

## Briefing

# Accessible Housing Standards 2015

**Purpose**

This briefing compares the technical specification provided in the 2015 Building Regulations M4 (2), 'accessible, adaptable dwellings' with the sixteen design criteria set out in its predecessor, the Lifetime Homes Standard (2011).

**For whom**

Technical officers, architects, developers, building control officers, access consultants, planning teams, housing decision makers and householders.

**Date**

November 2015

# Introduction

**As the innovators and long standing champions of the Lifetime Homes Standard, Habinteg has published this new briefing to help inform the transition to the new accessible housing standards.**

The concept of Lifetime Homes was developed in the early 1990s by a group of housing experts, including Habinteg and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The group was formed because of concerns about how inaccessible and inconvenient many homes were for large sections of the population. The Lifetime Homes Standard, 16 design criteria that can be universally applied to new homes at minimal cost, was developed to ensure that homes are inclusive, accessible, adaptable, sustainable and good value.

The legacy of the Lifetime Homes Standard will now be taken forward through Building Regulations in the form of a national standard for accessible, adaptable dwellings set out in Part M(4), Category 2.

We know that there is demand for accessible and easily adaptable homes similar to Lifetime Homes and this demand will only increase as the population ages. With the new regulatory standard in effect from 1 October 2015, planners, developers, architects and others will be looking to fully understand the technical details of the new arrangements. We have often referred to Category 2 as broadly equivalent to Lifetime Homes – although as noted in these pages we do have some concerns over omissions or reductions in certain aspects. This simple comparison looks at the 16 design criteria specified in the Lifetime Homes Standard and describes the access improvements or reductions delivered by the new national standard as described in Part M (4) category 2 national standard.

Many people over many years have invested in developing and implementing the Lifetime Homes Standard. The technical design criteria are well understood and have been adopted across the country. Habinteg hopes this comparison document helps the new access standards become understood and adopted in the same way.

We stress that this briefing is purely a comparison between Lifetime Homes and the new Category 2 standard. It is not guidance on the use of new standards and contains no advice on approaching the new arrangements. Responsibility for the new standards lies with the Department for Communities and Local Government. As such, any queries or feedback about the new standards for access should be directed there.

## Key to symbols



Increased access requirement, Category 2



No change, Category 2



Reduced access requirement, Category 2

# 1. Parking

## 1a. On plot (private) parking

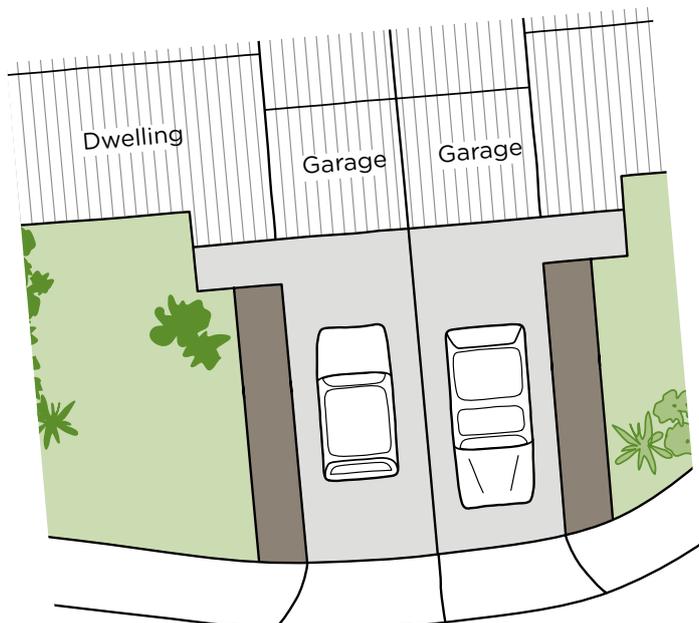
Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
Potential to widen one space from 2400mm to 3300mm.	No material change.	
Parking space to be level (1:60).	Parking space can be 'level' (1:60) or, where unavoidable, 'gently sloping' (defined as 1:60 to 1:20).	
Surface to be firm and with a maximum crossfall of 1:40.	Space to have 'an external surface that is firm, even, smooth enough to be wheeled over, is not covered with loose laid materials such as gravel or shingle, and has a maximum crossfall of 1:40'.	
Applies to carports which provide the only parking space; not applicable to garages.	Exempts carports.	

### Habinteg note:

We would prefer to see carports included explicitly in any future edition - particularly where they provide the only parking space.

**1b. Communal parking**

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
One space 3300mm wide x 4800mm long required close to each entrance/ core.	No material change.	↔
Surface to be firm.	Space to have 'an external surface that is firm, even, smooth enough to be wheeled over, is not covered with loose laid materials such as gravel or shingle, and has a maximum crossfall of 1:40'.	↑
Parking space to be level whenever practicable (1:60), gently sloping elsewhere, and with a maximum crossfall of 1:40.	Parking space can be 'level' (1:60) or, where unavoidable, 'gently sloping' (defined as 1:60 to 1:20).	↔
N/A	Includes requirements for drop-off points, where these are provided.	↑



## 2. Approach to dwelling from parking

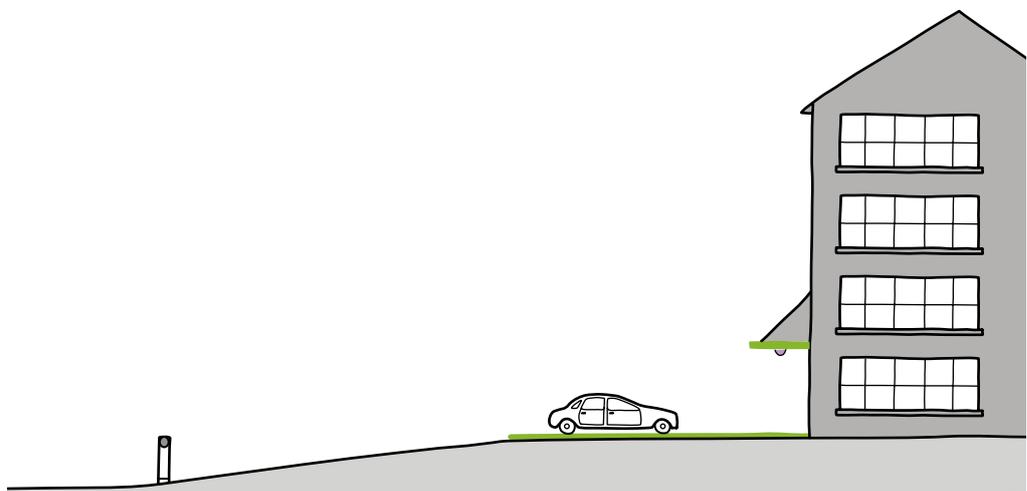
Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
Level or gently sloping approach to the main entrance (or secondary) entrance to an individual dwelling, and/or to the main communal entrance.	Category 2 combines LTH criteria 2 and 3, by describing the approach route as a whole including the route from any parking space.	
	Distinguishes between 'gently sloping' (1:60 to 1:20) and 'ramped' (1:20 to 1:12).	
	Where the overall rise of a ramp exceeds 300mm, an alternative stepped route is also required. This was not required under LTH.	
Slopes must provide level landing 1200mm long.	No material change.	
Paths to be minimum 900mm wide in the curtilage of a dwelling and 1200mm wide if communal.	No material change.	
No requirement regarding gates.	Gates to have clear opening width of 850mm.	

### 3. Approaches to all entrances

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
As far as practicable, to be as Criterion 2.	Criteria 2 and 3 are now combined under Category 2 as noted previously.	↔
Exemption for steeply sloping sites may be granted by Planning Authority.	No exemptions will be granted; Category 2 dwellings must now have step-free access to the private entrance or can only be classified as Category 1.	↑

**Habinteg note:**

We believe level access can be delivered in steeply sloping sites. We encourage designers and developers to address the creative challenge rather than default to Category 1 alone in response to terrain.

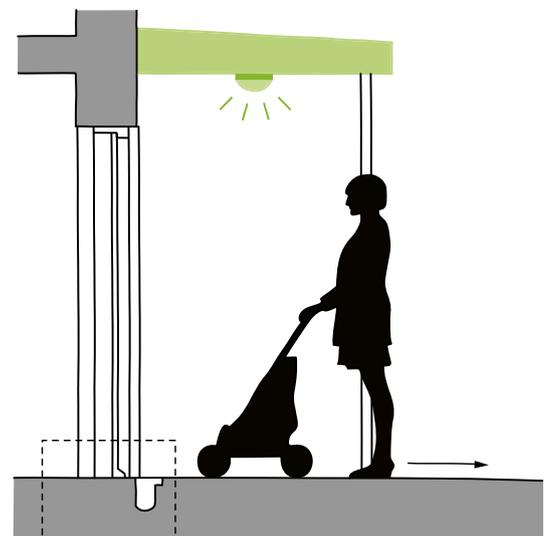


## 4. Entrances

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
All entrances lit with fully diffused luminaires.	Lighting now only required to main entrances. (Passive infrared sensor (PIR) lighting or similar to 'principal private entrance' and 'principal communal entrance').	
Accessible threshold to all entrances maximum 15mm total height. Slopes on sills supporting the threshold towards external landing not to exceed 15°.	No material change.	
Exemption for doors onto a balcony or terrace located above 'habitable rooms'.	All external doors to be accessible including doors to and from private garden, balcony, terrace, garage, car port or conservatory.	
Minimum 'effective clear opening width' to all dwelling entrance doors 800mm.	Now measured as 'clear opening width' and increased to 850mm.	
Communal doors 800mm (or 825mm if approach not head on and corridor not 1500mm).	Now measured as 'clear opening width' and increased to 850mm.	
300mm nib to leading edge / pull side to all entrance doors.	Nibs to be retained for 1200mm beyond door face.	
	Nibs not required to doors to communal stairwells.	

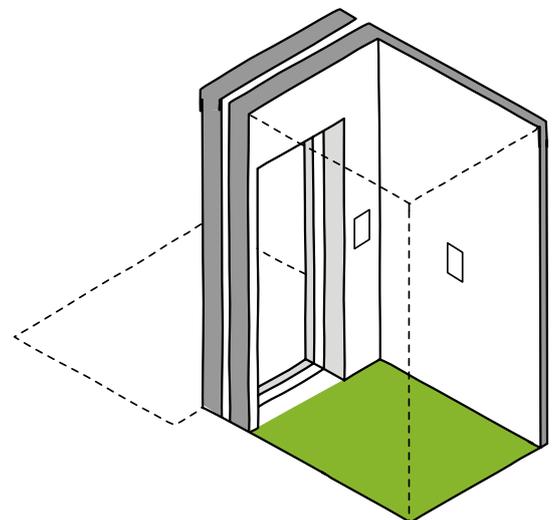
## 4. Entrances continued...

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
All 'main entrances' to be covered. Cover advised to be minimum 600mm deep (900mm deep typical) to private entrances and minimum 900mm deep (1200mm deep typical) to communal entrances; width to exceed width of door and any controls.	Minimum 600mm deep x 900mm wide cover required to 'principal private entrance' and minimum 900mm deep x 1200mm to 'principal communal entrance'.	↔
All entrances to have level external landings. 1200 x 1200mm to main dwelling entrance, and 1500 x 1500mm to main communal entrance.	No material change	↔
No requirement regarding matting.	Entrance matting should not impede wheelchair use.	↑
No requirement regarding porches.	Where a lobby or porch is provided (private or communal) doors to be minimum 1500mm apart and with minimum 1500mm between door swings.	↑



## 5. Communal stairs and lifts

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
All principal access stairs (even when lift provided) to have easy-going pitch; maximum 170 risers, minimum 250mm goings.	No material change	↔
Handrails at 900mm and extending 300mm top and bottom, contrasting step nosings and closed risers.	No material change	↔
Lift not required but when provided, minimum internal dimensions for lift car to be 1100mm x 1400mm.	Lift (or other form of step free access) required to all dwellings with entrances above ground, lift car size unchanged.	↑
Lifts to have clear 1500mm x 1500mm landings all floors.	No material change	↔
Lift controls to be 900mm to 1200mm high and 400mm back.	No material change	↔



## 6. Internal doorways and hallways

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
Minimum hall width 900mm; can reduce locally to 750mm at 'pinch points / obstructions' away from doorways.	No material change	
Minimum communal corridor width 1200mm; can reduce locally to 1050mm away from doorways.	No material change	
Minimum clear opening width to doorways in dwelling: 750mm (head on approach or at right angles where hall 1200mm wide) 775mm (where at right angles in hallway 1050mm wide) 900mm (where at right angles in 900mm hallway).	No change No change Clear opening width reduced to 800mm when at right angles in 900mm hallway.	
	En-suite shower rooms are exempt unless they are satisfying Criterion 12.	
300mm nib to leading edge/pull side of all dwelling doors in the entrance level.	Requirement extended to cupboard doors.	
300mm nib to leading edge/pull side of all communal doors.	No change except to doors into communal stairwells as noted previously in criteria four.	

## 7. Circulation space

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
1500mm turning circle or 1700mm x 1400mm ellipse in living areas and dining areas.	No longer required.	
1200mm clear in front of kitchen units and appliances.	No material change	
Main bedroom able to provide 750mm to both sides and foot of bed.	No material change	
Other bedrooms to offer 750mm to one side of bed.	750mm required at the foot of the bed in all double bedrooms.	
750mm clear route to window in all bedrooms, including to foot of bed where necessary.	No material change	

## 8. Entrance level living space.

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
A 'permanent' living space or dining space within or in addition to the kitchen (i.e. a socialising space) at entrance level.	No material change	

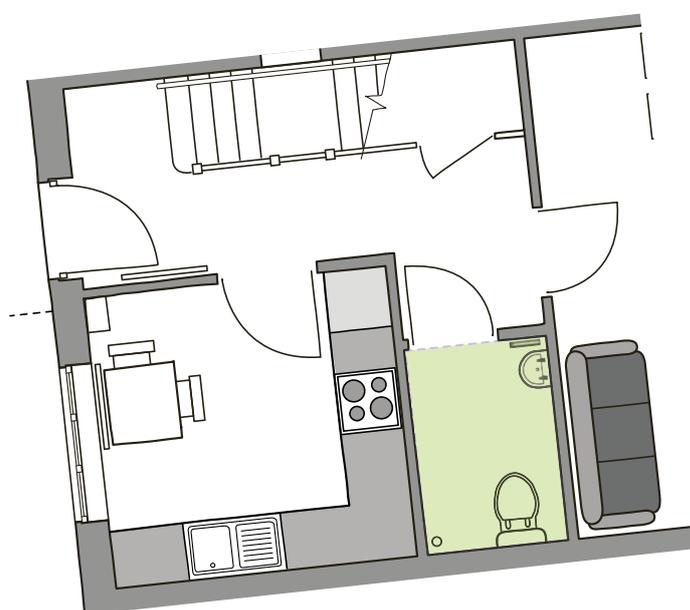
## 9. Potential for temporary entrance level bed-space

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
Corner of living space suitable for single bed, with 750mm wide access, power socket and able to be screened.	Not explicitly required.	<sup>1</sup> 

1. Although requirement to show on plan is removed, the physical feature is provided by default in the majority of dwellings.

# 10. Entrance level WC and shower drainage

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
WC and access zone and flush located centrally or away from side wall.	Flush position no longer specified.	↓
Basin and access zone, may only encroach up to 200mm into WC access zone.	No material change	↔
Floor gulley and falls for future level shower (may be capped initially).	No material change	↔
Minimum compartment 1450mm x 1850mm.	No material change.	↔
1 and 2 bed houses can have Part M size WC/ cloakroom. A floor drain for future accessible shower should be included.	Future shower provision no longer required in 1 and 2 bed houses with smaller WC (Category 1).	↓



## 11. WC and bathroom walls

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
All WC, bathroom and en-suite walls strengthened (between 300 and 1800 above FFL) to take grab rails.	Height band removed. Strengthening now required to full height of wall.	↑

## 12. Stairs and potential through floor lift in dwellings.

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
Stairs to be minimum 900mm wide (measured 450mm above pitch line).	Clear width reduced to 850mm.	↓
Unless entrance level has the living accommodation, kitchen, a main bedroom and Criterion 14 bathroom on the entrance level, potential through floor lift route to be identified.	Identification of potential through floor lift route no longer required <sup>2</sup> .	↔
	Extra requirement prohibiting steps within the entrance level.	↑

2. Although requirement to show on plan is removed, a through floor lift is possible once specific need is known.

## 13. Hoist potential

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
Structure above ceiling to a main bedroom and the bathroom of Criterion 14 to be capable of supporting hoists.	No longer required.	
Unless at entrance level, main bedroom and accessible (Criterion 14) bathroom should be on the storey above or below the entrance storey.	No longer required.	
Main bedroom and accessible (Criterion 14) bathroom should have a route between them not passing through living areas.	No longer required, 'route' principal bedroom and accessible bathroom required only to be on same floor. No specification for route between them.	

### Habinteg note:

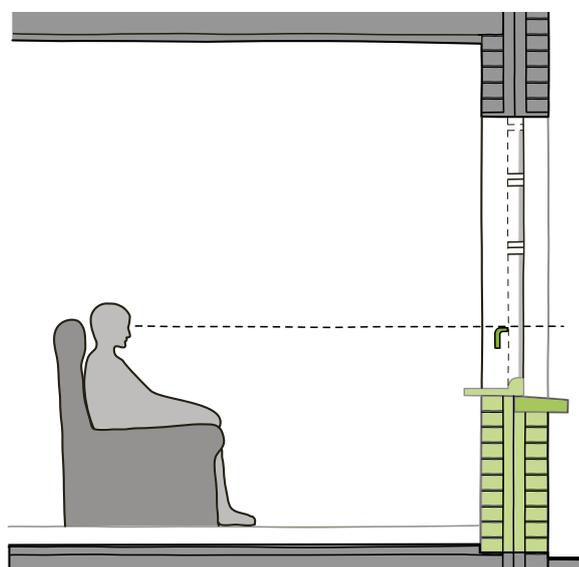
We believe that unless at entrance level a main bedroom and criterion 14 bathroom should be on storey above or below entrance level to enable potential access via a through floor lift adaptation (which can only travel one storey height) and / or reduce essential stair use for some people.

# 14. Bathroom

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
An accessible bathroom to be provided close to, and on the same storey as a main bedroom. If not the entrance level, this floor to be adjacent to the entrance level.	No longer required to be on a particular floor – as noted above at 13.	↓
WC access zone and flush located centrally or away from side wall.	Flush position no longer specified.	↓
Basin with approach zone (1100mm to front of pedestal etc)	Basin now allowed to encroach up to 300mm into WC access zone.	↓
Either bath or accessible level shower installed.	No material change	↔
Unless provided elsewhere in the dwelling, bathroom should make provision for future level access shower.	No material change	↔
Potential for 1500mm turning circle (or 1700mm x 1400mm ellipse) if bath removed and accessible shower provided.	No material change	↔

# 15. Glazing and window handle heights

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
Glazing in principal living space to begin no higher than 800mm (+50mm tolerance) i.e. 850mm from floor.	No material change	↔
Any full width transom within the field of vision (up to 1700mm from floor) to be at least 400mm in height away from any other transom or balcony balustrade.	No longer required.	↓
An opening light to a window in each room should have handles no higher than 1200mm from the floor.	Window handle height increased to 1400mm except for one window in the principal living area.	↓

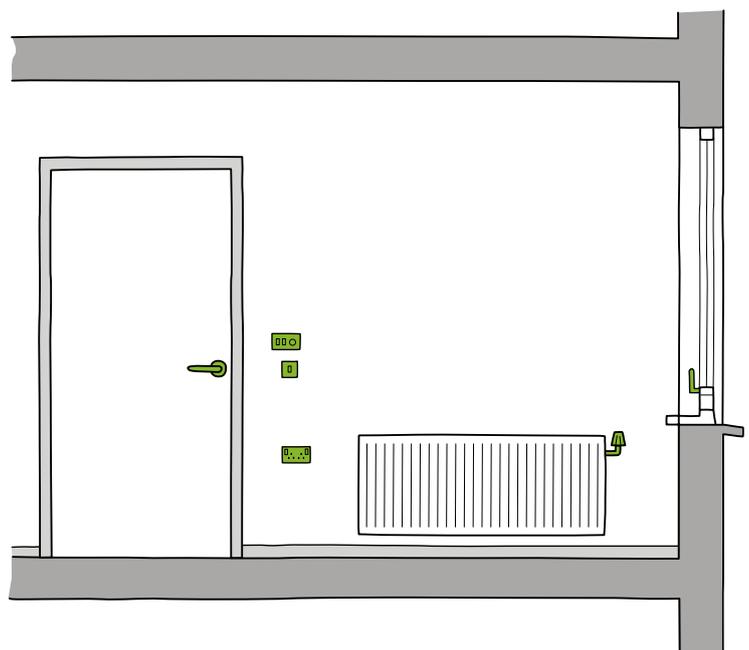


# 16. Location of service controls

Lifetime Homes (LTH) requirement	Category 2 comparison	Change at Category 2
<p>Any service controls that need to be operated or read frequently, or in an emergency, should be located within the height band of 450 to 1200mm and at least 300mm from any room corner. Includes electrical, TV and phone outlets; CSUs, heating programmers and controls, stopcocks and radiator controls.</p>	<p>CSUs must be at 1350 to 14500mm due to Part P Regulations. Radiator and cooker hood controls are exempt from height specifications.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>

**Habinteg note:**

We believe radiator controls should be provided at an inclusive height.



# Conclusion

Of the specifications set out across all 16 Lifetime Homes (LTH) criteria, 18 have been disappplied or downgraded, whilst 16 have been improved or added.

Whilst we welcome the improvements, in Habinteg's view, some issues remain that, if addressed, would enhance the practical use of the building by the widest range of people. Namely:

- Narrower staircases.
- Increase of window handle height and radiator controls.
- Allowability of parking to be 'gently sloping.'
- Exemption of car ports from requirements to be capable to be widened to 3.3m.
- Deletion of requirement for main bedroom and accessible bathroom to be on the entrance level or an adjacent storey to entrance level.

However the new Category 2 standard is an important set of specifications. They make dwellings usable by a wide range of householders, from families with young children to older less agile people and anyone living with a mobility impairment whether temporarily or on a longer term basis.

The Category 2 standard, along with M4(3) Category, describing specifications for wheelchair accessible dwellings is, as of October 2015, one of the optional access standards that apply in England.

For further information about the policy context for this standard, see Habinteg's October 2015 briefing, '7 points about the Housing Standards.'

## Further information

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For information or to raise questions about the Part M(4) of the building regulations 2015, please contact **Department for Communities and Local Government** (DCLG) via [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

For training on the use of the new standard or consultancy support with the design or provision of accessible homes, please contact Habinteg's specialist team, **Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE)** via [www.cae.org.uk](http://www.cae.org.uk) or 020 7822 8232.

To keep up to date with news and case studies about accessible housing design register for the free **Lifetime Homes newsletter** at [www.lifetimehomes.org.uk](http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk).

For further information about the policy context for this standard, see Habinteg's October 2015 briefing, '**7 points about the Housing Standards**' at [www.habinteg.org.uk](http://www.habinteg.org.uk).