ISPA
Intersectional Stigma of Place-based Ageing

Ordinary Accessibility: Redesigning the Private Rented Sector Through Lived Experience

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Executive Summary

This case study explores how stigma can become embedded in the everyday processes of the UK's private rented sector (PRS). It also examines how these processes can be redesigned through lived experience and professional expertise. Drawing on three in-depth interviews, it examines the work of a UK-based property consultancy founded and led by a disabled practitioner who brings together personal experience as a tenant with professional understanding of estate agency, property development and investment.

Through this lens, the study shows that accessibility in the PRS remains the exception rather than the norm, constrained by practices that inadvertently exclude disabled renters. Yet it also highlights how small, process-oriented changes (such as rethinking viewing procedures or standardising accessibility filters in property listings) can have transformative effects. The report demonstrates that when accessibility is treated as ordinary rather than specialist, stigma is disrupted, making inclusion possible within existing systems:

If you only have two tropes of disability - pity and victimhood, or superhero triumph over adversity - then we aren't going to change anything. So if we introduced something else that said, hey, look, there's an ordinary person just trying to struggle through life or muddle through life […] And that's really what we want to be aiming for (Simon)

This case study sits within the Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) Project, which examines how stigma linked to disability, ageing, and place limits people's ability to live well in their homes and communities. It contributes to ISPA's aim of identifying how systems, policies, and professional practices can be redesigned to promote dignity, choice, and inclusion.

Introduction

The private rented sector (PRS) now serves an increasingly diverse and ageing population, with older households and families growing alongside younger renters (Rugg and Rhodes, 2018). Existing research highlights many challenges in the PRS, including high costs, insecurity, limited control, but also perceived positives such as flexibility, mobility and the landlord having responsibility for maintenance (Simcock et al., 2022). However, these accounts rarely engage directly with disability and accessibility. In practice, the 'advantages' of flexibility and choice are often least available to disabled renters, who face compounded barriers at every stage of the letting process, from the absence of reliable accessibility

information in listings to reluctance around permissions or funding for adaptations. This case study addresses that gap, by examining how standard PRS processes shape access and inclusion for disabled renters.

Across the PRS literature, wellbeing is understood as shaped by interdependent capabilities such as security, control, affordability, relationships and the physical condition of homes, which can be either enhanced or constrained by renting (Harris and McKee, 2021). Tenants often describe a trade-off between asserting their rights (e.g. repairs or adjustments) and risking tenancy loss, with perceived insecurity itself undermining health and stability over time (Harris and McKee, 2021). Yet disability is largely absent as an analytic focus. While the evidence recommends improved practice '*in letting to older tenants, people living with disabilities or […] mental health problems*,' systematic engagement with accessibility and adaptations remains limited (Harris and McKee, 2021: 6).

At the same time, relational and process factors (e.g. how landlords and letting agents communicate, permit personalisation, or respond to repairs) strongly influence whether rented space becomes a home (McKee and Harris, 2025). This process lens matters acutely for disabled renters: when accessibility requirements are treated as specialist exceptions - rather than the 'norm' - ordinary letting workflows (fast decisions, generic marketing materials, default 'no alterations' rules) can inadvertently reproduce stigma and exclusion.

Figure 1: A woman using a wheelchair receiving keys to a new home (source: H_Ko/Shutterstock.com)

This case study is part of Intersectional Stigma of Place-based Ageing (ISPA) Project and contributes to a series of case studies exploring how housing systems and everyday practices can either reproduce or reduce stigma for older and/or disabled people across UK tenures. This England-based case study (with UK-wide relevance) examines the PRS through

the lens of a property consultancy founded by a disabled housing professional whose lived experience and sector expertise are used to redesign routine PRS practices. In doing so, it speaks to wider structural pressures, including welfare reforms that have deepened risks and precarity for many renters (Powell, 2015), while keeping focus on a pragmatic question central to ISPA: how can we make accessibility ordinary in the PRS so that standard processes reduce, rather than reproduce, stigma by design?

Background and Policy Context

In order to contextualise the interventions made by the organisation which this case study focuses on, it is necessary to look at the shifting tenure landscape of the UK and consider what these changes mean for older and disabled people in particular. Since 2000, the UK's PRS has expanded significantly to now comprise one in five UK households (ONS, 2025). As well as an increase in long-term renters, more and more families and low-income households are now finding themselves accommodated in the PRS, as opposed to social housing or owner-occupied homes (Kemp, 2015).

This includes disabled people, who, as the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC, 2018) reports, already face a chronic lack of accessible housing across all tenures. The shortage and pressures on social housing, where disabled people are more likely to live, mean that more disabled people are now living in the PRS. Evidence suggests that landlords in the PRS may be less willing to provide support and adaptations (EHRC, 2018). To put this in perspective, one in three disabled people in the PRS live in unsuitable accommodation, compared to one in five in social housing and one in seven in owner-occupied homes (EHRC, 2018).

Indeed, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG, 2024) found that 47% of respondents would be unwilling to lease properties to tenants requiring the installation of adaptations. Even beyond the UK, disabled people trying to find housing in the PRS may face discrimination from landlords and estate agents unwilling to let to them (Verhaeghe et al., 2016). As discussed in this case study, the highly competitive nature of the PRS, augmented by chronic housing shortages, disadvantages disabled renters, who may require more time to determine whether a property is, or can be made, suitable for them.

Policy Context

The policy landscape surrounding the PRS has evolved considerably over the past two decades, reflecting a shift from a marginal tenure to one now central to the UK's housing system (Kemp, 2015). Alongside this shift, progressive reforms have been pursued by governments across the UK, with notable divergence emerging due to the devolution of housing policy (Marsh et al., 2023; Marsh and Gibb, 2019). However, these efforts have not been matched by equivalent attention to accessibility or inclusion. Although the Equality

Act 2010 places duties on landlords and letting agents to make reasonable adjustments to practice, policies and procedures, implementation and enforcement remain limited, and adaptation processes in the PRS are often constrained by more insecure tenancies and uncertainty about cost recovery.

More recently, welfare reforms have intersected with PRS policy in ways that disproportionately affect disabled renters. Changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates, caps on Housing Benefit, and the introduction of Universal Credit have increased affordability pressures and risk of arrears among low-income tenants (Simcock et al., 2022; Powell, 2015). Combined with widespread reluctance among landlords to accept tenants claiming benefits, these policies have compounded exclusion from accessible and stable housing.

In parallel, housing and fire safety regulations, which have been tightened following major incidents such as Grenfell Tower, have created new design and compliance pressures, sometimes with unintended consequences for accessibility. In this scenario, safety and fire regulations can undermine accessibility with no clear options or solutions for professionals working in this area (McKee and McCall, 2025). The intersection of these frameworks illustrates how multiple systems including planning, safety, welfare, and equality, converge to produce what ISPA identifies as stigma by design: well-intentioned policy and professional practice that inadvertently disadvantage disabled people through inflexible or exclusionary implementation. These outcomes are rarely intended, yet the interaction of these multiple systems produces effects that are functionally exclusionary for disabled renters navigating the PRS.

Against this backdrop, the consultancy examined in this case study seeks to intervene not by waiting for systemic reform, but by demonstrating how existing processes within the PRS can be redesigned to make accessibility an ordinary, embedded practice.

Research Aims and Approach

This case study explores the work of a property consultancy seeking to improve accessibility and inclusion within the PRS for disabled people. The study examines how lived experience, professional expertise, and everyday practice intersect to create new ways of working that challenge stigma and exclusion in housing systems.

The analysis draws on three in-depth semi-structured online interviews with practitioners, each of whom is referred to by a pseudonym to protect anonymity. These comprise a property consultant (‘Simon’) working to embed accessibility within the PRS, his former landlord (‘Lesley’), and an estate agent (‘Leah’) whom he trained as an Accessibility Champion. Using this tripartite approach, the study to explore accessibility from multiple perspectives: the disabled tenant and professional innovator, the landlord willing to adapt

practice, and the intermediary learning to implement inclusive processes within everyday lettings.

Together, the interviews illuminate how personal experience and professional practice combine to inform the development of Simon's consultancy and its approach to redesigning PRS processes. The study forms part of the Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) project, which investigates how systems, organisations, and practitioners can reduce the stigma that limits older and/or disabled people's ability to live well in their homes and communities. Within that wider context, this case contributes evidence on how process-driven innovation in the PRS can normalise accessibility as a mainstream concern.

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Stirling. All participants gave informed consent, and all quotations used in this report have been pseudonymised.

The following section presents the key findings from the case study, organised around the narrative of how one practitioner's lived experience as a disabled renter became the basis for a new model of accessibility in the PRS. Through the stories of Simon, Lesley, and Leah, the findings trace a journey from exclusion to innovation. They show how ordinary processes can be reimagined to make accessibility a shared, systemic responsibility rather than a specialist concern.

Key Findings

[...] it seemed to me that the PRS was the hardest one, because you have no autonomy and it's an unlevel playing field [...] trying to compete with that pace is just so unlevel. I thought, well, what can I do to make this work? Because if you haven't got the money to buy a house and [...] you're on a waiting list for a social home, but you actually have to live somewhere [...] it might be three, five, twenty years away. All those people are forced into the PRS, even though it's not where they should be (Simon)

Why the Private Rented Sector (PRS) Matters

For Simon, the PRS represented both the most challenging and the most urgent space for action. Disabled renters, he argued, occupy a position of least control within a tenure defined by speed, competition, and limited rights. Whereas homeowners and social tenants can negotiate or plan adaptations over time, private renters must compete within a marketplace that rewards flexibility and rapid decision making. Listings move fast, financial decisions must be made quickly, and there is little space to assess whether a property is accessible or could be made so.

Across Simon's account, the PRS emerges as a system designed for the able-bodied renter, which assumes mobility, rapid decision-making, and access to resources. Disabled tenants, by contrast, must expend significant time, energy, and money simply to identify viable options. Accessibility information is rarely provided in listings, and estate agents often lack awareness of what details matter most to disabled clients. As a result, unsuitable properties cannot be ruled out early, forcing renters to attend more viewings, incur additional travel costs, and navigate the stress of repeated rejection.

Simon's reflections also highlight how accessibility needs are embedded in family life, not just individual circumstance. The result is that families like Simon's must work harder to secure stability in an already competitive market:

[...] I [was] married with two kids. That was four of us, who need a wheelchair accessible home. But I'm the only person with the wheelchair, but the others need it. And, if you take me out of the equation, and then if you say, 'hey, why'd you like this house?'. Most of their stuff will have nothing to do with me at all (Simon)

Structural Barriers and Adaptations

The fast pace of the PRS further compounds disadvantage. Properties are routinely let within days, leaving disabled renters requiring adaptations systematically outpaced by non-disabled tenants. Even when suitable homes are identified, landlords' reluctance to permit or fund adaptations undermines these efforts and creates additional barriers (MHCLG, 2024). The financial and bureaucratic processes associated with adaptation funding, such as Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)[1], are slow and complex, further disadvantaging those who cannot act quickly in a market that demands immediacy.

Many landlords view adaptations as temporary costs, or even a liability, rather than long-term investments that could enhance the property for future tenants. For disabled renters, this creates what Simon describes as an *'unlevel playing field'* and private renting as a tenure in which autonomy is constrained not only by individual capacity but by systemic design. Despite there being significant demand for accessible properties in the PRS, the sector is not delivering '*keys in the door'*, as Simon put it:

I had three issues - everything had to be related - All my work had to be related to issues of supply, process or narrative, and that the three of them were completely interdependent. It was a way of coming out of all the UK's housing silos, and looking across at the housing sector and all these kind of dots within the sector and saying, well, hang on a minute, that one's connected to this, and if we only did that, that that could work here and, quite rapidly, I honed it down to really looking at the narrative in close detail […] (Simon)

This recognition became the starting point for Simon's consultancy, which sought to reconnect supply, process, and narrative in ways that make accessibility an ordinary consideration rather than an afterthought. His approach begins from the premise that stigma is produced not only through attitudes but through design and procedure - the small, everyday decisions that shape who is seen as a 'good' tenant, what counts as a 'normal' home, and how quickly one is expected to decide.

In this sense, the PRS is not just a backdrop for the consultancy's work but an ideal testbed for it. It exposes how deeply embedded ableist assumptions are within housing systems and, crucially, how they might be disrupted through rethinking the ordinary processes of renting.

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[1] Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG): A statutory, means-tested grant administered by local authorities in England to fund essential home adaptations for disabled people. In the private rented sector, landlord consent is required and works are subject to assessment and approval processes: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/669a4302a3c2a28abb50d2d5/DFG_Guidance.pdf

Learning from lived experience: Reimagining the PRS from within

> *[...] since 2000 when I was an estate agent, I had a spinal injury in 2003, and property wise I've done all sorts of different things from agency and sales to investment and development [...] (Simon)*

Simon's creation of his property consultancy drew deeply on both professional and personal experience. His career in agency, development, and investment gave him technical understanding of how the housing system functions, including its incentives, bottlenecks, and unspoken hierarchies. When his spinal injury in 2003 changed his housing needs, that professional knowledge was suddenly refracted through lived experience. The result was insight not only into where the PRS fails disabled tenants but also a vision of how its processes could be redesigned from within.

The story of Simon's tenancy with Lesley and her husband Peter illustrates how personal connection, trust, and flexibility interrupt standard letting processes. Their initial meeting happened outside the usual agent-mediated protocol which then set in motion a relationship built on mutual respect and reciprocity rather than transactional roles:

> *That was a very, very new thing to me, when Simon turned up, and was asking about modifications (Lesley)*

Though Lesley and Peter had never leased property to a disabled tenant before, they agreed to take the property off the market for two weeks to allow Simon and Jane to find out if the adaptations they required could be fitted and how much these would cost:

> *[…] they seemed so genuine, and in need of a property like that, that we thought it was absolutely worth waiting for that (Lesley)*

> *[...] clearly, the wheelchair part of it is a really important part of: why were they happy to give me the two weeks to find out? Why don't they just make their life easy and just see if they got another viewing? You know, another person [will] say yes, we'll have it [...] I really think that for them, the wheelchair was an irrelevance. And that's why I think I loved them so much because they were, they treated me like an ordinary human being (Simon)*

In a system that rarely allows time for disabled tenants to assess or negotiate suitability, it became a quiet form of resistance to exclusionary norms. The tenancy lasted four-and-a-

half-years and blurred boundaries between landlord and tenant, business and community. Simon organised barbecues on Lesley's land; Jane, his partner, helped with the farm animals; Simon checked on the property when the landlords were away. What emerged was not only a sense of home but a micro-example of how accessibility and inclusion can be cultivated through relationships as much as design:

[…] the agents were going to be the obstruction here because if we left it to the agent, more people are going to view the property and someone very quickly was going to go (Simon)

This narrative also illuminates the systemic constraints that make such arrangements rare. Simon and Jane paid for the adaptations themselves (around £8,000) recognising that few tenants could afford such an investment in a property they did not own. Lesley later replaced the adapted bathroom after Simon moved out. Crucially, the improvements were not retained for future disabled tenants, treated instead as a temporary exception rather than *'good design for all'*. In this way, the value of accessibility remained contained within an individual story rather than normalised within the broader market:

I can remember my exact words, actually, because when he was suggesting converting the then bathroom into a wet-room, and the various modifications that would be needed there for a start. And then the path, to create a gravel path suitable for a wheelchair down to the back door, and then put in a ramp. And I said, 'oh, you know, that's rather a lot of pennies to think about'. And he immediately said, 'yes, I am prepared to pay for it' (Lesley)

As it happened, the quote came in at £4000 to do the work. And I ended up with a bill for £8000, and I remember thinking ouch, that hurt. But you know what? We lived there for four and a half years. They were amazing landlords […] (Simon)

For ISPA, stories like Simon's reveal how structural conditions manifest as everyday barriers. Simon's ability to navigate the PRS successfully was underpinned by insider knowledge of its systems and language, yet his success also exposes inequity due to it being an exception. In this sense, Simon's story is both hopeful and critical. It demonstrates the potential of individual agency while highlighting the limits of systems that depend on exceptional acts of negotiation and trust.

By viewing the PRS through this lived-experience lens, the consultancy reframes accessibility as a relational process. It asks: what if the practices that made Simon's tenancy possible, such as communication, time, and trust became standard elements of letting culture rather than fortunate anomalies? This question underpins the next section, which explores how Simon's consultancy translates those insights into practical interventions that challenge stigma through design and everyday process.

Redesigning Ordinary Processes: Tackling Stigma Through Practice

> *[...] OK, we have some supply. And we have a lot of demand. Why aren't the two of them meeting? What do we need to change everything so that instead of looking at specialist solutions, we look at mainstream solutions because the only solutions that are going to work that are going to be effective is if they're a familiar, normal part of the mainstream [...] (Simon)*

The consultancy Simon founded builds directly on the lessons of his personal and professional journey. Having experienced the barriers of the PRS first-hand, he identified that exclusion is not only a problem of supply but also of process and narrative. Housing is advertised, viewed, and let around assumptions of able-bodied tenants, leaving disabled renters perpetually 'out of step' with the market's speed and norms.

Simon describes his approach as linking *'supply, process, and narrative',* recognising that meaningful change requires connecting the dots between what is built, how it is let, and how disability is understood. His consultancy therefore works across the PRS with landlords, developers, and estate agents to redesign the letting process itself rather than simply adding new accessible units to the market.

Practical interventions are intentionally modest but strategically embedded. Simon's ambition is not to train a small group of specialists, but to normalise accessibility training across the profession. In his model, all estate agents would receive core training as standard, with **Accessibility Champions** embedded within multi-branch agencies to support processes, connections and communication across the business (internally or externally, as appropriate). Rather than creating separate accessibility systems, the aim is to adjust mainstream practice so that inclusion becomes routine. This includes:

- Embedding accessibility-related search filters within standard property websites so that relevant characteristics can be identified quickly.
- Training photographers and agents in the visual information that should be routinely captured in listings and marketing packs and ensuring that spatial layout, routes

through rooms, entrances and key features are clearly visible, without being labelled or framed as ‘specialist’. The images simply look like good-quality listings, but contain the information required for informed decision-making.

- Prioritising the rapid provision of accurate property information to renters with accessible housing requirements, enabling them to act at the same speed as other prospective tenants. This levelling of information is positioned as a matter of equality within a fast-moving market.

These seemingly modest adjustments transform how disabled renters can search for and assess homes, reducing the reliance on ad hoc communication and personal networks. They also reframe accessibility as a universal quality - integral to mainstream practice and beneficial to all tenants, including families with pushchairs or older renters - rather than a specialist add-on:

[...] we always make accessible housing about the person with the disability, and that, in itself, is the obstacle, because no one wants to see the person with the disability. They don't want to talk about it. They don't want to think about it, they didn't want to work at it […] (Simon)

Mini Case Study 1

An estate agent trained by Simon is going out to value a property. The landlord has recently inherited a property from his elderly parents, which has been adapted for their needs. He is about to start the process of ripping out these adaptations, assuming they wouldn't be desirable in the PRS, when the agent arrives. The agent persuades the landlord to pause removal of the adaptations and returns to the office to enquire with his team as to whether any clients on the books are looking for such a property. Through now standardised processes implemented by Simon's organisation, the team is able to quickly find a match: a family with two children, one of whom is a wheelchair user. The family has been searching for a property in the PRS for two years. On introducing them to the property, the family make an offer and the landlord makes additional, bespoke adaptations to their requirements, since he is in the process of making refurbishments. The estate agent has performed well for both tenant and landlord, the family now live in a property suitable for the needs of their child and therefore better suiting all the needs and the landlord now understands accessibility as a benefit for all and has installed long-lasting accessible features to his rental property.

Training Estate Agents: Leah's Perspective

Leah, who works at an agency in the South of England, describes how Simon's training translated into practical organisational change. Before the training, her team understood accessibility mainly in terms of adaptations:

> *That kind of assuming that everyone's needs are the same, probably not having a real understanding of the difference of people's accessibility needs […] it just hadn't been kind of considered, particularly in the PRS (Leah)*

She explained that, prior to the training, most conversations with tenants focused on specific adaptation during a tenancy:

> *When people [potential disabled tenants] were viewing properties, […] asking […] would a landlord be happy if we installed a ramp or if we had rails put up or whatever it might be. It was more about adaptations rather than kind of accessibility completely (Leah)*

Leah found the training '*really eye opening*', expanding staff understanding beyond wheelchair access to broader, practical considerations:

> *Previously I think there was lots of people that thought it was all about steps and door widths and things, but actually understanding […] is the parking accessible? […] what's the approach to the property like? How do you get from the back door to the garden? Can you get access to that or is it down steps, you know, all those types of things … really eye opening (Leah)*

The training also reframed the agent's role as providing tenants with the information they need to make independent decisions, rather than assuming what is or is not possible:

> *[Simon] talks a lot about the fact that it's not down to us to make the decision. It's down to them. Give them the information they need to make a decision if it's first of all property they want to see and second of all, if it's suitable for them, don't assume that it's not (Leah)*

The agency embedded these practices across their operations: accessibility filters on the website, clearer photography, marketing guides for landlords, and accessibility champions to support ongoing learning. Tenants were also able to independently assess suitability before booking viewings:

> *So we created on our website, we added filters so you could search for a property with a wet room and you can actually specifically now search on our website for that characteristic […] We spoke to our photographers because we have a panel of photographers and we updated the guidance to them that we wanted more options of photography as well. So not just one photo of one room with very little kind of scene, but actually different angles to show the routes around furniture and kitchens and bathrooms (Leah)*

Leah reported positive outcomes, including encouraging landlords to retain rather than remove accessible features. This led to longer tenancies and landlords recognising accessible properties as assets:

> *I think majority haven't really thought about it in that way. [For example the] gentleman [who] thought I need to get rid of all of this. This is going to be detrimental [See Mini Case Study 1]. But actually, it was the opposite. So it*

was all about for us educating them, […] they're good tenants. They want to stay in properties for a long time. And landlords want tenants in properties for a long time that are going to look after them (Leah)

Leah also highlighted sector-level influence, with Simon attending quarterly meetings of a PRS stakeholder body made-up of letting agents and other organisations involved in the lettings industry. This created opportunities to encourage wider industry adoption of accessibility practices:

[Simon] attends that meeting every quarter and he has connections there now with other agencies […] we've had conversations with the portals […] we've been pushing them to say, actually, we have these characteristics on our website. You should have them as well, because if you have them, agents will use them (Leah)

Leah's account illustrates how quickly organisational culture can shift when accessibility is reframed as ordinary professional practice rather than specialist knowledge. What began as a one-hour training session translated into changes in language, marketing processes, landlord engagement, sector dialogue and it equipped agents to embed better information and clearer processes into mainstream workflows.

By moving away from assumptions about what disabled renters can or cannot do, and towards the provision of accurate, timely information, accessibility becomes a matter of equality. It is essentially a narrative reframing that is rejecting the idea that disability must be either a problem to solve or a story of triumph and this underpins the philosophy of ordinary accessibility now expanded in the next section.

Normalising Accessibility in Everyday Practice

[...] if you only have two tropes of disability - pity and victimhood, or superhero triumph over adversity - then we aren't going to change anything. So if we introduced something else that said, hey, look, there's an ordinary person just trying to struggle through life or muddle through life, then we might go, oh, yeah. OK. Filters off. Never thought of it like that. And that's really what we want to be aiming for (Simon)

Central to Simon's philosophy is a rejection of binary narratives of disability. Rather than framing disabled tenants as either dependent or heroic, his consultancy positions them as ordinary customers whose needs should be anticipated by design. This shift in perspective -

from special case to standard consideration - is the essence of ‘ordinary accessibility’. It recognises that stigma is often produced not by overt prejudice but by systems designed without disabled people in mind.

Through its training and consultancy work, Simon’s organisation models what ISPA describes as practice-led stigma reduction: small, actionable changes that challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions underpinning exclusion. For example, an estate agent might simply change how they describe a property - focusing on spatial flow and usability rather than aesthetics - or adopt new language that normalises accessibility features as selling points rather than liabilities. These interventions build confidence among practitioners who may fear ‘getting it wrong’ or perceive accessibility as complex and risky:
The simplicity of this approach is intentional. Simon’s model demonstrates that making accessibility ordinary does not require radical transformation or new regulation; it requires reflection, time, and the willingness to see disabled people as part of the mainstream market. In this way, the consultancy embodies ISPA’s principle of addressing stigma by design: by embedding inclusion into ordinary practice, it shifts professional culture and, over time, the material systems that sustain inequality.

Mini Case Study 2

A wheelchair user and their partner are relocating from abroad for work. They email an estate agent trained by Simon, looking for a suitable accessible property. The request lands on the desk of an Accessibility Champion. The estate agent identified a suitable property, showed them around on video and negotiated with the landlord to put in additional adaptations including a platform lift.

While affordability and structural constraints remain beyond the scope of a single organisation, Simon argues that these process-level innovations have a ‘*ripple effect*’. Each small act of redesign - a more inclusive listing, a more thoughtful viewing, a more confident agent - can subtly shift how the sector perceives disabled tenants. Over time, these ripples accumulate into a new narrative of what normal renting looks like: one in which accessibility is expected, not exceptional.

Impacts and reflections

So it's one hour online training. That's all it took. That's not rocket science. That's not a kind of a diploma or exams or complication. It's just an implementable understanding of hey, take the filters off, let's look at it like this. And so I wasn't involved. So for me, the impact, everyone's obsessed with the impact they can record: ‘Oh, my company does duh-duh-duh-duh’.

I'm looking at impact I've got no idea about. Which is in some ways really exciting in some ways. It's a bit super depressing because everyone likes validation [...] (Simon)

Simon's reflection captures both the ambition and the ambiguity of measuring change in this field. Small shifts in understanding, language, and everyday workflow ripple outward through networks of agents, landlords, and tenants. These changes are not easily quantifiable outcomes, yet they represent precisely the kind of cultural and procedural change that the Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) project seeks to evidence and promote.

The experiences shared by Leah and Lesley illustrate these ripples in action. Through short, accessible training sessions, Simon equips practitioners to see the letting process differently as a set of choices that can either reinforce or reduce exclusion. Feedback from participating agents, including Leah, highlights increased confidence in discussing accessibility with clients, greater awareness of inclusive language, and a growing recognition that these changes make commercial as well as social sense.

When agents and landlords redesign their own processes (recognising both social and commercial value), inclusion becomes embedded within ordinary market logic rather than externally imposed. Lesley's perspective as a landlord is particularly instructive and her willingness to pause removal of adaptations and engage in dialogue around accessibility improved the tenant experience and contributed to a stable, long-term tenancy and enhanced understanding of accessible features as assets rather than liabilities. In a competitive market, properties that meet certain needs can reduce void periods and attract committed tenants. Accessibility, therefore, is not a charitable gesture but a pragmatic investment and this also combats the 'victimhood' narrative that Simon pushes against in his training.

So this highlights that impact also lies in the narrative reframing. By telling his story publicly, Simon challenges the stigma that frames disabled people as either burdens or exceptions. Instead, he presents accessibility as an ordinary feature of everyday life. It is a matter of good process, not personal heroism. This repositioning aligns with ISPA's broader ambition to dismantle stigma by design: to reveal how discrimination is sustained through the mundane workings of systems, and to show how those same systems can be repurposed toward inclusion.

At the same time, Simon's account reminds us that practice change cannot alone overcome the structural inequalities of the PRS. Affordability and limited adaptation funding remain significant barriers for disabled renters. Yet within these constraints, the consultancy

demonstrates that stigma can be addressed not only through new policies or resources, but through the cultivation of professional empathy, reflection, and care.

This could lead to a model of system change from the inside out that begins with lived experience, reconfigures professional practice, and invites others to see accessibility as a shared responsibility. As Simon, Lesley and Leah's accounts show, inclusion in the private rented sector does not have to wait for wholesale reform. It can start with how we rent, how we listen, and how we design the everyday.

Conclusions

This case study has illustrated how accessibility in the private rented sector (PRS) is shaped as much by systems and processes as by physical design. Through Simon's lived experience as both a disabled tenant and a housing professional, we see how the structures of the PRS systematically disadvantage disabled renters. Yet the same systems, when understood from within, also contain points of leverage for change.

By redesigning ordinary processes such as property listings, viewings, and communication protocols, Simon's consultancy demonstrates that inclusion can be built into the everyday practices of the PRS. His approach reframes accessibility from a specialist or exceptional need into a routine dimension of good housing management. This shift, while modest in scale, offers a blueprint for cultural and procedural transformation: showing how stigma can be reduced not only through new regulation, but through reflection, empathy, and professional confidence.

Leah's account illustrates how these principles translate into organisational practice - introducing accessibility filters, changing photography guidance, and influencing landlord decision making, such as retaining accessible features. This demonstrates how quickly norms can shift when practitioners are given the right tools and confidence to do things differently. Leah's account further shows how such reconfiguring works in practice - embedding into team culture, shaping landlord expectations, and influencing wider PRS stakeholder bodies.

Lesley's experience as a landlord further underscores the importance of relational and procedural flexibility with the PRS. Her willingness to pause the letting process, consider adaptations, and engage in dialogue around accessibility suggests that inclusion can be supported through everyday practice. Yet, the fact that the accessible bathroom was later removed shows that without more consistent guidance, such changes may remain temporary, closely linked to individual relationships rather than carried forward as more routine or sustained approaches to accessibility.

The case also highlights that without stronger policy support around affordability, tenancy security, and adaptations, the ripple effects of such initiatives risk being contained within isolated examples of good practice or dependent on motivated landlords and practitioners. However, their value lies in modelling what inclusion looks like in real-world contexts: small acts of redesign that normalise accessibility and challenge the ableist assumptions embedded in housing systems.

For ISPA, the significance of this case extends beyond the PRS. It demonstrates how lived experience can act as a diagnostic tool for understanding the systems and structures through which stigma operates, and help develop creative alternatives. In this sense, Simon's work is not only about disability or housing, but about the capacity of reflective, values-led practice to reconfigure systems from the inside out. Lesley's experiences as a landlord shows this in practice: by agreeing to adaptations and engaging in dialogue about accessibility, she made it possible for Simon's tenancy to work, showing small adjustments by landlords can directly improve the lived experience of tenants. Leah's account further shows how these shifts work in practice, embedding into team culture, influencing landlord expectations, and connecting with wider PRS stakeholder bodies to share good practice.

Ultimately, making accessibility ordinary requires both structural reform and cultural change, but it starts with practitioners willing to see things differently, and with systems flexible enough to support new ways of working. This case study shows that when those with lived experience are positioned as innovators rather than exceptions, the private rented sector can begin to shift from exclusion by design to inclusion by default.

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Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) Project

The ISPA project is an ambitious 5-year participatory mixed method study that will explore and understand how the stigma attached to where people live can intersect with experiences of disability and ageing. This will provide nuanced insights into the structures and systems that drive exclusion and allow us to tackle the inequalities experienced by older disabled adults. Do visit https://www.youtube.com/@ispaproject for an audio and visual overview.

We aim to develop interventions related to home and environmental modifications that encourage interventions for inclusive approaches within housing, health and social care delivery. This in turn supports people to age well within homes and communities across England, Scotland, and Wales. The project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Ref: ES/W012677/1) and runs from September 2022 to September 2027.

The Intersectional Stigma of Place-Based Ageing (ISPA) Project is a collaboration between the University of Stirling and the University of St Andrews, Newcastle University and University of Bristol.

We are also partnered with the Housing Learning and Improvement Network (Housing LIN) and Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA).

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