

Briefing

Accessible housing policy update

Purpose

This briefing outlines the current UK housing policy landscape for accessible housing and provides recommendations for a more inclusive future. It also highlights the significant accessible housing deficit, seeks to inform and update housing professionals about policy developments that may affect them, and makes the case for including accessibility amongst their top priorities.

Date

June 2017

Introduction

There are currently around 1.8 million people with an accessible housing need in the UK, including around 300,000 disabled adults who have an unmet accessible housing need.¹ The challenges presented by our ageing population are likely to significantly increase the need for accessible, adaptable homes. However, only 7% of homes in England offer even minimum accessibility features².

The Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017, and measures in the Housing White Paper, require local authorities to address housing needs that result from old age or disability. This is a collective challenge for the whole housing sector and we must work together to significantly increase the supply of accessible and easily adaptable homes across the country.

As a responsible housing sector, we must commit to delivering inclusive homes and communities that meet a wide range of needs. Whether for families with young children, somebody returning home after a hospital stay, a young disabled person looking to move for employment, or an older person with increasing mobility impairment, providing accessibility and flexibility in all new homes should be one of the key tests against which our social value will be measured.



Habinteg's new development in Hounslow, Goodrich Court, is a high specification example of mainstream inclusive housing design

Why accessible housing?

The Government's own impact assessment estimated that a three bedroom home built to Part M (4) Category 2 costs just £521 more in build costs than its less accessible equivalent³.

Additional space costs should be minimised through good design, but assuming some extra space is needed, net additional costs range from £1101 (2 bed terrace) to £1387 (3 bed semi-detached).

Compare this to the costs incurred when homes are not accessible. The average cost of a day in hospital is £683⁴, a week in residential care costs between £560-£660, while a wetroom conversion typically costs more than £5,000 - the equivalent cost in a Category 2 home is estimated to be around £1,000.

In 2015, 1.2 million hospital bed days were lost due to 'delayed discharge' of people from acute hospitals, up 31% in two years. This is estimated to cost the NHS £820 million a year⁴. In the following year, 46,199 days delay were caused by waits for community equipment and adaptations according to NHS England's delayed transfer of care statistics.

Homes built to accessible and easily adaptable standards can help alleviate these pressures on health and social care services.

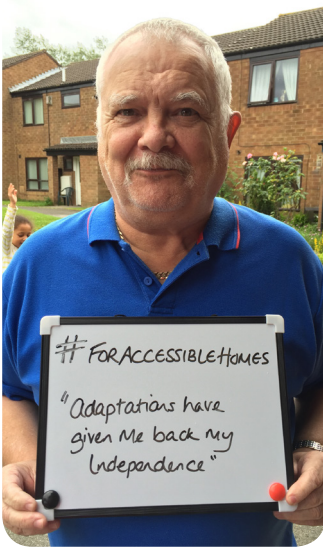
The economic and social benefits are not confined to healthcare: disabled people living in inaccessible homes are four times more likely to be unemployed than those living in accessible accommodation⁵.

Technical background

The Lifetime Homes standard was developed by Habinteg and others to ensure that homes are accessible, adaptable and inclusive, incorporating 16 design criteria that can be universally applied to new homes at minimal cost⁶.

The standard is still used extensively in Wales and Northern Ireland while new national accessible housing standards have superseded Lifetime Homes in England. These optional housing standards were introduced by the Government in October 2015. Part M (4) Category 2 and 3 - were placed into the Building Regulations for the first time.

This is an important, tangible recognition that access in housing matters. Part M (4) Category 2 largely reflects the Lifetime Homes standard, and Category 3 is broadly equivalent to the Wheelchair Housing Design Guide. However the 'visitable' default - Part M (4) Category 1 - is not truly visitable for many disabled people⁷.



Latest policy developments

The Housing White Paper

The Government's Housing White Paper entitled *Fixing our broken housing market* (February 2017)⁸ made explicit references to accessible housing standards, highlighting the need to:

- Strengthen national policy so that local planning authorities are expected to have clear policies for addressing the housing requirements of groups with particular needs, such as older and disabled people⁸.
- Ensure a more consistent delivery of accessible housing, including a new statutory duty to produce guidance for local planning authorities on how their local development documents should meet the housing needs of older and disabled people.
- Set a clear expectation that all planning authorities should devise policies using the Optional Building Regulations (Part M (4) Cat 2 and 3) to bring forward an adequate supply of accessible housing to meet local need.
- Consult on a new standard methodology for calculating 'objectively assessed need', and encourage councils to plan on this basis. The consultation outcome will be reflected in changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).



The Neighbourhood Planning Act

The Neighbourhood Planning Act 2017⁹ received Royal Assent in May just prior to the general election having been amended by the Government with cross-party support. The law now states that:

“The Secretary of State must issue guidance for local planning authorities on how their local development documents (taken as a whole) should address housing needs that result from old age or disability.”

The Government has acknowledged planning for accessible homes is an issue that requires them to support local authorities. It is vital that the resulting guidance is strong enough to make the change to local planning and development that is clearly needed. Habinteg and other organisations concerned will be offering support to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to ensure that the statutory guidance is fit for purpose and effective in meeting a diverse range of housing needs in each local authority area.

Women and Equalities Select Committee Inquiry into Disability and the Built Environment

A wide range of organisations and individuals were consulted by the cross-party House of Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee regarding accessibility and inclusion in housing during their inquiry into disability and the built environment¹⁰. Habinteg's Vice-Chair Andrew Gibson gave oral evidence to the committee.

The final report included recommended actions for Government, local authorities and others to put access at the heart of decision-making.

Key recommendations from the Committee:

- The Government should amend the default minimum baseline standard for all new homes under Part M of the Building Regulations to Part M (4) Category 2.
- Once new guidance under the Neighbourhood Planning Bill is adopted, the DCLG should undertake an audit of local plans to identify those that do, or do not, meet that guidance. Where this audit reveals gaps in accessible housing policies, the Government must take action to press local authorities to amend their Local Plans in line with the new guidance as a matter of urgency.
- A cross-departmental strategy should be established, joining up all aspects of built environment policy affecting accessibility.
- The Government should amend the National Planning Policy Framework and the National Planning Practice Guidance to incorporate a dedicated section on access for disabled people and inclusive design for local planning authorities and decision-makers.



Devolved regions and local authorities

In London, an accessible housing default has been in place since 2004. The London Plan required all new homes to be built to the Lifetime Homes standard with 10% built to higher wheelchair accessible design standards. London was also the first city to 'passport' over to the new national accessible housing standards Part M (4) Cat 2 and 3 and apply the same targets¹¹. Successive cross-party Mayoral administrations have maintained this goal in London for 13 years and Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, made the same commitment in his 2016 manifesto.

In Greater Manchester, Mayor Andy Burnham pledged to build Lifetime Homes and wheelchair accessible properties in his 2017 manifesto¹². Furthermore, the Greater Manchester draft spatial framework includes a clear commitment to a Part M (4) Category 2 default for all new homes¹³. Liverpool has a similarly forward-thinking draft Local Plan to increase delivery of accessible homes¹⁴.

Habinteg's 2016 research survey of local authorities asked councils by freedom of information request if they had policies to build to the Lifetime Homes Standard and, if so, whether they had recorded the number built in the last five years. The results showed strong approaches in Reading, Wokingham, Sevenoaks, Leicester, Leeds, Peterborough, and Eastleigh. Although taken as a whole, of the 266 councils that responded just, only 8.2% of councils had both policy and monitoring in place¹⁵.

Now is the time for national policy to follow the good examples out there to make accessible and inclusive housing the common sense default for the future.





What should the government do next?

Habinteg believes that the Government should:

1. Establish Part M (4) Cat 2 (accessible, adaptable) as the default standard for new homes country wide (as is currently the case in London), with a suitable provision of Category 3 (wheelchair standard) homes.
2. Review the definition of viability contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to balance the financial interest of developers and the longer term financial interests of the public purse.
3. Require Local Authorities to report the number of new homes built according to each access category in their annual returns.
4. Provide Local Authorities with more direction and support to build their plans to deliver for the needs of their whole population including approved sources of data and projections.

We've seen good progress in the last year, with cross party support for accessible homes growing. It is important that we do not lose momentum. There is still much work to do.

What can you do?

Habinteg would like to work with you to ensure accessible and inclusive housing remains on the agenda in this Parliament and becomes a top priority for our whole sector.

You can support our award-winning **#ForAccessibleHomes** campaign by following us on Twitter **@habinteg** or visit **www.habinteg.org.uk/foraccessiblehomes** for more information.

Take a look at our toolkit for planning policy developed in partnership with the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) for details on making local planning decisions more inclusive. You can find it online at **www.habinteg.org.uk/tah-toolkit** and register for updates.

You can also download our Local Authority scrutiny toolkit which is designed to help councils and councillors take action on local accessible housing provision. Find it online at **www.habinteg.org.uk/scrutinytoolkit**

Our policy responses to Government consultations are available on our website at **www.habinteg.org.uk/responses**

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About us

Habinteg is a housing provider with a mission to champion inclusion by providing and promoting accessible homes and neighbourhoods that welcome and include everyone. We promote accessible design standards, support the social model of disability, and publish a wide range of resources about disability, housing and the built environment.

For further details on accessible housing policy, please contact David Halliwell, Public Affairs Manager, by email dhalliwell@habinteg.org.uk or call 0207 822 8767.

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