



"Almshouses are about providing warmth, security and friendship. The Almshouse Association exists to protect this wonderful legacy and support our members to continue their vital work."

Nick Phillips | CEO | The Almshouse Association

The Almshouse Association is a support charity representing over 1,600 independent almshouse charities throughout the UK.

Established in 1946, the Association provides a host of services to help member charities run and manage their almshouses effectively, support their residents and protect the almshouse legacy for future generations. The Almshouse Association services include:

- Support and guidance
- Grants and loans
- Financial and practical support for struggling charities
- Representation to government and local councils
- Guidance manuals, model policies and templates
- Training, seminars, online courses and webinars
- Quarterly newsletter and e-bulletins
- Website and members forum
- Panel of consultants
- Charity Health Checks
- Recognition through awards
- Regional representatives

#SupportAlmshouses

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Almshouses today

Warm homes, friendly neighbours and community spirit

Take a walk through old market towns and villages in the UK and you are likely to find a group of houses of distinct character, often set back from the road, often in a courtyard with high chimneys and front doors close to one another. With roots that date back over a thousand years, these splendid historic buildings can be as much a part of the character of a village, town or city as a local church, pub or post office.

"The history of almshouses is a topic of intense interest that deserves to be shared and celebrated, with its lessons learned and applied."

Dan Cruickshank | Historian | BBC Presenter

Almshouses are the oldest form of community housing with a history dating back a thousand years. Today over 1,600 independent almshouse charities carry the name and spirit of

their original benefactors, providing warm, safe homes to over 36,000 people in housing need. Yet this effective housing model is often overlooked by both policy makers and the general public, seen more as quirky vestiges of a bygone era. In reality they are a sign of great social activism, run by local people (trustees) for local people and legally protected from being repurposed ensuring they are available in perpetuity.

Why are almshouses still so relevant?

Today almshouses are now more vital than ever. We have housing associations, council and social housing, yet the demand for almshouse accommodation outstrips supply in most areas. In some rural areas almshouses are the only form of social housing available. They don't just fill a gap in the provision of affordable housing, almshouses support the social needs of residents too. Not only do almshouses alleviate some of the isolation so prevalent today, they also support independent living and neighbourliness with warmth and compassion at their heart.

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Tangible financial benefits to society

A recent independent report by Housing LIN* discovered that almshouses provide an annual return of **£43m** in financial benefits to society.

In this report, Wood & Salter¹ identifies how sheltered housing that is able to effectively mitigate loneliness can reduce the need for hospital admission, as tackling loneliness helps build greater self-care. An example of this is Living Well Cornwall, which was a programme started by Age UK and NHS Kernow CCG to build self-reliance and self-confidence in the participants; the result was a 41% reduction in the cost of hospital admissions, and a 3:1 return on investment. The programme also led to an 8% reduction in social care costs².

The report also highlighted nearly **£9m** in savings due to the voluntary nature of almshouse charities.

"Though many almshouses are housed in heritage buildings they are not a thing of the past: today they offer accommodation to the needy and a way of life that reduces loneliness."

Baroness Joan Bakewell DBE, HonFBA, FRSA | Almshouse Association Ambassador



Photo courtesy of The Skinners' Almshouse Charity

Challenges and impact of funding

The tangible benefits underline the important role almshouses play in the future provision of affordable community housing. Over the next ten years the Association aims to:

- have almshouses recognised as the exemplar form of community housing
- support the development of 5,000 new almshouse dwellings
- establish five new almshouse charities to respond to the current affordable housing need
- see almshouses recognised as affordable housing by local councils and government (beneficiaries under section 106 legislation and exempt from selective licensing)
- carry out analysis and complete development action plans for all charities who need support
- have 50% of almshouse buildings zero carbon rated
- have 25% of listed almshouse buildings zero carbon rated
- support almshouse charities to modernise and update dwellings to provide independent 21st century living with wheelchair access, internet connections, electronic doors, sophisticated alarms and scooter storage
- encourage new almshouses to better reflect today's housing needs (young families/refugees).

"I used to wash in a bucket and boil eggs in the kettle...and I lived for 11 years without heating on at all. I can't describe how wonderful it is just to be warm."

Resident | Hammersmith United Charities

Whilst many almshouse charities are able to raise funds to build more almshouses and refurbish existing ones, others are struggling to maintain their buildings, particularly those that are listed. They are bursting with historic value and character but modernisation is expensive and the legislation protecting them can be onerous. It is these charities that urgently need our help raising funds to support essential repairs and improvements.

We need to:

- preserve the historic value and rich heritage of almshouses
- secure the future provision of genuinely affordable homes for people in housing need today and for generations to come.

"Coming to live in an almshouse has changed my life."

Resident | Shepton Mallet United Charities

£500 provides decarbonisation surveys and action plans

£25,000 provides new heating and insulation

£1,000 provides a new boiler

£80,000 provides a new roof

£7,000 provides a new kitchen

£1 million helps set up a new almshouse charity

Figures may vary depending on size and number of almshouses.

* Assessment of the evidence of financial benefits provided by almshouses - Housing LIN November 2021.

¹ Wood & Salter (2016): Building companionship - how better design can combat loneliness later in life; Demos and McCarthy & Stone.

² Local Government Association (2016): Combating Loneliness: A guide for local authorities.



Photo courtesy of St Mary's Hospital Almshouse Charity

Photo courtesy of Girton Town Charity