

## Almshouses: the historic model, fit for the future



**Nick Phillips, 16 November 2021**

The NHF notes in its 'About Social Housing' section how "social housing dates back to medieval times when almshouses and charitable housing providers...provided shelter to the elderly, the infirm and those less well off." It is not unreasonable to assume that a model which started so long ago may not still be in existence, and yet, this is not the case, almshouses are still very much alive and thriving.

In the 21st century, almshouses continue to flourish as charities providing genuinely affordable homes to those who need them, and they live on in perpetuity. No longer the preserve of older people, almshouses have shifted and adapted to meet the challenges of their local communities by supporting young people and families.

Celebrating our 75th anniversary this year, The Almshouse Association looks to support the almshouse movement and our 1,600 members through guidance and financial support, as well as providing a voice to the movement in government. And although almshouses have existed for over a thousand years, there is still so much we are learning about them.

On 15 November, we published our first piece of research, with the help of Housing LIN, on the financial benefits that almshouses provide to society. We were thrilled, though not altogether surprised, that almshouses provide an annual return of £43m in financial benefits to society. This includes savings for the NHS through a decrease in GP appointments and tackling loneliness, as well as significant savings for local authorities through a delay in the need for social care. The report also highlighted the nearly £9m contribution from voluntary work.

This research is of great value as we continue to promote the benefits of these charitable institutions as part of the solution to our national housing crisis. We are lucky to have gained support in parliament, with the likes of former Prime Minister Theresa May attending the Association's anniversary event earlier this year, as well as Lord Richard Best recently writing in support of seeing more almshouses. We also have fantastic support from the members of the APPG on Almshouses.

We are, however, still often misunderstood – particularly by local authorities, which impedes on the development of new almshouses. Many charities are looking to build more, thereby expanding the provision of genuinely affordable homes available in the community and yet, these charities are sometimes treated in the same way as large scale, for-profit developers, rather than the charitable institutions that they are. Additional legal fees make it harder to improve stock numbers when working on a charitable budget.

We look forward to working with partners, such as the NHF, to improve the understanding of this well-established model, but we also want to work with our fellow housing colleagues to help improve the diversity of housing choice.

So, I would ask you to read through our report to see how great an investment almshouses are and then to get in touch to see whether they could form part of your developments today and in perpetuity.

Written by **Nick Phillips** Chief Executive, The Almshouse Association