

## Almshouse Resilient Communities (ARC) for the Future – Project Overview

This short overview of the project sets out the background on the need for better quality social housing for older people and the potential of the almshouse charity model as an alternative to the predominant binary choice of private or local authority development. The project's three-way perspective (focusing on social, built environment and governance resilience), its aims and deliverables are described.



Social housing in the UK is failing older people [1] and costing the economy an estimated £286m per annum [2]. Health and housing are closely related; inadequate housing has contributed to increased mortality from Covid-19 [3]. The Covid-19 Marmot Review identified community resilience as an essential goal to reduce health and social inequalities. Almshouse Resilient Communities for the Future (ARC) will identify determinants of resilient older-age communities in almshouse settings.

The project includes seven community partners: Whiteley Homes Trust, Surrey; United St Saviour's Charity, London; Sir Josiah Mason Trust, West Midlands; Durham Aged Mineworkers' Homes Association; Legacy East Almshouse Partnership, East Anglia; Southwark Charities; and Bristol

Charities. In the UK, approximately 33,500 people live in almshouses and most are older adults. Almshouses are dwellings managed by a charitable trust as low-cost housing in which the residents are legally beneficiaries of a charity rather than tenants. The philanthropic model has endured for centuries but the form varies widely across the 1,600 charities in place today. The almshouse movement offers an alternative model for housing for older people, and a valuable partner for local authorities, exemplified by recent and current developments at United St Saviour's Charity and others.

The term resilience, widely used in policy, requires definition, and should encompass 'resilience of what to what' [4]. We take a socio-ecological perspective, that resilience is an adaptive response of a system to change, such that the system is better able to cope with future change [5], and that the identity of system, in terms of key components and relationships, persists over time [6]. The system is an almshouse community. Changes range from Covid-19 and climate change, to common changes, such as in staffing or the locality.

Previous research on community resilience has recognised the importance of context but this has proved challenging to examine empirically. Setting the project within almshouse communities, ARC will take a novel, contextualised and holistic approach. We will examine three forms of resilience and their interdependencies: (1) community or social resilience, (2) resilience in the built environment and (3) resilience in almshouse charity governance. Resilience in the built environment will include adaptation to the changing climate and also ways in which the built environment contributes to community resilience. Resilience in governance will include persistence of the charity trust over time and also how governance contributes to resilience in community and built environment.

The primary research question is: How can almshouse residents' communities become more resilient? In particular, what factors contribute to (1) social resilience, (2) resilience of the built environment, and (3) resilience in governance?

ARC will gather evidence in three in-depth key case study sites, and additional data in four 'vignette' case study sites, in three phases over 30 months. The research sites range from 60 to 1700 dwellings, historic to 21<sup>st</sup> century buildings, and urban and rural settings across England. A total of 72 interviews and four focus groups will be conducted with residents, complemented by 26 interviews with staff, trustees and stakeholders, and 15 days of site observations. Thematic analysis will be used, both abductive analysis, applying a framework of ecological resilience [7], and inductive, to identify novel insights.

Targeting *The Gerontologist* and other top quartile journals, ARC will provide new knowledge on factors which influence community resilience in older age setting. The output will take the form of an evidence-based toolkit which will showcase innovative practice, with analysis of the factors and contexts which facilitate it, and will provide examples of what the future of housing for older people could be. The findings will form the basis from which the Almshouse Association can develop an innovation network, putting in touch charities who lead and charities who want to learn on specific aspects of resilient community, governance or built environment. The role of the Association is crucial in influencing future policy and practice on living environments for older people and they will request discussion of the findings at the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Almshouses. Through the 14 sector partners, the toolkit will be disseminated widely across almshouse, older care and housing sectors, utilising multiple media formats, to initiate changes in approaches towards the provision of suitable, high-quality housing for older people.

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