

# NUS Accessible Housing Campaign Briefing

## The Issues – What's wrong?

National government and local councils are failing to provide the accessible homes the UK needs. Disabled people are having to wash at their kitchen sinks, use commodes in their living rooms, sleep on sofas, or are unable to move out of their parent's home because of the lack of accessible homes.

### Britain's homes simply are not fit for people with mobility problems:

- 72% say that they do not have an accessible door into their building (that is one that is easy to get into)
- 52% say that they do not have doors and hallways wide enough for a wheelchair
- 50% say that they do not have stairs big enough for a stair-lift to be fitted

### There is a growing need for accessible homes:

- 300,000 disabled people are on housing waiting lists across Great Britain
- Only 5% of homes in England can be visited by someone using a wheelchair
- 5 million people in the UK have a mobility problem and could benefit from an accessible home
- One in six disabled adults and half of all disabled children live in housing that isn't suitable for their needs
- A recent report by Habinteg and the South Bank University estimated that there was an unmet housing need for wheelchair users in England alone of almost 80,000 homes.

### Finding an accessible home:

- 54% of those with mobility problems who have looked for accessible homes said they found them difficult to find.
- Only around one in twenty (4%) said they found them easy to find.

### Campus Accommodation

The lack of accessible housing has a huge effect on students in different circumstances. The majority of students studying in further education live in ordinary residential homes (rather than on campus) and so face many of the difficulties outlined above. In particular, students that are returning to education, who may have family responsibilities for example, will find it difficult to move into a suitable home in order to study at their chosen institution because of the lack of choice.

There is also a serious problem with a lack of accessible purpose built student accommodation, which includes university halls of residence. Student Accommodation, and particularly older buildings, often lack accessible doors, wide hallways or stair lifts, meaning that some disabled students can only

access the first floor. From the 2015/16 [Accommodation Costs Survey](#), it is apparent that 11% of higher education institutions do not provide any accommodation that could be adapted for use by a disabled student.

## **The Impact**

The effect that inaccessible housing has a person's quality of life can be extreme. Many disabled people have low esteem due to the undignified conditions in which they live, and it is all too easy to lose one's independence when unable to use the home, let alone leave it.

## **The power – who can fix the problem?**

### **Government –**

Though some areas, like London, have committed to building enough accessible homes, too many other areas are falling far behind. There is very little sign that governments in Westminster, Edinburgh or Cardiff, or in city and town halls across the country, have woken up to what needs to be done.

### **Developers / Housing Associations –**

The Lifetime Homes standard is a set of 16 design criteria that can be easily incorporated into the building of new properties to ensure that homes are accessible and inclusive for everyone. The cost of building a home to Lifetime Standards is £1,100. It's a small price to pay to stop people being trapped in their homes or unable to go upstairs. However, developers are trying to avoid the paltry costs of making homes accessible, 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. Developers are blocking attempts to make sure the right homes are built for our population. In effect, we are putting industry interests and

profits before the health and wellbeing of our society.

### **Councils –**

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

- How many accessible homes do you have?
- Where are the accessible homes that we do have?

Leonard Cheshire Disability's research found that councils are not thinking about accessible 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
- Of those councils that have a housing plan, fewer than 1 in 5 (17%) set out plans to build accessible homes in the year ahead
- Only 5% of housing authorities have carried out any analysis of the additional costs of inadequate housing to health and social care.

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

Legislation also requires that councils 'have regard to the special needs of chronically sick or disabled persons'. But given the current state of things, how many councils can be confident they aren't breaking the law?

### **University and College management**

Lobbying councils and government can ensure that enough housing in the private and public sectors is accessible, but we need to ensure campus accommodation is accessible too.

New accommodation buildings should be built to the Lifetime Homes Standard, and existing buildings should be audited for their accessibility, while any halls going through

privatisation should include accessibility requirements in their tendering process.

## The Asks – what we want to change

### We want...

- All new homes to be built to Lifetime Homes Standards.
- 10% of new homes to be built to full wheelchair accessibility standards.
- A commitment from all political parties that new settlements – e.g. the planned garden cities – are built with accessible housing.
- Housing associations and local authorities to work together to create accessible housing registers so people can find disabled-friendly social housing more easily.
- All new purpose built student accommodation to be built to the Lifetime Homes Standard.
- For the design process of any new accommodation buildings to include consultation with disabled students with a variety of needs.
- Governments to reform current housing rules – including section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act (1990), the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), the New Homes Bonus, and the Housing Bill (Wales) – to increase the supply of accessible homes nationwide.

### What are Lifetime Homes?

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. 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.

You can see the criteria online here:  
[www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/](http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/)

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.

## The Actions – What you can do

### Government -

- You can write to your MP or go to a meeting with them asking if they can support the asks above.
- If you are involved in a political party you can engage with their decision making structures and ask that the party supports the asks above

### Developers -

- Speak to local developers about how they will incorporate Lifetime Home Standards in their upcoming builds. Your council/MP should be able to inform you what new builds are being planned for your local area
- Share the stories of developers who are building good accessible houses to celebrate success and push others to follow their example

### Housing Associations -

- Get in contact with local Housing Associations who provide social housing on behalf of the local authority and encourage them to incorporate Lifetime Home Standards in the way that they build houses. You can also ask your council and MP to ask them to do the same
- Ask housing associations to contribute to accessible housing registers so people can find disabled-friendly social housing more easily.

### Councils -

- Meet with your local councillors as well as the committee with responsibility for housing and ask them what they are doing to improve accessible housing, ask that they support the above asks

- Ask to engage in the planning process of the council and sit on any meetings that discuss how planning and new buildings will be managed in the coming year
- Ask the council include Lifetime Homes Standards in their Local Plan for the area.
- Get other people involved with the campaign – set up social media pages to talk about the issues and share stories, connect with Disabled Peoples Organisations or other residents' groups in your local area and ask them to share the campaign with their supporters. You could also hold a stall or an event in your local community to talk to people about the problems and encourage them to take action

### **University and College Management –**

- Ask management that all new accommodation built on campus meets the Lifetime Homes Standard.
- Ask that an accessibility audit is carried out across existing accommodation to assess what adjustments can be made to increase the number of accessible rooms.
- Ask that any plans for new purpose built student accommodation which are being tendered to private companies also include a requirement that they will be built to the Lifetime Homes Standard.
- Offer to create of panel of disabled students with different needs so that all new designs can be consulted upon.

### **People Power -**

- Collect stories from people in your area who are experiencing issues with their housing
- Invite your local representatives to a meeting/question and answer event with a group of you to demonstrate that there are lots of people who care and are affected by this issue
- Ask your local council to provide you with the number of disabled people in your own area who are on a housing waiting list. Leonard Cheshire Disability recently completed Freedom Of Information requests for this information and will be able to pass the results on to you to use
- Try searching on a house hunting website for accessible houses with your MP to show how difficult it is to find suitable housing
- Collect signatures on a petition about the issues to demonstrate how many people want change
- Get other campaigners to go along and talk to their own MPs about the issues with inaccessible housing

### **Need support?**

If you are running a campaign on accessible housing please do get in touch (even if you don't need help). We want to know how you are getting on and we may have some extra support or resources that could help you out. If you do need anything please feel free to drop us an email at [maddy.kirkman@nus.org.uk](mailto:maddy.kirkman@nus.org.uk) or [james.elliott@nus.org.uk](mailto:james.elliott@nus.org.uk)

Leonard Cheshire Disability are also running a similar campaign and have numerous resources, research papers and briefings that might help you when preparing your arguments and lobbying for change. They have policy and research staff that can help and support you with information on your local area as well as nationally. If you want to access this support please email: [campaigning@leonardcheshire.org](mailto:campaigning@leonardcheshire.org)