

HOME

Housing Made for Everyone

Coalition vision

Everyone, no matter their age, background or ability needs a good home. For most of us that means a home that keeps us safe and healthy and enables us to live the life we want at every age, whether that be studying, bringing up a family, working, volunteering or socialising with family and friends.

Yet a home like this is a remote prospect for far too many people. For those people, home is a place where they merely exist, surrounded by outdated and inflexibly designed spaces. Poorly designed housing is more of an endurance test than a place of comfort and sanctuary.

Our existing housing can present enormous barriers to older and disabled people. For example, many millions of homes have steps to the front door and very few have toilets at entrance level, essential for so many people who find it hard to get around.

Poorly designed homes can present a daily struggle that impacts on every aspect of life, from the ability to simply get up and dressed, to maintaining social contacts or holding down a job.

This is deeply important for all of us. Whilst it's not inevitable, the likelihood is that most of us will become less physically able as we grow older. And many people have mobility challenges from lifelong conditions or because of an accident. Anyone who has broken a limb will have had an experience of the barriers so many people face every single day just with simple daily tasks in the home.

Of course, well designed and flexible homes don't only benefit older and disabled people. Parents caring for small children, using prams and buggies, face a range of hazards when a home hasn't been designed with ease of use in mind. And all of us benefit from well-designed spaces when we're handling furniture, heavy shopping or luggage and welcoming visitors with access requirements.

The scale of the problem can feel overwhelming. Only a small fraction of homes we have now provide even the most basic access and adaptability and if we don't take action now the problem will only grow. As more and more people live longer lives, more and more will need homes that are easy to get around and that can adapt as needs change over time, enabling them to live independently and well.

For the foreseeable future, retrofitting and adapting existing homes will be necessary for many people as 93% of existing homes do not meet even the lowest threshold of visitability. However, it can be expensive to retrofit and, in some instances, not practical because of the design of the home. Future proofing the homes we build now means that less adaptations will be required, and those that are can be achieved more effectively and at lower cost. This is a crucial part of the solution.

Making all new homes accessible and adaptable will mean that more people will be able to stay in their own homes as their needs change, rather than being forced to move prematurely and unnecessarily into supported or specialist housing which cost much more. Returning home from hospital will be smoother and faster, the likelihood of falls and other housing related health problems will be less frequent, and people's need for care at home will reduce, all of which will free up much needed NHS and social care resource.

So what needs to be done?

We need a fresh approach that acknowledges health and social care costs as well as housing need if we're to have an effective policy framework – one that sets high standards of accessibility and good design whilst being fair to industry.

This must include making the accessible, adaptable design standard (set out in Building Regulations M4 Category 2) the mandatory baseline for all new homes. Local Authorities need to ensure their housing policies adequately reflect the needs of older and disabled people, and Housing associations and developers need to commit to providing high quality homes fit for the future.

We must rise to the challenge. The longer we leave it, the greater the task and the more damaging the consequences of inaction as many more people have to struggle and make do in homes that present both barriers and hazards in daily life.

The time to act is now. Please sign up to our charter. Join us to create a world where everyone, no matter what their age or impairment, has their right to a good home fulfilled.

The HoME Charter – seven actions to transform new housing

1. We believe that central Government should set a higher regulatory baseline for accessibility of all new homes (M4 Category 2), and, where need can be demonstrated for M4 Category 3 (wheelchair user), the Government should lower the current high bar needed to introduce relevant planning policies. This will provide a level policy playing field across the country and the certainty that developers want, enabling them to build homes that meet the future needs of our ageing population.
2. Central Government should collate and make publicly available data from every planning authority on the number of new homes built to each of the Categories set out in Approved Document M4 Volume one (access to and use of buildings), alongside sufficiently resourcing planning authorities to effectively monitor this.
3. Local Authorities should be bold and confident in their planning policies for accessible housing, utilising MHCLG guidance and best practice approaches to evidencing need.
4. Homes England, in line with action already taken by the Greater London Authority, should give priority to current development bids for homes that meet M4 Category 2 standards. These should also include a number of Category 3 wheelchair accessible properties. If necessary, the additional costs should be recognised in the Value for Money assessment and grant awarded for affordable housing.
5. Local Authorities should review and keep up to date with the accessibility of housing in their area in preparation for an accessible housing database that will make finding the right home easier for people with specific requirements.
6. Estate Agents and their membership body ARLA should work with the Government and others to create and deliver standard accessibility ratings, similar to the environmental rating, which is displayed for every home sold.
7. The home building industry should join our call for legislative change for higher accessibility standards. They should proactively seek out good practice among their members and disseminate this widely to encourage greater engagement from members who don't yet see accessible homes as good business.

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For more information about the campaign or how to show your support, email HoMEinfo@ageing-better.org.uk

HoME coalition founding members

