



Modern Methods of Construction: Submission to Inquiry

(Select Committee for Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee)

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ABOUT AGE UK

Age UK is a national charity that works with a network of partners, including Age Scotland, Age Cymru, Age NI and local Age UKs across England, to help everyone make the most of later life, whatever their circumstances.

In the UK, the Charity helps more than seven million older people each year by providing advice and support. It also researches and campaigns on the issues that matter most to older people. Its work focuses on ensuring that older people: have enough money; enjoy life and feel well; receive high quality health and care; are comfortable, safe and secure at home; and feel valued and able to participate

ABOUT THE INQUIRY

The Select Committee for Housing, Local Government and Communities is examining Modern Methods of Construction (MMC). This involves off-site construction of homes in factories using new technology to reduce costs and speed up the building process. Although factory built homes are not a new concept – advances in technology now mean they can be built efficiently to a higher standard. There is interest in how this approach could contribute to meeting the Government's target of 200,000 new homes a year. For further details go to: <https://tinyurl.com/ya69b2de>

OUR RESPONSE

1. What are the benefits of MMC, and how can they sustainably boost the housing supply?

1.1. MMC have the potential to increase the housing options available to older people, especially those seeking to 'right size'.

1.2. All new homes, including those using MMC, should be expected to comply with the Lifetime Homes Standard as set out in Category 2 of the Building Regulation, Part M which ensures homes can be adapted quickly and cost-effectively to meet the requirements of residents who have or develop mobility and sensory impairments.

1.3. We have previously had concerns over the poor insulation and heating standards for some prefabricated factory built dwellings, such as park homes (as set out in the Age UK report '*Don't leave park homes out in the cold*'). We would expect the Government to ensure all new homes built using MMC have the highest 'cutting edge' standards for energy efficiency, ventilation, accessibility etc. This may necessitate further progress on improvements to the building regulations alongside stronger and effective enforcement to ensure MMC and all other forms of home building attain the highest standards.

1.4. MMC also provides the opportunity to design homes that are flood resilient and able to address the growing risk of flooding in many areas. It is essential that flood

resilient designs are also energy efficient, and 'age proofed' by complying with Category 2 of the Building Regulations, Part M.

1.5. Age UK is interested in the potential of MMC to increase the supply of bungalows offering level access homes suitable for older and disabled people. Because MMC reduce build costs they may increase the economic viability of bungalows.

1.6. A proportion of new homes using MMC should be designed to cater for people who use wheelchairs. Age UK believes 10% of all new homes should be wheelchair accessible, following the standard set out in Category 3 of the Building Regulations, Part M.

1.7. More generally, all new construction methods need to be 'age proofed' to take account of an ageing population.

1.8. MMC could make it easier for homes to be adapted. For example, by making it easier to remove a partition wall to create a downstairs bedroom or adding an annexe to an existing property. We need common standards applied to building components to ensure adaptations and improvements are facilitated by MMC, not made more difficult due to differences in component specifications.

2. What are the primary risks to increasing the use of MMC?

2.1. We are concerned that there should be safeguards to prevent the possibility of homebuilders using MMC as a cost cutting exercise by building new homes to a lower standard using inferior material.

2.2. Despite the potential of MMC to benefit consumers there is a risk that they may in some cases be used to increase profit margins while reducing build standards. It is essential that homes using MMC comply with enhanced building and fire safety regulations and are flexible to an ageing population. All new homes built using MMC should be expected to last for several generations and be future proofed to meet the challenges presented by climate change

2.3. New homes using MMC need to be located in age friendly places with access to services. The benefits of MMC will be negated if homes are built in the wrong locations without the necessary infrastructure to support older people – such as access to good public transport links and health and care services

3. How could the Government, Homes England and local authorities (a) increase demand for MMC to meet its homebuilding targets and (b) support the construction industry in increasing the use of MMC?

3.1. To help increase the supply of housing for older people, including housing delivered using MMC, local authorities should be required to have a planning strategy for older people's housing. MMC housing has the potential to have particular benefits when it comes to meeting older people's changing needs over time, as outlined above. Increasing the supply of suitable housing for older people could make more family homes available from the existing stock – benefiting all generations.

4. How can small and medium sized house builders better utilise MMC, including to support innovation and competition in the construction industry?

4.1. There is potential for smaller and medium sized specialist home builders to design accessible homes that specifically appeal to older people. Also universal standards for the components of homes using MMC might make it easier for smaller house builders to make adaptations and improvements to a property later on - if required.

5. How can challenges related to access to finance (for both homebuyers and developers) be overcome.

5.1. Access to finance could be particularly beneficial to older homeowners who wish to 'rightsize' but who have limited home equity or need help with securing a mortgage. There could be benefits and incentives available to older people who choose to buy or rent specific types of prefabricated housing. This needs to work alongside better legislative protection and regulation – especially for new and existing park home residents.

Part of the overall cost savings of MMC should contribute to improving the affordability of new homes designed for older people.