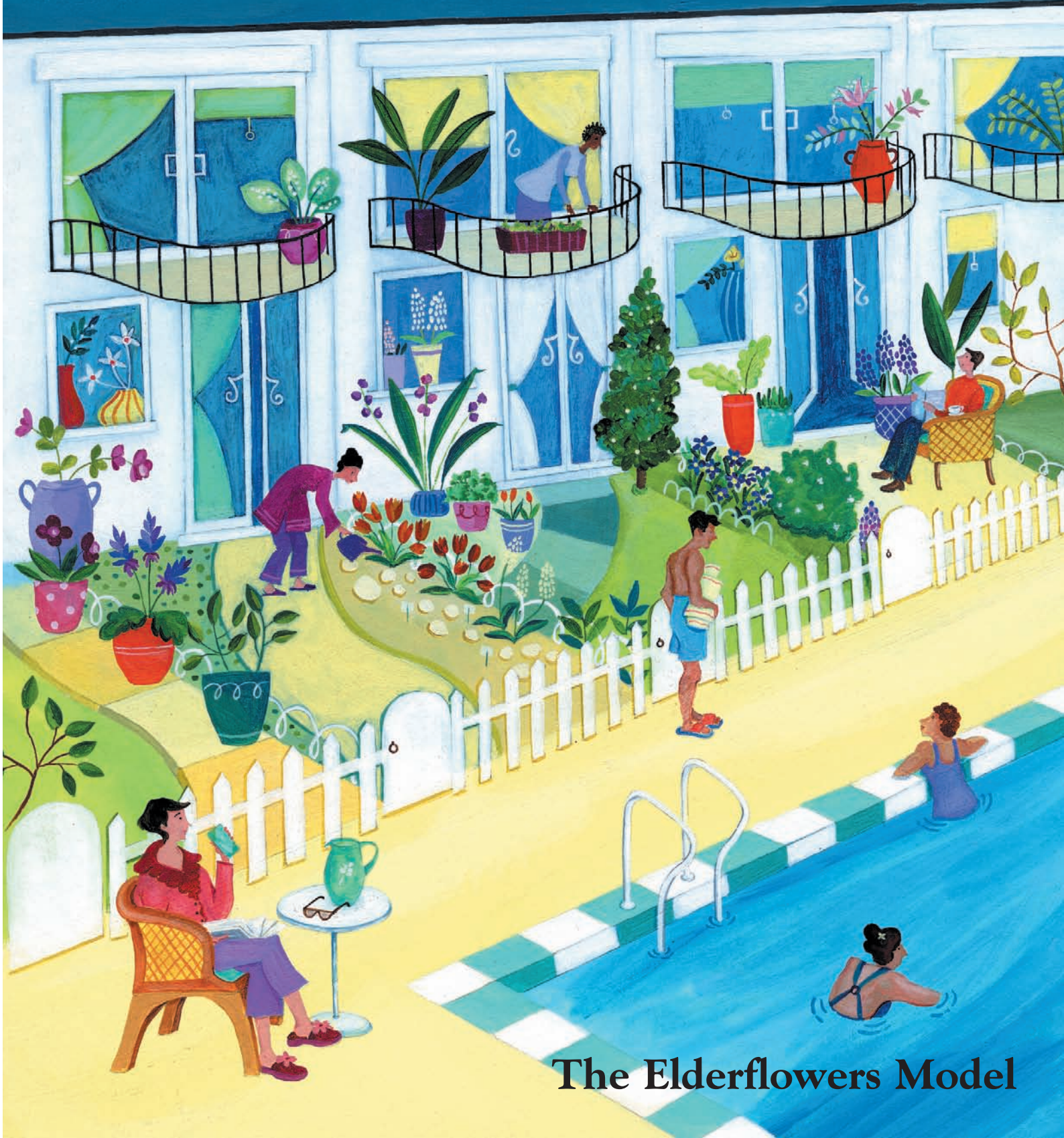


A New Type of Housing for Active Older People



The Elderflowers Model

Executive Summary

A NEW TYPE OF HOUSING FOR ACTIVE OLDER PEOPLE THE ELDERFLOWERS MODEL – REPORT 1

What people need for a happy life, as they grow older, is financial security, regular exercise, a good diet and stimulating company. The provision of suitable housing and company for older people can provide greater contentment at less cost to society and themselves.



The 2001 Census showed that only 4% of those aged 65 or more were living in communal establishments, i.e. care homes or hospitals. Allowing for sheltered housing would take the percentage up to approximately 10%.

It is widely acknowledged that there is "a shortage of affordable, suitably sized and accessible housing for older couples or people on their own within the mainstream housing market," to quote Prof. Sheila Peace of the Open University. The result is that many people who would move to more suitably sized housing remain in their large houses into old age, adding to the problem of under use of the housing stock.

The estimated 3.3 million homes under-occupied by the 50-69 age group represent 16% of the whole housing stock in England, and 50% of all under-occupied homes. (These 3.3 million homes are equivalent to more than 22 years of new house building at the rates achieved in recent years. If the government's target for increasing new building to 200,000 homes per annum by 2016 is achieved, under occupancy by the 50-69 age group will still amount to more than 16 years new construction.) In 1981 the proportion of households under-occupying was 25% as compared to the current 37%. The ageing of the population has been a major factor in the growth of under-occupancy, and since further ageing is predicted, increased under-occupancy can be expected.

This study which is aimed at housing professionals in government, housing associations and in the private sector and at housing researchers, argues

- that the increasing under-use of the housing stock is a major factor in the current housing problem, and under-occupancy by older people is driving the increase in total under-occupancy
- that in many cases under-occupancy by older people arises from the lack of an affordable alternative to remaining in mainstream housing. Active older people do not qualify for, and would not wish to enter, traditional public sector housing for elderly people which is intended for those with substantial care needs. Private sector housing schemes tend to cater for people whose income is high enough to pay for costly services.
- that many of the problems characteristic of older people are linked to their housing. By continuing to live in over-large homes that they can no longer afford to maintain and heat, they often become "housing rich and income poor". Down-sizing would bring financial benefits, such as lower fuel bills and Council Tax, and in the case of home-owners, would release equity to be invested and added to pensions. Trading down is financially advantageous to remaining in the original home and buying into a reversion scheme.

It is argued in this report that to encourage "young old" people to move into more suitable housing would benefit the households themselves as well as society generally, reducing the total amount of land required for new house-building. However it is recognised that older people are unlikely to move unless they are offered a package which is sufficiently attractive to overcome a natural tendency to try and stay put in much loved homes.

It is therefore proposed that active older people with low to medium incomes (many still working) should be considered to be a market for a different kind of quality housing, and associated facilities geared to their specific needs. The intention would be to produce a new kind of moderately priced housing for a more mixed age range, starting as young as 50, than in conventional housing for the elderly.

The Elderflowers Model of housing is developed in this report. This combines features that already exist in other housing models, in an innovative way. The Elderflowers Model offers high quality purpose built accommodation, constructed to generous space standards together with communal facilities and commercial facilities, in order to provide an attractive lifestyle. This kind of development would enable people to live healthier and happier lives as they age.

The housing units will be mainly for owner-occupiers, and will also include a proportion of affordable housing in the form of Housing Association rental and shared ownership. To reflect their own competence and wish for independence the residents would collectively assume responsibility for the management of the development, which would also have the effect of reducing service charges.

This type of development can provide a contribution to a mixed and sustainable community. Active older people tend to play a valuable role in the community, and contribute to voluntary services, and by being located centrally they will contribute to maintaining a balanced community.

Further reports in this series will cover the planning and design characteristics necessary for this type of development and the development of appropriate partnerships.

National Market Research will explore the housing preferences of active older people. While in many surveys of older people's wishes, it is concluded that they wish to retain the same number of rooms as they lived in previously, it is thought that this is partly because they fear that they will have to move to a much smaller home with smaller rooms: these preferences need to be checked in a comprehensive national survey. When people make choices about moving they need to be informed about what is available: the national survey will provide them with the information for informed choices.

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