

FORMER MINISTER CALLS FOR NHS LAND TO BE SOLD FOR CARE HOMES

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The former care minister Paul Burstow will say today that NHS trusts should sell surplus land to build enough care homes and supported living apartments to meet increasing demand.

The Liberal Democrat MP will make the call as he announces the findings of the thinktank Demos's year-long Commission on Residential Care, which he chaired.

Its final report includes a call for incentives, such as expedited planning permission and reduced purchase prices, to sell surplus land to providers who reserve a percentage of space for state-funded residents' care, or contribute to local authority services. The idea mirrors the current Section 106 planning rules, which are designed to ensure property developers build affordable housing.

More than 450,000 people live in care homes in England but this number is expected to rise due to a rapidly ageing population and increase in younger people with complex health needs. Less than 40 per cent of land held by NHS trusts is being used for hospitals and medical buildings, according to Demos, leaving more than 5,000 hectares potentially available for purposes including care accommodation.

Other proposals in the report include more co-location, combining care properties with educational institutions or community centres such as nursery groups or libraries, and the introduction of an industry-wide 'licence to practise' ensuring all care workers receive a minimum level of training before they are able to support people unsupervised.

“As we are living longer lives, housing with care is going to become increasingly important in helping us stay independent, happy and healthy,” said Mr Burstow. “It is vital that government wake up to this reality sooner rather than later and helps creates the right incentives to ensure older and disabled people have a genuine choice when they need to move.”

Separate Age UK research reveals unsuitable housing is leaving thousands of older people facing unnecessary delays in being discharged from hospital, with the charity calling on the government to ensure all homes are built to lifetime homes standard so they can be easily adapted as people age.

Its report, *Housing in Later Life*, found patients who need adaptations, such as grab rails or ramps, fitted at home are having to wait an extra 27 days on average – more than 40,000 days in total – and that delayed discharges resulting from these were costing the NHS an estimated £11.2m a year.

Responding to Age UK’s report, an LGA spokesman reinforced its calls for government to remove the housing revenue borrowing cap which it said is hampering the ability of councils to finance new homes. The LGA claims doing that would allow councils to build 80,000 homes over five years.

He said: “More flexibility and investment from government is needed to ensure that older people who want to remain living independently are enabled to do so.

“Alongside investment in new builds, councils are also working to make the best use of existing stock by providing the right support and adaptations to enable people to live in their homes longer supported by a range of care and support options that satisfy people’s individual needs.”