

Forecast of bungalow boom in West Lothian

An ageing population in West Lothian could bring about a boom in bungalow building.

Almost 40% of local people will be over 75 by 2028 – a figure which far outstrips the national average of 25%.

Livingston, West Lothian's largest town, has few bungalows – single-level living is currently at a premium for the elderly and disabled.

As a blueprint for the next five years is drawn up councillors have been told they will need to plan for more age friendly communities- and developers will need to build a broader range of more accessible homes.

The county's population was 182,000 in 2018, according to National Records of Scotland. That is predicted to rise to 192,000 by 2028.

The numbers of newly retired will also surge by a fifth in five years. The number of those aged 65 to 74 is expected to increase by 19% by 2028, with those aged over 75 increasing by 39% which is more than 38,000 people.

Planning officer Margaret Stone told a meeting of the Economy, Community Empowerment and Wealth Building Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel that new planning legislation requires homes to “meet the needs of older and disabled people”.

The Scottish average growth is predicted at 14.4% in the 65 to 74 population and 25.4% increase in those aged over 75 during

the next five years.

Homes will need to be easily adaptable. In a planning debate earlier this year residents in Livingston's Murieston area called for more bungalows. They pointed out that 200 homes built in the area in the last five years were all of similar design- mostly three bedroomed or larger over two floors – to maximise returns for developers.

Bungalows, despite commanding premium prices, occupy a larger site footprint and cut potential profit as fewer can be built on a site .

In her report to the PDSP Mrs Stone said: "The Local Housing Strategy sets out that private sector housing providers will be encouraged to provide a broader range of house types and sizes to meet the needs of the community. This is an example of a policy that could be developed further and implemented in the forthcoming Local Development Plan."

She added: "Work now under way progressing the next local development plan is at the early evidence gathering stage, gathering the views of the public at large and key stakeholders to identify issues and gaps in provision of specialised housing."

A key aspect of the next LDP was the development of housing where older people "were able to live in communities with physically and mentally active lives and access the services they require," added the planning officer.

Cllr Tom Conn asked if building regulations would change to cover issues such as wheelchair accessible doors. Head of Planning Craig McCorrison said the simple answer was yes, and that regulations had already started to change – for instance new rules on the adaptability of ground floor rooms to bathrooms. Liveability is governed by the regulations," he added.

Cllr Sally Pattle asked: "In Linlithgow you have to have 25 percent affordability in any new development. Is it going to be a similar percentage to build age friendly homes?"

Mrs Stone said this was something too which could be looked at in the development of the Local Plan.

Chairing the meeting, Cllr Kirsteen Sullivan asked: "Will partners from Health and Social Care have an input . Mrs Stone replied: "Yes absolutely. All views are gratefully received."

She added that meetings had already been held with partners.

by Stuart Somerville Local Democracy Reporter