

Continuing care retirement communities: A guide to planning

2008 update by
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Continuing care retirement communities: A guide to planning by Robin Tetlow was published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) in April 2006. An update was published in October 2007 focusing on the Secretary of State decision concerning Storthes Hall, Huddersfield, issued in January 2007.

This further update summarises all the relevant changes in policy and practice which have occurred since the original publication. It should be read alongside the original report, the October 2007 update and the associated technical appendices, all of which can be downloaded from the JRF website (www.jrf.org.uk).

Recent policy developments

Section five of the original report focused on a range of policy and good practice documents issued by the Government. The following additional publications are now relevant:

- *PPS3: Housing* (November 2006)
- *Homes for the Future: More Affordable, More Sustainable – Housing Green Paper* (July 2007)
- *Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods: A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society* (February 2008)
- *Sustainable Planning for Housing in an Ageing Population: A guide for regional-level strategies* (February 2008).

All these documents point to local planning authorities paying more regard to demographic trends and the housing requirements of older people and to providing greater choice, mirroring an increasingly diverse older population.

The foreword to *Sustainable planning for housing in an ageing population*, written by Baroness Andrews, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government,

states that *'the purpose ... is to place social sustainability at the heart of sustainable planning'* and recognises the importance of cross-sectoral partnerships in order to integrate *'planning for housing, health, social care and community'*.

PPS3 requires regional spatial strategies and local development frameworks to have particular regard to *'the accommodation of requirements of specific groups, in particular, families with children, older and disabled people'* (paragraph 21). This is also identified as one of the key factors to which local planning authorities must have regard in deciding planning applications (paragraph 69).

CCRCs as a concept

The original report highlighted examples of several continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs) across Britain. In the Storthes Hall decision, the Secretary of State concurred with the Inspector that *'the concept of a continuing care retirement community appears sustainable in the longer term, based on examples elsewhere in Britain'* (paragraph 13). This was the first Secretary of State decision to make such an observation.

Over the past two years there has been a marked increase in interest from landowners, developers and care operators with a wide diversity of schemes emerging in all parts of the country.

Use Class Order classification

Practice continues to vary regarding the Use Class designation of CCRCs (C2, C3 or sui generis), especially because of the differing character, size and balance of facilities provided on different schemes and the complications of defining an overall *planning unit*.

The recent RTPI Good Practice Note 8 *Extra Care Housing: Development Planning, Control and Management*, prepared in collaboration with the Department of Health (October 2007), is helpful in highlighting the fundamental importance of the “care” element being via a Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) registered domiciliary care operator/ scheme. It goes on to state that ‘this should clarify whether the development is regarded as a residential institution or a group of ‘ordinary’ dwellings. This is a key distinction for planners as it relates to C2 or C3 categorisation under the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order ...’ (page 19).

Provision of affordable housing

The issue of whether or not CCRCs should be required to provide an element of affordable housing remains closely related to the Use Class issue.

In the Storthes Hall decision, the Secretary of State concluded that the provision of an element of affordable housing, which had been offered by the applicants, was appropriate in the circumstances; albeit possibly in the form of an off-site contribution.

The original report referred to Counsel’s Opinion and a variety of other Secretary of State decisions. In a recent appeal decision relating to a site at Tiddington in Stratford-on-Avon District (APP/J3720/A/07/2037666, 3 September 2007), an inspector ruled that no on-site or off-site affordable housing was required because ‘as a matter of fact and degree’ the development would fall into Use Class C2.

In the North Somerset case described in more detail below, the local planning authority, in granting planning permission, accepted the proposal as Use Class C2 with no affordable housing provision.

CCRCs in rural locations

The Storthes Hall decision and others before it established that the location of CCRCs relative to local amenities is less critical than for general market housing. Subject to other planning policy constraints, CCRCs can be developed successfully in relatively rural locations, day-to-day services being provided on site and residents having no requirement to be near schools and employment sites.

A recent planning officer’s report for a proposed CCRC on the edge of Sandford, a village in North Somerset, sets out the issues clearly (Application no 07/P/3232/F, South Area Committee, 12 March 2008). The report recognises that the scheme would cater for the needs of the whole of North Somerset; that a more urban location might be more sustainable; and that such a major development would have a significant impact on the village. It concludes, however, that ‘*the community benefits that this proposal provides outweigh any uncertainty that may exist by allowing such a large number of care units in a rural location*’.

CCRCs in the Green Belt

The original report highlighted that CCRCs have been granted permission in the Green Belt. Storthes Hall was another example.

A further example has recently arisen concerning an extra care community (not a full CCRC) near Oldham. The Secretary of State concluded in this case (APP/W4223/V/07/1201856, 6 February 2008) that the proposal amounted to ‘*inappropriate development*’ in the Green Belt but that the advantages ‘*clearly outweigh the harm*’ and constituted ‘*very special circumstances*’.

Conclusions

Recent policy developments and planning decisions reinforce many of the messages of the April 2006 report. Increasingly, the principles and benefits of CCRCs are being recognised across the planning, housing, health and social care sectors and by local planning authorities in particular. It should, however, be emphasised that site-specific planning issues will always be important and may indeed be of overriding importance.

Further information

Continuing Care Retirement Communities: A Guide to Planning by Robin Tetlow, together with 11 technical appendices and the October 2007 update, can be downloaded from the JRF website at <http://www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop>