

NO PLACE LIKE HOME
5 MILLION REASONS
TO MAKE HOUSING
DISABLED-FRIENDLY



Leonard Cheshire Disability is the leading charity supporting disabled people. Our services include high quality care and community support together with innovative projects supporting disabled people into education, employment and entrepreneurship.

With over 7,000 employees we support over 4,600 disabled people in the UK alone. Worldwide, our global alliance of partners works in more than 50 countries.

Find out more and what you can do to help at:
www.leonardcheshire.org

KEY FINDINGS

There is a growing need for disabled-friendly homes:

- 300,000 disabled people are on housing waiting lists across Great Britain;¹
- Only 5% of homes in England can be visited by someone using a wheelchair;²
- 5 million people in the UK have a mobility problem and could benefit from a disabled-friendly home;³
- One in six disabled adults and half of all disabled children live in housing that isn't suitable for their needs;⁴ and
- Three quarters of British adults (75%) report that they live in a home without an accessible front door⁵ – meaning that of the hundreds of thousands of people who acquire a mobility impairment every year, most will have to move house or risk becoming trapped in their own home.

The average UK council⁶ has no estimate of the number of disabled-friendly homes they already have:⁷

16%
Fewer than 1 in 6

councils could provide any data on the number of homes in their area which were wheelchair accessible

10%
Only 1 in 10

councils could provide any data on the number of homes in their area built to Lifetime Home Standards.⁸

Councils don't know where the disabled-friendly homes they do have are:

83%
More than 4 in 5

councils do not have an accessible housing register or similar system.⁹

£600
million every year

Poor housing costs the health service £600 million every year;¹⁰

5%

of housing authorities have carried out any analysis of the additional costs of inadequate housing to health and social care.¹¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

To secure the growth in disabled-friendly homes the country needs, we are calling for:

- 1 National government to make Lifetime Homes the minimum standards for all new-builds, and commit to build 10% of new homes to fully wheelchair accessible standards, by 2020;
- 2 Local government to create local policies for Lifetime Homes to be a standard requirement and for 10% of homes in large developments to be wheelchair accessible;
- 3 Every local authority to operate an accessible housing register or comparable system;
- 4 Private and social housing developers to build to Lifetime Home standards and deliver 10% wheelchair accessible homes in large developments; and
- 5 All new Garden Cities to be exemplars of accessibility – with both homes and neighbourhoods built to disabled-friendly standards.

What are Lifetime Homes?¹²

Lifetime Homes are ordinary houses and flats which incorporate 16 design criteria that can be universally applied to new homes with an average cost of £1,100 or less.¹³

These standards actually save money in the long run, by ensuring that things like grab-bars and stair-lifts can be easily and cheaply installed if people's needs change.

Lifetime Homes work for a broad range of people – from disabled people who need more space to move around, to older people who need grab bars to help them get around the home safely, to families with young children who need to get prams and pushchairs through the front door. These are not just homes for disabled people – they work for everyone.

¹ We asked all 370 housing authorities in the UK how many disabled people are currently on their housing waiting list. 151 authorities provided a response, and we scaled this up on a pro-rata basis using the mean population percentage to reflect the entire country.

² English Housing Survey, Profile of English Housing 2012.

³ ComRes interviewed 2,006 GB adults aged 18+ online between the 4 and 6 June 2014; including 238 who self-identified as having a mobility impairment. Data were weighted to be representative of all GB adults aged 18+. Extrapolation was based on the Census 2011 data (47,754,569 people aged 18+ in Great Britain)

⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Housing and disabled children, 2008.

⁵ ComRes interviewed 2,006 GB adults aged 18+ online between the 4 and 6 June 2014. Data were weighted to be representative of all GB adults aged 18+.

⁶ These are councils which have responsibility for housing – including all unitary authorities, all London boroughs, all district councils, and all Metropolitan boroughs, as well as all Welsh and Scottish authorities, and the NI Housing Executive.

⁷ Based on FOI responses from 288 authorities (76% response rate).

⁸ All councils in the UK which had a responsibility for housing were asked for this data including in Wales where Welsh Housing Quality Standards are followed instead of Lifetime Homes standard.

⁹ Based on responses from 288 authorities (74% response rate).

¹⁰ Roys, M. Davidson, M. Nicol, S. Ormandy, D. and Ambrose, P. (2010) The real cost of poor housing. BRE.

¹¹ Based on responses from 331 authorities (86% response rate)

¹² Lifetime Homes standard were developed by Habinteg and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, details are available here: <http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/pages/about-us.html>

¹³ Estimates vary. The CLG Housing Standards Review Consultation Impact Assessment estimated the average cost as £1,100. A previous CLG estimate put the average cost at £547. DCLG The Future of the Code for Sustainable Homes, 2007.

ROYAL COLLEGE OF GPs ENSURING ALL NEW HOMES ARE DISABLED-FRIENDLY



Dr Maureen Baker CBE,
Chair of the Royal College of GPs

GPs are expert medical generalists. We are trained to treat the 'whole' person, and this includes taking into account not only our patients' physical and mental health, but the social issues, such as housing, that might be impacting on their health and wellbeing.

As a practising GP and Chair of the Royal College of GPs, I know first-hand that the living conditions of our patients can have an enormous influence on their health.

It could be that a patient has tripped and fallen down stairs, or has slipped in the bath or shower because there aren't any grab rails. Poor housing causes some of our patients pain and misery on a daily basis .

It can also be frustrating for GPs when we see the same patient three times in three weeks, with new injuries each time, because they can't live in their own home safely.

GPs always have our patients' best interests at heart – and sometimes this involves urging them to get a stair-lift fitted, or to install grab rails in the bathroom, or to lower their front step. It's demoralising to be told that this isn't possible because they can't afford it, the council won't pay for it, or their homes cannot be adapted.

The Royal College of GPs – the UK's largest medical Royal College that represents over 50,000 family doctors – is pleased to support this important report. Ensuring that all new homes are disabled-friendly can have a direct impact on alleviating pressures across the NHS by keeping people out of hospital and making our society healthier.

It's a cost-effective policy and it makes sense - making sure that all new builds are disabled-friendly costs just £1,100 per home. If making homes more accessible can reduce falls in the home by just 10%, then the costs will be recouped in no time and we'll have healthier and happier residents as a result.

I hope that developers, local councils and the government will listen to the people with disabilities and their families who speak to us through this report, and ensure that they make the right decisions, for our patients and the NHS.

PAPWORTH TRUST

SUPPORTING DISABLED PEOPLE FOR ALMOST A CENTURY



Vicky McDermott
Chief Executive of the Papworth Trust

At the Papworth Trust we have been supporting disabled people for almost a century – and we've seen the world change enormously in that time.

But despite increased equality and the significant (and ongoing) shift in public attitudes to disability since our foundation in 1917, the progress that has been made on delivering homes that work for disabled people has not kept up the pace.

There are still far too many disabled people who can't rent or buy a home which is right for them. One in four of our customers told us last year that they could not get around their home safely, while two in five said that needed help to do everyday things like cooking and washing, because of the way their home was built.

For disabled people, having an inaccessible home often means care and support for everyday activities from cooking to going to the bathroom. This restricts people's independence and leaves them reliant on others, barriers which can be reduced or removed altogether with the right housing.

And that's why councils' and governments' failure to get to grips with this issue just doesn't make sense. It costs £5,000 a year to provide care to someone for just one hour a day – and if you can't get into your kitchen or bathroom without help, one hour is just the beginning of the support you need.

Investing in disabled-friendly housing – as we are doing in our visionary space saving accessible bungalows – just makes sense. It cuts health and care costs to councils, it helps disabled people to live independently, and it helps people to improve their lives and gives them the choice of where to live and work.

That's why I'm so happy to support this campaign from Leonard Cheshire Disability – because building disabled-friendly homes works.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Our research has found that national governments and councils are failing to provide the disabled-friendly housing the UK needs.

While 300,000 disabled people are stuck on housing waiting lists across Great Britain, developers are blocking attempts to make sure the right homes are built for our population. In effect, we are putting industry interests before the health and wellbeing of our society.

From Sue in Cornwall, who has had 40 falls in the past two years because her home is not fit for her needs, to Ruby in the Vale of Glamorgan, who is losing precious time with her disabled son due to the inaccessibility of their house, to Philip in Liverpool, who has been stuck in the same job for a decade because he can't find a home anywhere else in the country he can live in, disabled people are paying the price.

Developers are trying to avoid the paltry costs of making homes disabled-friendly, even though they can afford it and still stay profitable. Last year, the top 10 housing developers made combined profits of £1.6bn – that is more than thirteen times the cost of building every new home in England to Lifetime Homes standard.¹⁴

Sadly, it appears that government was more than ready to listen to developers, and is making it more difficult to build disabled-friendly homes, by adding hurdles for local authorities to jump through before being able to insist on Lifetime Homes or fully wheelchair accessible standards.¹⁵

There is a need for radical action at national and local level:

- Partly because of the human misery this lack of disabled-friendly homes is already causing – earlier this year, we revealed the Hidden Housing Crisis that is affecting thousands of disabled people across the country;¹⁶
- Partly because more and more of us can expect to become disabled in later life;¹⁷
- Partly because the lack of housing stops disabled people from moving around the country and getting jobs, harming our economy;¹⁸ and
- Partly because of the knock-on costs for other services. People living in unsuitable homes need more care – if someone can't get upstairs to their bathroom, they may need someone to come and help them have a strip wash at the kitchen sink every day. If someone falls down the stairs because they can't install a stair lift the NHS will end up paying to treat them.

Making all new homes disabled-friendly is an obvious solution that comes at zero-cost to the Exchequer. We must act now to increase the number of disabled-friendly homes, rather than living to regret it when thousands more disabled people are living in misery, and NHS and care costs are spiralling.

¹⁴ 133,930 homes were built in England in the 12 months to March 2014 – subtracting the 18,000 homes built in London, and 10% of homes built elsewhere, which were already built to Lifetime Homes standard, would leave 104,337. It costs less than £1,100 for homes to be built to Lifetime Homes standard – according to The CLG Housing Standards Review Consultation Impact Assessment, 2013

¹⁵ <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2014-15/deregulation.html>, clause 32 (4) accessed 08/10/14

¹⁶ The Hidden Housing Crisis, Leonard Cheshire Disability, 2014

¹⁷ As footnote 4

¹⁸ See Philip's case study, page 17

MORE THAN 4 IN 5 (83%) COUNCILS DO NOT HAVE AN ACCESSIBLE HOUSING REGISTER



OUR COMMITMENT

At Leonard Cheshire Disability, we have made a commitment to build all our new properties to Lifetime Homes Standards and to build at least 10% to be fully wheelchair accessible (currently almost every single property we own is fully wheelchair accessible).

Like any organisation, we are conscious of costs and ensuring value for money – and if we, as a charity, can make this commitment, we believe that every developer and local authority in the country can and should do the same.

But we shouldn't wait for the goodwill of developers to change. We need all political parties to commit to:

- Building all new homes to (easily adaptable) Lifetime Homes standard;
- Building 10% of new homes to fully wheelchair accessible standards;
- Requiring every local authority to operate an accessible housing register or comparable system; and
- Ensuring all new garden cities are exemplars of accessibility – with both homes and neighbourhoods built to disabled-friendly standards.

WHAT ARE THE COUNCILS DOING?

SARAH BEENY

While filming my recent series of 'Double your house for half the money' I met an inspiring couple, Laura and Adam Margolis, who had decided to upgrade their home in Hertfordshire to make it more disabled-friendly.

I watched the couple transform a house with a warren of inaccessible rooms and narrow corridors into an open and spacious home that suited their family and fitted their lifestyle.

Adam, who has progressive MS, no longer has to feel like a prisoner in his own home, confined to a limited number of rooms. He can now go to the bathroom without help, answer the doorbell, and put his children to bed. Before the renovation, he couldn't even get into his children's bedrooms to wish them goodnight.

This problem is more widespread than we think. Over the whole of England, the government estimates that only five per cent of homes are fully possible to visit, let alone live in for disabled people.

For those who don't have the money to adapt their properties, or whose homes just cannot be adapted in the way they need, the choice of suitable housing is negligible – leaving many people trapped in houses that are totally unsuitable for their needs. At worst, these houses of horror are causing severe discomfort, health problems and isolation.

That's why I am joining the call by Leonard Cheshire to urge the government to make sure all new homes are built to be adaptable for disabled people and 10 per cent are built to be wheelchair friendly.



WHAT ARE THE COUNCIL DOING?

Adam's local council is Hertsmere. They have not responded to our freedom of information requests.

It is a disgrace that the vast majority of councils cannot answer two very simple questions about disabled-friendly housing in their area:

- How many disabled-friendly homes do we have?
- Where are the disabled-friendly homes that we do have?

Our research found that councils are not thinking about disabled-friendly housing, despite the growing number of disabled and older residents:

- A third of councils (32%) either did not mention disability at all in their housing plan, or mentioned it only in passing;¹⁹
- Of those councils that have a housing plan, fewer than 1 in 5 (17%) set out plans to build disabled-friendly homes in the year ahead;²⁰ and
- Only 5% of housing authorities have carried out any analysis of the additional costs of inadequate housing to health and social care.²¹

This is despite councils' legal responsibility to 'periodically review the housing needs of its area' in order to be able to respond appropriately.²²

Legislation also requires that councils 'have regard to the special needs of chronically sick or disabled persons'.²³ But when so many disabled people are left stuck in inaccessible homes, forced to wash at their kitchen sink, and sleep on the sofa, how many councils can be confident they aren't breaking the law?

How many disabled-friendly homes do we have?

Our research also found that councils do not know how many of the homes in their area are disabled-friendly, or how long it would take to make them disabled-friendly:²⁴

16%
Fewer than 1 in 6

councils could provide any data on the number of homes in their area which were wheelchair accessible

10%
Only 1 in 10

councils could provide any data on the number of homes in their area built to Lifetime Home Standards²⁵

9%
Fewer than 1 in 10

could provide any information on how many homes were built to wheelchair accessible standards in the past three years

7%
Only one in 14

could provide any information on how many homes were built to Lifetime Homes Standard in the past three years

¹⁹ Based on responses from 222 English and Wales housing authorities (84% response rate). Councils in Scotland and NI were not asked this question.

²⁰ Based on responses from 222 English and Wales housing authorities (84% response rate)

²¹ Based on responses from 331 authorities (86% response rate)

²² Housing Act 1985, Section 8

²³ Section 3 of Chronically Sick and Disabled Person's Act 1970, as amended

²⁴ This section is based on FOI responses from 288 authorities (76% response rate)

²⁵ All councils in the UK which had a responsibility for housing were asked for this data including in Wales where Welsh Housing Quality Standards are followed instead of Lifetime Homes standard.

ARE ANY COUNCILS GETTING IT RIGHT?

Even for those authorities able to provide data, the overwhelming majority only knew how much social housing was built to disabled-friendly standards.

The owner-occupier sector and the private rented sector were almost entirely ignored, despite the latter being the fastest growing housing sector of the past 15 years²⁶ – and the place most disabled people will call home.

Where are the disabled-friendly homes that we do have?

Even where disabled-friendly homes do exist – they remain extremely difficult for disabled people to find.

The best way for disabled people to identify homes that work for them is via an accessible housing register, or comparable system.²⁷

Such a register brings together vital information about disabled-friendly homes such as how many properties in the area have a stairlift; whether a particular property is wheelchair accessible; the number of steps to the front door; and whether there is a stairlift or walk-in shower.

But once more, councils are not meeting their residents' basic right to find a home that is suitable for their needs. More than 4 in 5 councils in (83%) in the UK do not have an accessible housing register or similar system.

This means that the burden for finding disabled-friendly homes falls solely on disabled people. This generally involves endless visits to homes with little or no information about their accessibility available. Some of these homes will have steps, almost none will have a stairlift, and many won't even have a bathroom downstairs.

Even when disabled people visit these homes, it will often be almost impossible to tell without an occupational therapist or surveyor whether the walls are strong enough to install the extra features like grab bars that they need. And this process is even more complicated and time consuming for people who lack mobility or have low energy levels.

In the worst case scenario, the lack of an accessible housing register will mean features like grab bars, adjustable sinks and panel lifts are torn out of disabled-friendly homes, so non-disabled people can move into them. This causes a double whammy of costing the council more money and reducing the supply of disabled-friendly homes even further.

While the majority of councils across the country are failing to meet their responsibilities to the disabled-people and their families in their area, there are some examples of good practice, scattered around the country.

Examples of the good work being done include:

- **In London**, under the London Plan, 87% of new homes were built to Lifetime Homes standard in 2012, and 9% were built to full wheelchair accessible standards;²⁸
- **In Northern Ireland and Wales** all social housing is built to Lifetime Homes standard,²⁹ and Welsh Quality Housing Standards, respectively;³⁰
- **In Scotland**, an accessible housing register – Home2Fit – is currently being trialled on a national basis;³¹
- **In Dartford**, in the South East, the council offers a discount to the Community Infrastructure Levy³² for developers who build to Lifetime Homes standard, effectively subsidising their construction;³³

- **In councils like Rother and Brighton and Hove – both on the South Coast** – they use section 106 agreements³⁴ to ensure that some disabled-friendly homes are built where a development is large or profitable; and
- **In Central Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire** they require a set percentage of new homes to be built to Lifetime Homes standard and fully wheelchair accessible standards, in all new developments.

It is vital that all councils and national governments open their eyes to what needs to be done, and start delivering for their disabled residents and their families.

²⁸ London Plan Annual Monitoring Report 9, 2011-12 – figures as part of annual targets of 100% Lifetime Homes, 10% wheelchair accessible homes

²⁹ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hsdiv-housing/ha_guide/hag-index/hagds-design-standards-contents/hagds-lifetime-homes.htm: 5.3.4 accessed 08/10/14

³⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housing-and-regeneration/housing-quality/welsh-standard/?lang=en> accessed 08/10/14

³¹ <http://www.home2fit.org.uk/> accessed 08/10/14

³² The community infrastructure levy is a new levy that local authorities in England and Wales can choose to charge on new developments in their area: <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/giving-communities-more-power-in-planning-local-development/supporting-pages/community-infrastructure-levy>

³³ Based on FOI responses

³⁴ Planning obligations are legal contracts made under section 106 of the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act – they place specific requirements on developers who wish to build in the local area: <http://www.guildford.gov.uk/s106> accessed 08/10/14

²⁶ The private rented sector has increased from 9.9% of all households in 1999 to 17.4% of all households in 2012: The Private Rented Sector - Communities and Local Government Committee.

²⁷ Based on responses from 288 authorities (74% response rate)

ARE COUNCILS USING THE AVAILABLE TOOLS?

There are a number of tools available to councils to help them deliver more disabled-friendly homes.

Section 106 agreements

Section 106 agreements³⁵ can be used to legally require developers to build to disabled-friendly standards.

However, councils are routinely failing to put these agreements to good use and are allowing developers to get away with building lower quality housing which does not work for disabled people.

Of the almost 22,000 section 106 agreements which were signed in Great Britain over the past three years:³⁶

2%
(492 agreements) required the construction of wheelchair accessible homes; and

7%
(1,467 agreements) required the construction of Lifetime Homes/ Welsh Quality Standard Homes.

This means that in the vast majority of cases, councils missed the opportunity to deliver disabled-friendly homes for their residents.

If there is any hope for the hundreds of thousands of disabled people and their families trapped in inaccessible homes across the UK, councils must urgently increase their use of section 106 agreements to deliver disabled-friendly homes.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

To help meet the small additional cost of investing in disabled-friendly homes, councils can also offer a discount to developers on their CIL – the amount councils charge developers for local infrastructure projects.

However, less than 1% of councils which use the CIL do actually offer a discount for disabled-friendly homes.³⁷ This means that developers have little incentive to build to the necessary higher standards.

Those councils that use CIL should carefully consider offering discounts to developers who are willing to surpass national standards and deliver disabled-friendly homes.

Are health and housing decisions integrated at council level?

The recently passed Care Act requires councils to provide care ‘with the aim of integrating services with those provided by the NHS or other health-related services (for example, housing)’.³⁸

However, housing often remains absent from discussions about health and care services. In fact half (50%) of all local authorities in England do not even have a housing representative on their health and wellbeing board.³⁹

Health and wellbeing boards⁴⁰

Health and wellbeing board members work together to understand their local community’s health and wellbeing needs, agree priorities, and encourage commissioners to work in a more joined-up way.

As a result, patients and the public should experience more joined-up services from the NHS and local councils in the future.

When key decisions are being made about which health and care services to offer, where to invest in preventative healthcare, and where to focus to reduce costs to the health and care services – it is absolutely vital that housing be considered. As we see later in this report, failing to do so is a big mistake. It’s impossible to fully consider health and care needs without first looking at people’s homes.

To remedy this situation, all councils should immediately appoint a housing representative to their health and wellbeing boards, and begin considering the housing needs of their residents.

³⁵ Section 75 in Scotland

³⁶ Based on responses from 273 authorities, out of a total of 380 (71% response rate).

³⁷ Based on responses from 282 housing authorities (86% response rate). 2 councils told us they offered a discount.

³⁸ Clause 3 of the Care Act 2014: Promoting integration of care and support with health services etc.

³⁹ Based on responses from 131 top tier authorities (86% response rate)

⁴⁰ http://www.local.gov.uk/health/-/journal_content/56/10180/3510973/ARTICLE#sthash.8MDu8RB9.dpuf



GOVERNMENT MUST INSIST THAT HOUSING DEVELOPERS MAKE ALL FUTURE HOMES DISABLED-FRIENDLY. IT'S THE VERY LEAST THEY CAN DO FOR DISABLED PEOPLE



WHAT IS NATIONAL GOVERNMENT DOING?

Though decisions about housing and planning rest with local councils, the government in Westminster is responsible for maintaining the overall planning system throughout England.

Indeed, in 2008, the previous government committed to building all homes to Lifetime Homes standard by 2013.⁴¹ Sadly, for disabled and older people and their families and friends things have gone backwards since then.

Despite the Minister for Disabled People (Mark Harper MP) recently saying that he “agree[s] that there is a need for accessible housing which supports disabled people to be independent and to live life to the full”,⁴⁴ the government is actually making it harder for councils to build any disabled-friendly homes – via legislation called the Deregulation Bill, introduced in 2013.

Extra administrative burdens

The Bill will mean that councils will have to have collected detailed and costly evidence before they can ask developers to build homes to either Lifetime Homes or wheelchair accessible standards.

But our research shows that councils simply do not have this evidence in place. We question whether it is cost-effective to ask each council to do their own evidence-gathering exercise, especially at a time when council resources are being squeezed.⁴⁵ There is a real danger that councils will feel unable to commit time and money to gathering evidence and therefore will fail to put any standards in place. There is also no clarity as to how many disabled and older people a local authority will need to have to justify 100% Lifetime Home Standards or a certain proportion of wheelchair accessibility.



Planning Ahead: Austria
In Austria, which is among Europe’s highest spenders on health and care,⁴² building homes which disabled and older people can live in for as long as possible is already considered best practice, and key to efforts to manage the cost of an ageing population.

Since 2008, municipal government has required most new homes to be built to the equivalent of Lifetime Homes standard, and has introduced measures to retrofit existing homes to ensure disabled and older people can live in them for longer. We think this approach should be replicated across the UK.⁴³

⁴¹ <http://www.tendingdc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/housing/strategies/housing%20strategy/Priorities%20statement%20for%20East%20of%20England%202010%20-%202014.pdf>

⁴² For Future Living: Innovative Approaches to Joining Up Housing and Health, IPPR, 2014

⁴³ Klenovec M (2013) Independent living in Austria & review of European Access Awards, Centre for Inclusive Design

⁴⁴ Fulfilling Potential Forum 23rd October 2014, written question response

⁴⁵ Local government spending: where is the axe falling, IFS, 2012

The Bill will also put councils at risk of being sued by developers if they insist on disabled-friendly standards without having collected this evidence. Imposing this new hurdle of evidence gathering on councils is both unnecessary and counter-productive. The case for more disabled-friendly housing is clear and will benefit not just disabled people and their families, but also the NHS and care services, and ultimately the whole population.

The Deregulation Bill and the London Plan

The Mayor of London made his views of the Deregulation Bill clear when he outlined his ongoing lobbying of the government to ensure London retains the power to set housing standards without the need for additional evidence.

Question No: 2014/4063

Darren Johnson

What lobbying are you undertaking to ensure that the Deregulation Bill doesn't strip you and the boroughs of the power to set requirements for Lifetimes Homes and fully wheelchair accessible standards?

Written response from the Mayor

I have lobbied government to ensure that both I and the London boroughs are able to set equivalent standards under the proposed national standards regime and will continue to do so in my response to the current government consultation.⁴⁶

Localism at risk

The Bill and the accompanying Housing Standard Review⁴⁷ will also entirely remove local councils' ability to require private developers to build to fully wheelchair accessible standards, whatever evidence they have collected about local need. This is despite the government's flagship commitment to give communities more power in planning local development,⁴⁸ and flies in the face of the localism agenda.

The impact of this change will also be significant. The London plan has, until now, required 10% of all large developments, private or social, to be either wheelchair adaptable or accessible.⁴⁹ The Bill will remove the GLA and local authorities' power to decide this at a time when overall government policy is moving in favour of further devolution of decision-making.

In effect, this will mean that before a wheelchair user can move into one of these homes, they will likely have to install a platform lift and an accessible kitchen themselves – adding around £20,000 to the purchase cost of a home. For disabled people, who are more likely to live below the poverty line anyway,⁵⁰ this is deeply unfair, and for many it could be one extra cost too many.

While not all disabled-friendly properties need to be fully wheelchair accessible from the moment they are built, it is absurd that local authorities will be banned from requiring any private homes to be built to these standards.

This ban will hold even if there is a severe shortage of wheelchair accessible properties in the area and there are wheelchair users lining up to buy homes that work for them.

THE HUMAN MISERY OF LIVING IN AN INACCESSIBLE HOME

In our previous report, *The Hidden Housing Crisis (2014)*, we revealed the human misery that results from the lack of disabled-friendly homes.

72%

Almost three quarters

of British adults reporting mobility problems say that the door to their property is not properly accessible (for example, because it has steps, or no ramp),

50%

Half

say they do not have stairs big enough for a stairlift to be fitted.⁵¹

That means that disabled people are stuck washing at their kitchen sink, sleeping in their lounges, and unable to get upstairs to tuck their children into bed.

People like Sue (who featured in our previous report), who has had more than 40 falls in the past two years because her house is not fit for her needs, are experiencing that misery every day. And Sue is not the only one – Ruby and Catherine, below, are facing similar struggles.

⁴⁶ http://questions.london.gov.uk/QuestionSearch/searchclient/questions/question_278194 accessed 29/10/14

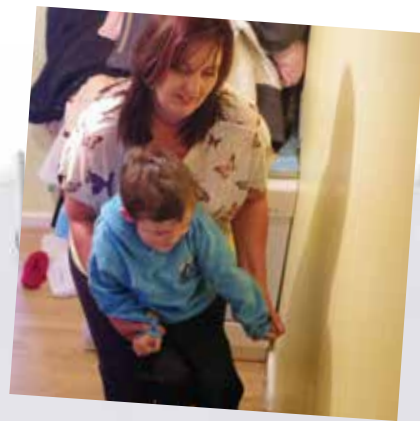
⁴⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/354154/140911__HSR_CONSULTATION_DOCUMENT_-_FINAL.pdf

⁴⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/giving-communities-more-power-in-planning-local-development/supporting-pages/neighbourhood-planning> accessed 12/11/14

⁴⁹ Fully accessible homes are ready for a wheelchair user to move into straight away, while adaptable homes may require the installation of features such as a platform lift, an accessible kitchen and/or an accessible bathroom

⁵⁰ Around a third of all disabled adults aged 25 to retirement are living in low-income households. This is twice the rate of that for non-disabled adults, as it has been throughout the last decade: <http://www.poverty.org.uk/40/index.shtml> accessed 08/10/14

⁵¹ ComRes interviewed 2,006 GB adults aged 18+ online between the 4 and 6 June 2014; including 238 who self-identified as having a mobility impairment. Data were weighted to be representative of all GB adults aged 18+.



CASE STUDY

RUBY NASH

Ruby lives in Barry in South Wales with her son Cody, who has the degenerative condition Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Cody currently finds it difficult getting up the stairs on his own and this will only get worse as time goes on and his illness progresses.

Ruby: "I'm very worried about what will happen if we have to stay here once Cody has to use a wheelchair. He won't be able to sleep in his bedroom, or use the bathroom privately, and the impact on his life, and our lives, will be enormous.

"There are new developments being built in Barry, but neither the council nor private developers are building enough homes to cater for families like us who need them.

"We are gold priority on the local housing association list, but there's not a single available home in the area which is suitable.

"The life expectancy for someone living with Duchenne is only 27 years. Our precious time together shouldn't be wasted struggling to get out of the front door, or get down the stairs. We should be able to enjoy our lives together while we can."

WHAT ARE THE COUNCIL DOING?

Ruby's local council is the Vale of Glamorgan, and this is the housing situation there:⁵²

- 253 disabled people are on the housing waiting list;
- They are building 10 new wheelchair accessible properties this year (unfortunately Ruby is 17th on the housing list and won't get one);
- They have made no estimate of the additional cost to health or social services as a result of inadequate/inaccessible housing;
- There is no housing representative on the Local Service Board;
- But they do run an Accessible Housing Register – so they know where their wheelchair accessible properties are; and
- All social housing in the area has been built to Welsh Housing Quality Standards.

⁵² Based on FOI responses



CASE STUDY

CATHERINE SCARLETT

Catherine lives in a terraced house with her husband and three children. 10 years ago she renovated the house doing a lot of the work herself. They have been very happy living there ever since.

But three years ago Catherine acquired Motor Neurone Disease and is getting worse every month. She can currently walk a few feet without assistance, but eventually she will need a wheelchair to move even that far.

Over the past year, Catherine's disability has turned her home into a nightmare.

"I only have one bathroom, upstairs, which is at the top of a steep and narrow staircase, and I can't install one downstairs because there just isn't enough room. I can't even have a commode as my downstairs is open plan with the front door opening directly into the street.

"That means I spend almost all my time alone in my bedroom, so I can be near the toilet. It's lonely, depressing, and extremely frustrating.

"I'm terrified that I'll be stuck living like this for the rest of my life. We're desperately looking for a home we can move into – but I'm worried we won't be able to afford anywhere – especially as I can't do the renovations anymore. But because I own, I had to get support from my local MP to even get onto the council housing waiting list, and I have no idea whether I'm anywhere near the top.

"I've worked hard all my life. It just feels really unfair that I'm stuck now, with nowhere to go. It's terrifying how quickly this has happened, and that I can't do anything to save the home, and life, that my family and I have built together."

WHAT ARE THE COUNCIL DOING?

Catherine's local council is the East Riding of Yorkshire, and this is the housing situation there:⁵³

- 514 disabled people are on the housing waiting list;
- They have made no estimate of the need for disabled-friendly homes in the area;
- Neither have they made an estimate of the additional costs to health and care spending of not having enough accessible homes;
- They do not have a housing representative on their Health and Wellbeing Board;
- But they do run something similar to an Accessible Housing Register – so they know where their wheelchair accessible properties are.

⁵³ Based on FOI responses

CASE STUDY

PHILIP BARTON



Philip is a wheelchair user who lives in Merseyside, where he works as a planning consultant.

He has lived in his current house for 12 years, a house that he describes as 'a wonderful wheelchair accessible property', but one that he had to wait two years to move in to. At the time it was the only wheelchair accessible property in the area.

For the past two years Philip has been trying to move to a different area of the country in order to develop his career. So far, he has been offered two jobs, but has been forced to turn them down because of a lack of suitable housing.

"I was offered a job at Oxford council, and asked them to help me find a home in the area in order to get to work. But the only home I was offered was a two-storey house with no access to the top floor. It was miles from the city centre, and they couldn't tell me if I could get my wheelchair on the buses in the area. It was extremely frustrating.

"I live in a wonderful property now, but I am trapped here because I simply cannot find comparable accommodation anywhere else. This prevents me from taking job opportunities and keeps me isolated. Working from home is the only practical way for me to be employed.

"Making changes to the fabric of existing houses or flats is financially impossible if I'm not in work but I need a certain standard of accommodation in order to be able to work – it's a Catch 22 situation."

"I live in a wonderful property now, but I am trapped here because I simply cannot find comparable accommodation anywhere else."

THE GROWING NEED FOR DISABLED-FRIENDLY HOMES

More than one in ten British adults (11%) - over 5 million people in Great Britain - say that they have a mobility problem.⁵⁴

Every year, more than 800,000 people become disabled - this could be from a car or sports accident, an illness like multiple sclerosis or a stroke, an injury on the battlefield, or simply due to old age. The total number of disabled people is also rising. Many disabled people – with a broad range of impairments – are living longer due to advances in medical treatment and social support.⁵⁵

For example, over the past 30 years, the life expectancy of people with Down's Syndrome has more than doubled (from 25 in 1983 to 55 today),⁵⁶ and for people with cystic fibrosis it has tripled (from 14 in 1980 to 41 today).⁵⁷ Stroke mortality rates have also halved over the last 20 years.⁵⁸

The population of the UK is also ageing, as the graph (below) demonstrates. The Prime Minister himself recognised the challenges and opportunities presented by an aging population as far back as 2006. In a speech to Age Concern (now Age UK) he said that:

"The biggest generation in history is retiring. 11 million baby boomers are marching towards 65 – the first of them reached that milestone this year. Today one in six people are aged 65 or over. In just thirty years it will be more than one in four."⁵⁹

That's why it is so alarming that only 5% of homes in England can be visited by someone using a wheelchair.⁶⁰

There are one fifth as many 'visitable' homes as there are people with mobility impairments.⁶¹ They are a small fraction of the number of homes that someone with a mobility impairment might be invited to visit.

⁵⁴ ComRes interviewed 2,006 GB adults aged 18+ online between the 4 and 6 June 2014; including 238 who self-identified as having a mobility impairment. Data were weighted to be representative of all GB adults aged 18+. Extrapolation was based on the Census 2011 data (47,754,569 people aged 18+ in Great Britain)

⁵⁵ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Social exclusion and the onset of disability, (2003)

⁵⁶ http://www.nads.org/pages_new/facts.html accessed 08/10/14

⁵⁷ <http://www.disabled-world.com/health/respiratory/cystic-fibrosis/life-expectancy.php> accessed 08/10/14 Stroke statistics, The Stroke

⁵⁸ Association, <http://www.stroke.org.uk/sites/default/files/Stroke%20statistics.pdf> accessed 17/11/14

⁵⁹ http://conservativehome.blogs.com/torydiary/files/david_cameron_ageing_speech.pdf accessed 17/11/14

⁶⁰ English Housing Survey, Profile of English Housing 2012

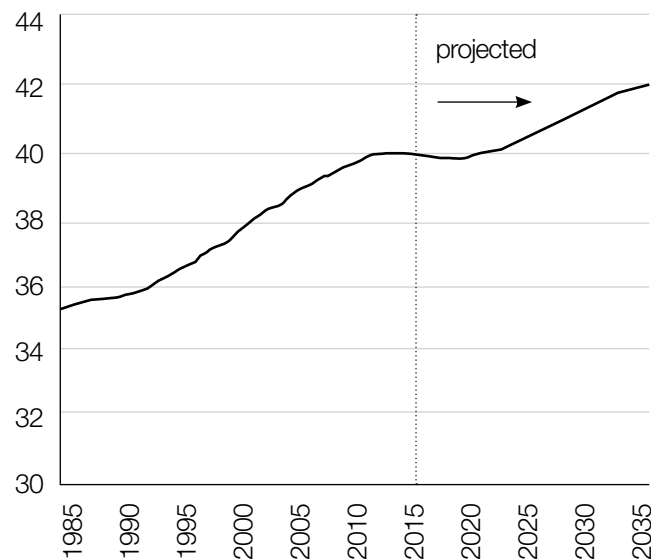
⁶¹ More than one in ten British adults (11%), which is around 5 million people in Great Britain, ComRes interviewed 2,006 GB adults aged 18+ online between the 4 and 6 June 2014. Data were weighted to be representative of all GB adults aged 18+. English Housing Survey, Profile of English Housing 2012 – there are 22 million households in England, and 5% of them are 'visitable' meaning there are 1.1m visitable homes.

Further, our research has found that Britain's homes simply aren't ready for disabled or older people to live in them:⁶²

- Three quarters of the British public (75%) say that their home lacks an accessible front door (one that is easy to get into);
- Two thirds (65%) say that their home lacks a bathroom large enough to fit a wheelchair; and
- More than half (56%) say that their home lacks stairs wide enough to fit a stair lift.

We cannot carry on acting as if only a tiny proportion of the UK population is disabled, or pretending that more people won't become disabled and get older over the next 20 years. All the evidence is telling us the opposite.

The only practical and humane solution is to build more disabled-friendly homes now.



300,000 DISABLED PEOPLE ARE STUCK ON HOUSING WAITING LISTS ACROSS GREAT BRITAIN



⁶² ComRes interviewed 2,006 GB adults aged 18+ online between the 4 and 6 June 2014. Data were weighted to be representative of all GB adults aged 18+.

THE EXTRA COSTS OF UNFRIENDLY HOMES

Disabled-friendly homes are not just good for the people who need them. They are good for the country, the taxpayer, and public services.

Building disabled-friendly homes is one of the best ways to reduce future demand for:

- The social care system, by allowing people to be more independent in their own homes, and need less support from care workers;
- The health system, by reducing falls and long stays in hospital following accidents; and
- Home adaptations, some of which will be council funded.

Care services

The pressures on care services are real and growing. A survey by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) revealed earlier this year that providing care services could soon become 'unsustainable' due to increasing budget pressures:

"Since 2010 spending on social care has fallen by 12 per cent at a time when the number of those looking for support has increased by 14 per cent. This has forced departments to make savings of 26 per cent in their budgets – the equivalent of £3.53 billion over the last four years."⁶³

Under these circumstances, councils must take every opportunity to spend precious resources wisely to support people who are reliant on care services.

Providing disabled-friendly homes is an excellent opportunity to improve value for money in council spending, but as Carlene's story below demonstrates, some councils prefer to waste thousands of pounds every year helping someone to use their own kitchen, rather than increasing the number of disabled-friendly homes that would allow them to do it themselves.

CASE STUDY

CARLENE

Carlene is 33 and was born with cerebral palsy. She has used a wheelchair all her life.

Carlene cannot use her kitchen because the work surfaces are too high and the room too narrow, meaning that she is reliant on a care worker to prepare her meals.

Although Carlene has been on the disability housing register for eight years she has never been shown a house that meets her needs.

"I was given the option of this or nothing. Housing opportunities for disabled people are very limited and have been for a long time. There's a massive lack of choice. I'm not able to move anywhere better – despite the extra costs this house causes for the council."

Carlene's current housing reduces her independence and costs the council significant sums. Over eight years, the cost of providing care for one hour a day to help Carlene use her own home will likely have been more than £40,000.⁶⁴



WHAT ARE THE COUNCIL DOING?

Carlene's local council is Bolton, and this is the housing situation there:⁶⁵

- They have built only 5 wheelchair accessible properties in the past three years;
- They do not have a housing representative on their Health and Wellbeing Board;
- But they have built 135 homes to Lifetime Homes standard in the past 3 years;
- They have undertaken analysis of both the need for disabled-friendly homes, and the impact on health and social care costs of not having enough of such homes; and
- They operate something similar to an Accessible Housing Register.

⁶³ <http://www.adass.org.uk/social-care-services-unsustainable-adass/> accessed 08/10/14

⁶⁴ Cabinet Office Unit Cost database

⁶⁵ Based on FoI responses

5 MILLION PEOPLE IN THE UK HAVE A MOBILITY PROBLEM



The NHS

Healthcare is facing increasing financial pressure. According to the Kings Fund, a significant increase in funding is needed to prevent a financial crisis in the NHS.⁶⁶ As with care – it is absolutely vital that the NHS makes any savings that it can without endangering patients' health.

The cost to the NHS of unsuitable housing is enormous. The Building Research Establishment (BRE) estimates that poor housing costs the health service £600 million every year and that the total cost to society, including benefit expenditure and lost tax revenues from those left unable to work, could be as high as £1.5 billion.⁶⁷

And a significant proportion of this cost relates to the lack of disabled-friendly housing. When people's homes are not adapted for their needs, it is often dangerous for them to live there. They risk slipping in bathrooms without grab rails and hoists, falling down stairs with no stair lift, or scalding themselves in kitchens where they can't reach the kettle properly. When these accidents happen, it is the NHS that picks up the bill.

Falls

Falls are one of the most common reasons disabled and older people are admitted to hospital. But they could be dramatically reduced by ensuring homes are suitable for features such as stair lifts, grab rails and level access to buildings.

If more people who needed disabled-friendly housing had it, the NHS would save millions of pounds every year. Around 86,000 people fracture their hip every year. 95% of these fractures are the result of a fall, often in the home.⁶⁸ This costs the NHS £2.2 billion annually⁶⁹ – more than 2% of the total NHS budget.⁷⁰

The cost to the NHS of just one hip-fracture – perhaps caused by someone falling down the stairs – is estimated as £28,000. In comparison, it costs only £1,100 extra to build new homes to Lifetime Homes Standards.

If an increased stock of disabled-friendly homes reduced the total number of falls by only 10% it would save the NHS around £170 million a year. That is nearly half as much again than it would have cost to build every new home in England to Lifetime Homes standard in 2013/14 – around £115 million.⁷¹

Bed blocking

The NHS also incurs significant costs when people who are in hospital following an accident or illness, for example a stroke, can't return home once they are well enough because their home is no longer suitable for their needs.

Over the past year people spent over 40,000 unnecessary days in hospital beds despite being well enough to go home because their homes were not suitably adapted.⁷² These wasted bed days alone cost the NHS more than £11.2m every year.⁷³

⁶⁶ The NHS productivity challenge: experience from the front line, Kings Fund, 2014

⁶⁷ Roys, M. Davidson, M. Nicol, S. Ormandy, D. and Ambrose, P. (2010) The real cost of poor housing. BRE

⁶⁸ National Institute for Health & Care Excellence, Clinical knowledge summaries – Falls: risk assessment, January 2014.

⁶⁹ Cabinet Office, Unit Cost Database 2013, estimated costs of a hip fracture is £28,000.

⁷⁰ £96.5 billion

⁷¹ 133,930 homes were built in England in the 12 months to March 2014 – subtracting the 18,000 homes built in London, and 10% of homes built elsewhere, which were already built to Lifetime Homes standard, would leave 104,337. It costs less than £1,100 for homes to be built to Lifetime Homes standard – according to The CLG Housing Standards Review Consultation Impact Assessment, 2013

⁷² NHS England, Delayed Transfer of Care, NHS Organisations, England, August 2010 - August 2014. For the period September 2013 – August 2014. Category (F) Awaiting community equipment and adaptations. Total 40,681.

⁷³ Hospital bed day cost is £273 (source: NHS Reference Costs 2012/13)

CASE STUDY

HANNAH

Hannah has been disabled since 1990, but her condition has deteriorated significantly in the past few years.⁷⁴

“One day I felt very tired so I went to bed to sleep it off, and after a few days I couldn’t use my legs. I had to have rehabilitation to learn to walk again. For two years I have had to use a commode on the ground floor as I have problems using the stairs.”

Hannah is unsteady on her feet, and has to go up and down the stairs on her backside to prevent her from falling. Even moving around like this, Hannah has fallen down the stairs a few times and her doctor is very worried by her bruises. She is concerned it is only a matter of time before Hannah suffers a serious injury.

“I’ve been told I can’t have a stair lift installed in my home – but there’s also nowhere for me to move to. I’ve been trying for two years and have had no luck. I don’t know how long I can live like this before having a serious accident and ending up in hospital.

I just want to live somewhere safe, that’s not asking too much, is it?”

In order to maintain the anonymity of ‘Hannah’ we have changed her name and have not provided information from her council.

Home adaptations

As people become disabled and/or get older, their housing needs change. While some people will need to move to new, disabled-friendly properties, others will want to carry out adaptations to their current home to allow them to continue to live where they feel comfortable.

One way of paying for these adaptations is to apply for the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) from the local council. But the funding available for DFG is simply not enough to meet demand. In 2011, the Department for Communities and Local Government found that the total demand for DFG was more than 10 times the amount of funding provided (£1.9bn compared to the government allocation that year of £157m).⁷⁶

Under the current system, applicants for DFG are often left waiting years, sometimes more than a decade, to receive the funding they need to make basic adaptations to their home.

Disabled-friendly homes are, by design, cheaper and easier to adapt than any other homes. For less than £1,100 new homes can be built to Lifetime Homes standard – which can save councils and families tens or hundreds of thousands of pounds in the long run.

Installing a stair lift in a Lifetime Home can cost as little as £2,400,⁷⁷ but if the wall by the stairs is not strong enough to support a stair lift’s weight, the cost of replacing or reinforcing it could be five or ten times that.

Similarly, if a bathroom is big enough for a wheelchair to fit into by design (as they are in Lifetime Homes), the only cost to adapt the home may be around £300 to install grab bars.⁷⁸ But, if the doorway needs to be widened, if the bathroom needs to be ripped out and redesigned, and if the wall needs to be strengthened, costs could easily be 30 times higher.

This issue is high on the agenda for a broad range of national charities – Age UK recently called for older patients to be offered a home assessment when they came into contact with health services, in order to speed up hospital discharge and reduce further admissions. This could and should also apply to disabled people.

⁷⁴ In order to maintain the anonymity of ‘Hannah’ we have changed her name and have not provided information from her council.

⁷⁵ Housing in Later Life, Age UK, 2014

⁷⁶ www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn03011.pdf accessed 08/10/14

⁷⁶ www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn03011.pdf accessed 08/10/14

⁷⁷ <http://www.rica.org.uk/content/how-much-will-stairlift-cost> accessed 08/10/14

⁷⁸ Better outcomes, lower costs, ODI, 2005 prices

POOR HOUSING COSTS THE HEALTH SERVICE £600 MILLION EVERY YEAR



WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

Amending the Deregulation Bill

With a couple of simple tweaks, the Deregulation Bill could enshrine disabled-friendly homes as standard.

The Deregulation Bill will establish three levels of building standards in law:⁷⁹

- Category 1 – the equivalent of the current inadequate standards for homes;
- Category 2 – the rough equivalent of Lifetime Homes standard; and
- Category 3 – fully wheelchair accessible standards.

At the moment, there is no aspiration to increase the basic standard, despite the increasing need for disabled-friendly homes. We are calling for the government to put in place a timetable, ending no later than 2020, to move the minimum building standards up from Category 1 to Lifetime Homes (Category 2) standards. This is both eminently sensible and completely affordable, and mirrors the decisive steps taken in other countries such as Austria and Australia.⁸⁰

The differences between Category 1 and Lifetime Homes (Category 2) standards are fairly small. They include minor changes like guaranteeing a level or gently sloping entrance to the building and ensuring that walls and ceilings are strong enough to support someone's weight⁸¹ – but they are significant. They can transform a house from a prison, where someone is unable to get in and out of the front door – to one where a wheelchair can fit comfortably through the door. Or change a home where someone is trapped downstairs, washing at the kitchen sink and sleeping in the living room, to one where a stair lift and other adaptations can be easily installed, giving people the freedom to live independently and enjoy their homes like everyone else.

Although the government may be reluctant in these times of low economic growth⁸² to impose additional costs on developers, when looking at the overall benefits to the country, including the NHS and care services, the cost of building disabled-friendly homes pales in comparison. Despite some developers resisting these changes, they would in fact be easily affordable for the industry. There is no need to see disabled-friendly homes as a threat to profitability – providing better homes can be done at the same time as sustaining healthy profits.

The table below shows that had these disabled-friendly standards been in place last year, developers could still have counted on profits of £1.3bn.

	2013/14 costs
Top 10 developers' profits	+ £1,600m
Build all new homes to Lifetime Homes standard	- £115m
Build 10% homes to wheelchair accessible standards	- £151m
Top 10 developer profits if all homes disabled-friendly	+ £1,334m

These calculations do not include the wider benefits to the building industry of building homes that are more suitable for older and disabled people, which may well in fact far exceed the difference in profitability outlined above.

We need a building industry that will deliver the homes that the country needs as the population changes, and delivers long-term value for customers and society at large.

⁷⁹ Via regulation making powers

⁸⁰ Liveable Housing Design Guidelines, Liveable Housing, 2012

⁸¹ Full details available here: http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/data/files/For_Professionals/accessible_revisedlthstandard_final.pdf

⁸² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10613201> accessed 08/10/14

While there is rightly a focus on building more homes across the UK, the government and councils should be looking to deliver a housing market that works for everyone rather than bowing to some developers' knee-jerk opposition to disabled-friendly standards.

Councils taking the lead

As we have seen in London, setting a minimum standard for new developments – such as requiring all new homes to be built to Lifetime Homes standard, and 10% to fully wheelchair accessible standards, pays off.

The capital has been uniquely successful in ensuring that as many new homes as possible are built to disabled-friendly standards⁸³ – and building has not suffered as a result.⁸⁴

But so far other councils have failed to act to provide suitable homes for their disabled and older residents, despite their legal responsibility for planning and housing and the positive effects that disabled-friendly housing can have on health, care and adaptation budgets.

Encouraging developers to build disabled-friendly homes

Where housing conditions are more difficult, for example in local authorities with little house building currently taking place, there are clear incentives councils can offer to both draw developers in and ensure they build disabled-friendly homes.

Dartford Council offers a discount to the Community Infrastructure Levy for developers who build to Lifetime Homes standard, effectively subsidising the small additional cost of Lifetime Homes.

Brighton and Hove Council use section 106 agreements to tie planning conditions to specific developments and ensure that some disabled-friendly homes are built where a development is particularly large or profitable.

While this approach lacks the impact of a minimum building standard, the use of discounts and individual agreements has proved successful in delivering disabled-friendly homes in councils across the country, and should be used more widely.

Accessible housing registers

It is highly inefficient for local authorities to manage housing without a knowledge of which homes are disabled-friendly homes. As an absolute minimum, every council across the UK should operate an accessible housing register or similar system.

Ideally though, the register should be operated over as wide an area as possible. The more homes covered by the register, the easier it will be for disabled people to find somewhere to live that works for them, move to get new jobs, and the less likely expensive adaptations will go to waste.

In London, a citywide register is in operation, while in Scotland their system works countrywide. As an interim step to a national system, local authorities in England, as well as Wales and Northern Ireland, should work in partnership with neighbouring authorities to offer a housing register for as large an area as possible.

Understanding the problem

Councils up and down the country remain in the dark about the quality of their housing stock, about the needs of their disabled residents, and about the cost to the health and social care system of subjecting disabled people to unsuitable housing. This must end.

Some councils have taken a proactive approach to collecting data, and where this data has been collected the results have been dramatic.

The Building Research Establishment (BRE) estimates that the cost of poor housing in Lambeth⁸⁵ and North Tyneside⁸⁶ alone will be £90m over 10 years – 90% of which could be saved if improvements to only the most dangerous homes were made.

In Gateshead, the council used research from BRE to secure £300,000 of funding from the Strategic Health Authority to tackle hazards associated with falling on stairs.⁸⁷

The information provided from data collection when properly deployed can attract investment, and save councils millions.

A survey of the housing stock and of the needs of disabled people should be undertaken by every council in the UK within the next 12 months, and the results made available online. This would also give councils evidence to allow them to bring in Lifetime Homes (Category 2) standard should the Deregulation Bill progress in its current form.

Integrate to save

From health and social care, to Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), integration has been the name of the game for government for some time. Well respected experts, from the 2004 Barker Review⁸⁸ to the 2014 Demos Commission on Residential Care,⁸⁹ have been recommending integration of our key public services for more than a decade.

The supply of disabled-friendly homes affects areas including health, social care, employment, family life and housing.

That is why all councils should ensure that housing is part of their Health and Wellbeing Boards. It is encouraging that half already do, but there is no reason why any should be leaving housing off the agenda.⁹⁰ When vital decisions are being made about public health and preventative health and social care spending, it is essential that disabled-friendly homes are part of councils' strategies.

Councils who do not currently have a housing representative on their health and wellbeing board should appoint one immediately, as should local service boards in Wales, and the closest equivalents in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

⁸³ London Plan Annual Monitoring Report 9, 2011-12

⁸⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-house-building>, Live Table 253

⁸⁵ A Health Impact Assessment: The cost of private sector housing and prospective housing interventions in Lambeth, BRE, 2012

⁸⁶ North Tyneside Housing Impact Assessment, BRE, 2012

⁸⁷ <http://www.bre.co.uk/page.jsp?id=2369> accessed 08/10/14

⁸⁸ Review of Housing Supply, Delivering Stability: Securing our Future Housing Needs: Final Report, Kate Barker, 2004

⁸⁹ <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/corc> accessed 08/10/14

⁹⁰ Only 50% of HWBs have a housing rep – based on responses from 131 top tier authorities (86% response rate)

CONCLUSION

Ensuring Garden Cities deliver for disabled people

There has been a clear commitment to delivering new settlements – called Garden Cities – from all three of the largest political parties.⁹¹

Ebbfleet, and any other Garden Cities which are built in the next 10 years, provide an excellent opportunity to deliver disabled-friendly homes and neighbourhoods, and act as beacons for the kind of communities we should aspire to for the future.

Clearly, as elsewhere, all homes in the new Garden Cities should be built to Lifetime Homes standard, and 10% to fully wheelchair accessible standards.

But more than that, where corporations are being established to develop the new cities, such as in Ebbfleet, it is important that these bodies put in place suitable arrangements to ensure they are properly informed of the housing needs of disabled people.

Only with these arrangements in place from the very start can pitfalls like inaccessible neighbourhoods and unsuitable transport be avoided. It would be a travesty if these exciting new developments became ‘no go areas’ for disabled people, like too many of their predecessors.

Case study: The Wolfson Prize

The second Wolfson Economics Prize, launched on 14 November 2013, asked entrants to answer the question ‘How would you deliver a new Garden City which is visionary, economically viable, and popular?’ and offered a prize of £250,000 to the winner.

After two rounds of entries, five finalists were identified including two – Shelter, the leading housing and homelessness charity, and Wei Yang & Partners and Peter Freeman – who committed to building all new homes in their (imagined) Garden Cities to Lifetime Homes standard, 10% as full wheelchair accessible standards, and 37.5% and 30% of homes respectively as affordable housing.

While we were disappointed that neither of these entries won the prize (Shelter came second) we were pleased to see that cost effective and innovative designs for disabled-friendly Garden Cities are being pulled together.

We hope to see more high quality designs of this kind from government in the years ahead, to ensure that Garden Cities are fit to meet the needs of the whole UK population in the years to come.

Disabled people are being let down by developers, their local councils, and national government. All three are thinking short-term and being railroaded by the house building lobby’s resistance to regulation, despite the obvious benefits for the whole of the UK.

Building more disabled-friendly homes will deliver better lives for millions of disabled people, their families, carers and friends, now and in the future. But it will also help the whole country as the NHS and social care systems are put under less pressure and disabled people are more able to take up jobs across the country.

National government, local government and individual developers all have a part to play. With an increasing number of disabled voters and customers, all should seize the opportunity to build the right homes for the future.

⁹¹ The Government has published a Garden Cities Prospectus, and committed to building a city at Ebbfleet, while the Lyons Housing Review proposed a similar approach for the Labour Party

⁹² Habinteg response to the Lyons Review - <http://www.habinteg.org.uk/main.cfm?Type=NI&objectid=2880> accessed 17/11/14

⁹³ Housing in Later Life, Age UK, 2014

⁹⁴ Making our Communities Ready for Ageing: A call to action, ILC, 2014

⁹⁵ Delivering housing, health and care outcomes, CIH and Tunstall, 2013

⁹⁶ Wheelchair Accessible Housing: Waiting for appropriate housing in England, Aspire, 2014

⁹⁷ Klenovec M (2013) Independent living in Austria & review of European Access Awards, Centre for Inclusive Design

⁹⁸ Liveable Housing Design Guidelines, Liveable Housing, 2012

**ONLY 5% OF HOUSING
AUTHORITIES HAVE
CARRIED OUT ANY
ANALYSIS OF THE
ADDITIONAL COSTS
OF INADEQUATE
HOUSING TO HEALTH
AND SOCIAL CARE**



THERE IS A GROWING RECOGNITION OF THE NEED FOR DISABLED-FRIENDLY HOMES



“WITHOUT A COMMITMENT TO IMPROVED ACCESS STANDARDS FOR ALL HOUSING WE RISK REPEATING PAST MISTAKES – BUILDING HOMES THAT NEED EXPENSIVE RETROFITTING LATER”⁹²

Habinteg



“ALL NEW MAINSTREAM AND SPECIALISED HOUSING SHOULD AUTOMATICALLY COMPLY WITH HIGHER ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS, TO REFLECT THE LIFETIME HOMES STANDARD.”⁹³

Age UK



“THE LIFETIME HOMES STANDARD SHOULD BE MADE MANDATORY FOR ALL NEW HOUSES ACROSS THE COUNTRY.”⁹⁴

International Longevity Centre



LOCAL HOUSING AUTHORITIES AND HOUSING PROVIDERS NEED TO INVEST IN “HOUSING THAT IS BUILT TO LIFETIME HOMES STANDARD AND THAT CAN BE ADAPTED AND UPDATED EASILY AND COST EFFECTIVELY.”⁹⁵

Chartered Institute for Housing



“LIFETIME HOMES STANDARD SHOULD BE PHASED IN TO NATIONAL BUILDING REGULATIONS REQUIREMENTS.”

IPPR



“AT THE HEART OF THE PROBLEM IS THE LACK OF HOUSING OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO DISABLED PEOPLE; THERE SIMPLY IS NOT ENOUGH WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE HOUSING IN THE COUNTRY TO MEET THE NEEDS OF OUR POPULATION.”⁹⁶

Aspire



“OUR NATION’S SHORTAGE OF DISABLED-FRIENDLY HOMES IS FORCING PEOPLE TO LIVE IN VICTORIAN CONDITIONS. WORSE STILL, AS THE NUMBER OF DISABLED AND OLDER PEOPLE GROWS, THIS HIDDEN CRISIS IS GOING TO GET WORSE AND WORSE.”

Leonard Cheshire Disability

If you agree with all the organisations calling for more Lifetime Homes standard, please sign our petition to let the government know what you want them to do: www.leonardcheshire.org/hometruths.