

Inclusion London Response to the Proposed Changes to the NPPF Consultation

23/09/2024

Chapter 3 - Planning for the homes we need

Question 1

Do you agree that we should reverse the December 2023 changes made to paragraph 61? Yes

Question 2

Do you agree that we should remove reference to the use of alternative approaches to assessing housing need in paragraph 61 and the glossary of the NPPF? Yes

Chapter 4 - A new Standard Method for assessing housing needs

Question 15

Do you agree that Planning Practice Guidance should be amended to specify that the appropriate baseline for the standard method is housing stock rather than the latest household projections?

We do not agree with the proposal to amend the PPG to specify that the appropriate baseline for the standard method is housing stock rather than the latest household projections. Whilst we welcome the Government's intention to increase the number of houses being built, we want to ensure that these homes actually meet the needs of local populations. Delivering more homes per se rather than focusing on delivering the type of homes we need, including accessible homes, will not address the housing crisis.

Household projections are essential for understanding the number, size and type of houses that need to be built, including accessible homes. They also account for population trends and future needs. Without embedding this approach into planning, Local Authorities will not be able to provide appropriate housing, including for Deaf and Disabled people.

Additionally, it is unclear from the Government's proposal the extent to which the accessibility of the housing stock has been factored into these calculations. There is currently limited data on the number of accessible new homes being built, with a lack of clear information from both local authorities and the national government about the number of starts and completions of homes built to M4 (1), M4 (2), and M4 (3) accessibility standards. It is unclear how Local Authorities will be able to address the specific housing needs of their residents, with a methodology that does not take their needs, or the existing stock available into account. To address this gap, the Government should develop a standard method that includes the accessibility levels of housing stock, of both existing properties and new build homes.

A more comprehensive approach, combining both housing stock data and household projections, would provide a clearer picture of housing needs. Any calculations involving housing stock must also consider the supply of accessible homes and affordable homes. The methodology should aim not only to meet housing targets for a specific number of homes but to deliver homes that actually address the specific needs of older people and Disabled individuals with different impairments.

We, therefore, believe national Government should develop a standardised and robust methodology that local authorities should use to assess Disabled people's housing needs and deliver accessible and adaptable housing, as well as wheelchair-accessible housing. This should include both the current and projected needs of the local population, the existing stock and potential future needs. It must account for the size, type, tenure, accessibility demands and supply of the local area. The Government should amend the planning practice guidance to include a standardised and robust methodology.

Question 19

Do you have any additional comments on the proposed method for assessing housing needs?

Currently, in the NPPF it is stated that "Planning policies for housing should make use of the Government's optional technical standards for accessible and adaptable housing, where this would address an identified need for such properties." However, evidence suggests that Local Authorities are not identifying and planning for the housing needs of Disabled people and are not delivering the accessible homes Disabled people need. Only 12% of local

authorities across Britain rated the data they relied on to develop their local plans and housing strategies as 'good' or 'very good' in terms of its usefulness.¹ 2020 research from Habinteg also found that more than half of all local plans still make no requirements for any accessible housing standard.²

Local Authorities need a national standardised tool to assess their local housing needs, enabling them to consider all relevant factors such as size, type, tenure, accessibility, etc. Currently, Local Authorities lack comprehensive data on the housing needs of Disabled people in their areas. In fact, only 12% of councils rate their data on Disabled people's housing requirements as 'good' or 'very good', according to the EHRC, yet many still rely on this insufficient data in their key strategic documents.³ Relying on inadequate data to plan and assess housing needs, and subsequently build the required homes, is not an effective approach.

At Inclusion London, we have observed a lack of coordination between Housing and Planning teams within Local Authorities. These teams, which should work collaboratively and inform each other's decisions, often operate with a significant gap in knowledge. For example, we have found that Planning teams do not always rely on data from allocation teams when planning new housing. This disconnect means that crucial data on the needs of Disabled people is not properly integrated into housing strategies.

This must change. A standardised methodology should be provided to all Local Authorities to ensure they can accurately assess the housing needs of their populations, including Deaf and Disabled people. Additionally, adequate resources must be allocated to ensure this methodology can be effectively implemented and used. We believe that the current proposed method for assessing housing needs does not explicitly enable local authorities to assess Disabled people's housing needs and deliver accessible homes.

Regardless of the assessment method, using housing stock levels as a reference point would not provide local authorities with a robust basis to assess need for accessible homes, as the method doesn't factor in the accessibility of the existing housing stock. Most Local Authorities do not know how accessible their current housing stock is, and national Government does not currently collect good

¹ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Britain's Hidden Crisis [Housing and disabled people: Britain's hidden crisis | Equality and Human Rights Commission \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](#)

² Habinteg (2021) Forecast for Accessible Homes (2020) [Habinteg Housing Association Annual Report and Financial Statements 2020](#)

³ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Britain's Hidden Crisis [Housing and disabled people: Britain's hidden crisis | Equality and Human Rights Commission \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](#)

quality data around the net number of starts and completions of accessible homes built to M4(1), M4(2) and M4(3) standards. Without addressing this lack of data, the proposed method would only encourage the delivery of more housing rather than the type of housing that is needed, including accessible homes, including those for wheelchair users.

Only 9% of homes in England meet the criteria needed to be considered 'visitable'.⁴ This indicates that a large number of the existing homes within England are not suitable for a significant portion of Disabled individuals. The shortage of wheelchair accessible housing in England is particularly acute, with over 400,000 wheelchair users living in inaccessible homes.⁵ This is why we have, and continue to make calls for the Government to raise accessibility standards and set minimum national accessible housing targets for all Local Authorities. These targets should be a 90% M4(2) accessible and adaptable homes and 10% M4(3) Wheelchair user homes.

The urgency to raise accessibility standards and introduce minimum targets was also highlighted by the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee in May 2024 as part of the Committee's inquiry into the state of housing for Disabled people. In the Committee's report, 'Disabled People in the Housing Sector', it was stated that:

"At the next NPPF review, the Government must include an explicit requirement for local authorities to assess the local need for homes at M4(3) wheelchair user standard. The NPPF should also encourage local authorities to include a required minimum percentage of M4(3) standard homes in their local plan, with the precise figure based on their local need assessment. If the Government does not make these changes at the next NPPF review, the Department must set out in writing to us, upon publication of the revised NPPF, how it plans to increase the supply of new homes built to the M4(3) standard to meet the needs of wheelchair users"

In addition to the above, we need M4(2) properties to be built widely because accessibility is a universal need—everyone is likely to face mobility challenges at some point in their lives. Planning for 90% accessible and adaptable homes and

⁴ Habinteg (2020) New government data reveals accessible homes crisis for disabled people [New government data reveals accessible homes crisis for disabled people | Latest news | Habinteg Housing Association](#)

⁵ Habinteg (2020) New government data reveals accessible homes crisis for disabled people [New government data reveals accessible homes crisis for disabled people | Latest news | Habinteg Housing Association](#)

10% wheelchair user homes by default is essential for a truly inclusive housing system.

Nonetheless, the need for accessible housing will vary across different areas, this is why there must be a robust national standardised methodology not only for assessing housing needs but also for ensuring that Local Authorities with higher numbers of Disabled residents can build beyond minimum targets.

Chapter 5 - Brownfield, grey belt and the Green Belt

Question 34

Do you agree with our proposed approach to the affordable housing tenure mix?

No, we do not agree with the proposed approach to the affordable housing tenure mix.

The Government is proposing a target of 50% affordable housing, of which a proportion should be social housing. It suggests leaving it to Local Authorities to determine the appropriate proportion of social housing to build in their areas, subject to viability assessments. While we acknowledge that the need for social rent housing may vary between areas, it is clear that there is an acute shortage of social rent homes across all Local Authorities in England.

This shortage disproportionately affects Disabled people, many of whom have been on waiting lists for accessible social rent homes for years and are forced to live in unaffordable or unsuitable accommodations. Research shows that poverty rates are consistently higher for Disabled people than they are for non-disabled people.⁶ Additionally, Disabled people, are more likely to be on low-income or unemployed and face on average extra costs of £975 per month.⁷ It is for this reason that Disabled people have traditionally been overrepresented in the social housing sector.

A 2021 report by Habinteg revealed that an average wheelchair user could now expect to wait 47 years for a new-build, fully wheelchair-accessible social rent

⁶ Joseph Roundtree Foundation (2023) UK Poverty 2023 [uk_poverty_2023_-_the_essential_guide_to_understanding_poverty_in_the_uk_0.pdf](#)

⁷ Trade Union Congress (2022) Non-disabled workers paid 17% more than disabled peers [Non-disabled workers paid 17% more than disabled peers – TUC | TUC](#)

home. This highlights the urgency of addressing the chronic undersupply of accessible social housing, especially for wheelchair users.⁸

We believe the Government should take a more prescriptive approach to the affordable housing tenure mix and introduce mandatory social housing targets that all Local Authorities should be expected to meet. This is essential to alleviate the housing crisis for Disabled people and ensure that sufficient social rent homes are built.

Furthermore, we are concerned that the Government's proposal does not make any reference to the need for affordable homes, including those for social rent, to be accessible to meet Disabled people's housing needs. There is a shortage of accessible homes across all tenures, with the problem being particularly severe in social housing. As a result, thousands of Disabled people are living in unsuitable housing, which severely affects their quality of life.

We believe national Government must raise accessibility standards by making M4(2) the default option for new housing, introduce minimum 10% targets for wheelchair user homes, and ensure that a significant proportion of these homes are available in social housing. Currently, Local Authorities are not building enough accessible homes, especially accessible social rent homes, because M4(1) remains the default standard, and there are no mandatory targets to drive the delivery of accessible housing.

Without these changes, Disabled people will continue to face long waits for accessible homes and will be disproportionately impacted by the affordable housing crisis.

Chapter 6 - Delivering affordable, well-designed homes and places

Question 47

Do you agree with setting the expectation that local planning authorities should consider the particular needs of those who require Social Rent when

⁸ Habinteg (2022) Wheelchair users subjected to decades-long wait for new accessible housing [Wheelchair users subjected to decades-long wait for new accessible housing | Latest news | Habinteg Housing Association](#)

undertaking needs assessments and setting policies on affordable housing requirements?

We agree with the expectation that local planning authorities (LPAs) should assess the housing needs of those requiring Social Rent when conducting needs assessments and setting policies for affordable housing. This is because the need will vary from one Local Authority to another. However, we disagree with the Government's proposal not to introduce specific social housing targets. The shortage of social housing is well-documented, and the Government must introduce minimum social housing targets that all local authorities are expected to meet to avoid a postcode lottery. Crisis reported earlier this year that one million households in England are currently stuck on the council waiting lists for social housing.⁹ Despite this, there are a remarkably low number of Social Rent homes being built – this is a crisis and the Government must intervene. There needs to be a minimum portion of homes that are built for Social Rent, as set by the Government, and flexibility for Local Authorities to go over this portion if the housing needs of their area warrants it.

In addition to this, the NPPF must also make clear that when building Social Rent homes, Local Authorities need to consider the specific needs of Disabled people when undertaking needs assessments and setting policies. At present, many local authorities across England are failing to collect high-quality data about Disabled people and their housing needs. Most local plans lack sufficient information on this, and more than half fail to set any targets for accessible housing.¹⁰ In spite of this, Disabled people, are more likely to be on low-income or unemployed and face on average extra costs of £975 per month.¹¹ As a result, it is clear that homes for Social Rent are crucial for Disabled people, and therefore, our needs must be specifically considered when building Social Rent homes.

This is also crucial, as without it, we are building inaccessibility into our social housing stock, requiring Local Authorities to pay for adaptations that would otherwise be unnecessary. Recent research from Habinteg found that,

⁹ Crisis (2024) [Over 12,000 social homes lost last year, as over one million households remain trapped on council waiting lists | Crisis | Together we will end homelessness](#)
[Over 12,000 social homes lost last year, as over one million households remain trapped on council waiting lists | Crisis | Together we will end homelessness](#)

¹⁰ Habinteg (2021) Forecast for Accessible Homes (2020) [Habinteg Housing Association Annual Report and Financial Statements 2020](#)

¹¹ Trade Union Congress (2022) Non-disabled workers paid 17% more than disabled peers [Non-disabled workers paid 17% more than disabled peers – TUC | TUC](#)

adaptations of a grab rail, wet room and stairlift would cost almost £27,000 more for someone living in an M4 (1) home than someone living in an M4 (2) home.¹²

We believe that the Government should make M4 (2) the default regulatory baseline and introduce a mandatory 10% target for M4 (3) wheelchair-accessible homes to avoid postcode disparities. These targets should be viewed as minimum requirements, and LPAs should be encouraged to exceed them if their housing needs assessments indicate an increase in the number of Disabled people in their area. Ensuring that local authorities gather accurate data on Disabled people's housing needs is essential for delivering the homes that are required.

In conclusion, the Government must set minimum targets on Social Rent homes, and ensure these homes are accessible to build a Social Housing stock that will meet the needs of the population over time.

Question 52

What would be the most appropriate way to promote high percentage Social Rent/affordable housing developments?

The most appropriate way to promote high percentage Social Rent homes would be for the Government to introduce specific social housing targets through the NPPF. Please refer to our response to question 47 for an explanation about the need for minimum mandatory social housing targets.

Question 57

Do you have views on whether the definition of 'affordable housing for rent' in the Framework glossary should be amended? If so, what changes would you recommend?

We believe that that the definition of Affordable Housing in the Framework glossary needs to be amended, and that a clear definition of accessible housing should be added too. Whilst we are pleased with the Government's commitment to building 1.5 million more homes, both affordability and accessibility are key to ensuring that delivering these homes will actually meet the needs of the people of this country.

¹² Habinteg (2024) [Adaptations to older homes could cost households thousands: Habinteg | Latest news | Habinteg Housing Association](#)

Affordable housing should be social housing. Affordable housing is currently a very loose concept and what is technically considered affordable is not genuinely affordable for the majority of Deaf and Disabled people in this country. After undertaking research into Housing and Disability in Britain, the Equality and Human Rights Commission concluded that “Disabled people are overwhelmingly represented in social housing, because of its lower affordable rent, security of tenure and provision of support, but demand for social housing outstrips supply in every part of Britain”.¹³

Other tenures that fall under the category of ‘Affordable Housing’ are out of reach for the majority of Deaf and Disabled people and without massively prioritising Social Rent, accessible homes, we cannot solve the housing crisis.

Therefore, the definition of Affordable housing for rent in the Framework glossary should be amended in a way so that it specifically refers to social housing. We suggest that the definition of Affordable Housing for Rent is amended as follows: Affordable housing for rent meets the following condition: the rent is not greater than 50 per cent of local market rent and/or is set in accordance with the Government’s rent policy for Social Rent and must be owned and let by local authorities or private registered providers, for which guideline target rents are determined through the national rent regime.

The framework glossary should also include a clear definition of accessible housing. The Government should revise the NPPF to incorporate an explicit, clear definition of accessible housing. The term ‘accessible’ is used inconsistently in the NPPF. This does not embed a clear goal to ensure we are building accessible housing stock. The definition should reference Part M of the Building Regulations ensuring that the adaptability and accessibility of new-build homes is interwoven throughout the NPPF to avoid misinterpretation. Accessible homes should be considered as a key element to the planning framework in a parallel way to affordable housing.

Question 59

Do you agree with the proposals to retain references to well-designed buildings and places, but remove references to ‘beauty’ and ‘beautiful’ and to amend paragraph 138 of the existing Framework?

¹³ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Britain’s Hidden Crisis [Housing and disabled people: Britain’s hidden crisis | Equality and Human Rights Commission \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/our-reports/britains-hidden-crisis)

We agree with this proposal. However, we are disappointed that references to ‘well-designed buildings and places’ in this chapter do not make any mention of inclusive design and accessibility standards. A ‘well-designed building’ can be defined as such if it is built in accordance with the principles of inclusive design and in line with accessibility standards. The NPPF needs to ensure that when referring to well-designed homes, it is clear that these homes must be accessible. Accessibility should be defined in the glossary as referring to Part M of the building regulations.

Finally, we reiterate our recommendation that we believe that the Government should make M4 (2) the default regulatory baseline and introduce a mandatory 10% target for M4 (3) wheelchair-accessible homes to avoid postcode disparities.

Question 61

Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?

We are concerned that that this chapter, which is focused on delivering well-designed, affordable homes, makes no reference to the housing needs of Disabled people and the need to raise accessibility standards as recommended by the latest Levelling Up Committee’s report.

One in four people in the population are Disabled.¹⁴ We represent a significant portion of the population. A ‘well-designed building’ is a building that considers access needs from the outset, follows the principles of inclusive design and meets accessibility standards.

Only 9% of homes in England meet the criteria needed to be considered ‘visitable’.¹⁵ This indicates that a large number of the existing homes within England are not suitable for a significant portion of Disabled individuals. The shortage of wheelchair accessible housing is particularly acute, with over 400,000 wheelchair users are living in homes which are inaccessible.¹⁶

¹⁴ Commons Library (2023) UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences

[UK disability statistics: Prevalence and life experiences - House of Commons Library \(parliament.uk\)](#)

¹⁵ Habinteg (2020) New government data reveals accessible homes crisis for disabled people

[New government data reveals accessible homes crisis for disabled people | Latest news | Habinteg Housing Association](#)

¹⁶ Habinteg (2020) New government data reveals accessible homes crisis for disabled people

[New government data reveals accessible homes crisis for disabled people | Latest news | Habinteg Housing Association](#)

In spite of this, it is widely recognised that most people, over the course of their lifetimes, will acquire an impairment whether it is permanent or temporary. Continuing to build homes that are not accessible and cannot be easily adapted means we are building inaccessibility into the housing stock of this country. Even when homes can be adapted, local authorities are having to pay for costly and disruptive adaptations further down the line. A well-designed home is a home in which we can use all of the facilities, therefore, an accessible home.

In the latest 'Disabled People in the Housing Sector' report published by the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, the Committee found that most Council officers felt that 'accessible housing supply should have greater emphasis in the Government's National Planning Policy Framework'.¹⁷

Therefore, the NPPF needs to ensure that when referring to well-designed homes, it is clear that these homes must be accessible. Accessibility should be defined in the glossary as referring to Part M of the building regulations.

Finally, we reiterate our recommendation that we believe that the Government should make M4 (2) the default regulatory baseline and introduce a mandatory 10% target for M4 (3) wheelchair-accessible homes to avoid postcode disparities.

Chapter 8 - Delivering community needs

Question 69

Do you agree with the changes proposed to paragraphs 114 and 115 of the existing NPPF?

We support the proposal of adopting a vision-led approach to transport planning and we strongly advocate for the need for local authorities and developers to work together with residents to design the transport interventions needed.

However, we are concerned that the proposed changes to paragraphs 114 and 115 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which emphasize a vision-led approach to transport planning, do not address the critical need for improving accessible transport infrastructure for Disabled people. Also, there is a lack of clarity as to what the vision-led approach proposed by the Government would entail. We believe that it is essential any vision-led approach to transport

¹⁷ Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities Committee (2024) Disabled people in the housing sector [Disabled people in the housing sector \(parliament.uk\)](https://www.parliament.uk/publications/2024/04/17)

planning embeds the needs and aspirations of Deaf and Disabled people to travel freely, safely and independently across the country.

We know that transport infrastructure in England is still not widely accessible to many Disabled people, including but not limited to people with mobility impairments, and access barriers prevent Disabled people from living independently. Disabled people experience significant accessibility barriers within the built environment, including navigating the street space and when using public transport. Transport for All's 'Are We There Yet Report' (2023) found that 56% of the respondents to their survey reported being unhappy or extremely unhappy making journeys. Additionally, 77% of respondents experienced poor pavements, including bumps, potholes, tree roots, broken tiles, and narrow width, making it the most frequently cited barrier of any mode of transport.¹⁸

Having an accessible transport infrastructure is a key component to having a home that allows Disabled people to thrive. Inclusion London's latest research into housing and disability also highlights the importance of good transport links in Deaf and Disabled People's local areas. We interviewed 22 Deaf and Disabled individuals with different impairments, living across various tenures in different areas of London. 14 out of 22 of the people we interviewed told us their local transport options were inaccessible to them. We have not yet published our research but can share some preliminary insights.

Our interview analysis underscores the crucial need for housing developments to be located near accessible transport options, especially underground stations. Residents living far from these stations face significant physical and emotional challenges due to longer travel times and unreliable transportation alternatives. Those dependent on buses often encounter further issues, including inconsistent enforcement of pram folding rules and attitudinal barriers from drivers and other passengers, which can lead to conflicts and prevent them using the bus. Additionally, obstacles such as uneven pavements, poorly marked drop-curbs, and obstructed pathways extend travel times and exacerbate the difficulties of navigating the built environment. These barriers contribute to a stressful experience for Disabled Londoners. Currently, only 33% of London Underground Stations are accessible from street to platform level.¹⁹ Therefore,

¹⁸ Transport for All (2023) Are We There Yet [Microsoft Word - NATS full report to export as PDF \(transportforall.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁹ Transport for London (2024) Step-free access [Step-free access - Transport for London \(tfl.gov.uk\)](#)

integrating accessible tube stations into the planning of new housing developments is essential for reducing physical strain and enhancing overall quality of life for Disabled individuals. Strategically locating housing near well-serviced and accessible transport options is vital for improving accessibility and ensuring a more supportive environment.

Currently, housing planning and delivery is often disconnected from transport planning. Accessible homes are built in areas where there is no accessible transport provision. This, coupled with the fact that housing allocations policy does not account for Disabled people's transport needs, means that Disabled people can be allocated homes which are in areas where transport infrastructure and the street-space are inaccessible. This means that Disabled people have to refuse homes they have been allocated.

Overall, we strongly advocate for a 'vision-led approach' to transport and housing that embeds the needs and aspirations of Deaf and Disabled people from the outset to travel safely, affordably and independently. A vision-led approach to transport planning must go hand in hand with investments aimed at improving the accessibility of the national transport infrastructure and improving the street-space to enable Disabled people to navigate the built environment as non-Disabled people. Any vision-led approach to transport and housing planning should be co-produced with Deaf and Disabled people and our organisations.

Question 71

Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?

We welcome the Government's commitment to reduce health inequalities and the intention to find ways to improve the planning system to support the creation of healthy communities. However, we are disappointed that this chapter does not make any reference to the link between the lack of accessible housing in the country, including the shortage of wheelchair accessible homes, and the rise in health inequalities among older and Disabled people and therefore does not contain any proposal to address this issue.

We believe that a healthy community is a community where everyone is able to thrive and live independently, where everyone has equal chances and is valued and treated equally. For Disabled people, this means in practice being able to afford essentials, being able to access good community and social care support services, being able to live in accessible and inclusive town centres, with good,

accessible, safe and affordable transport networks and a street space free from disabling barriers, being able to access employment opportunities and being able to live in accessible and inclusive housing.

While we appreciate the Government's recognition in this consultation that meeting community needs goes beyond providing homes and jobs and that our society needs to be supported by a range of services and facilities to be sustainable, and to support healthy living, we are concerned that no reference is made in this chapter to the need to increase the supply of accessible and adaptable housing for older and Disabled people.

Housing is a fundamental part of independent and healthy living, a cornerstone for Deaf and Disabled people who, like our non-Disabled counterparts, want autonomy, choice and control over our lives. However, the reality is that many of us reside in homes which fall short of meeting our accessibility needs and being able to live in a truly accessible and affordable home is often a postcode lottery. We believe that all Deaf and Disabled people should have the right to live in a home that is accessible to us and the Government should prioritise boosting the supply of accessible social housing in order to be able to reduce health inequalities.

To us, accessibility is not just about homes which meet the needs of those with mobility impairments – it is about homes that suit the needs of all Deaf and Disabled people throughout our lives. This includes flashing doorbells and alarms for Deaf people, noise-reducing insulation for autistic people and lever-style taps for those with arthritis. It also means building homes in accessible areas – meaning the local transport network is accessible, it is close to medical and social services, family and support networks.

Nationally, there is a significant unmet accessible housing need for Disabled people across all tenures. Around 1.8 million households in England have an identified need for accessible housing, of whom 580,000 are working age. The existing housing stock across England is unfortunately often not accessible or adapted to meet disabled people's requirements, with only 9% offering minimal accessibility features.²⁰ The shortage of wheelchair accessible housing is

²⁰ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Britain's Hidden Crisis [Housing and disabled people: Britain's hidden crisis](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/our-reports/britains-hidden-crisis-executive-summary). Available at: [housing-and-disabled-people-britains-hidden-crisis-executive-summary.pdf \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/our-work/our-reports/britains-hidden-crisis-executive-summary)

particularly acute, with 400,000 wheelchair users currently living unsuitable homes.²¹

Disabled people are struggling to find accessible homes across all tenures, and many are living in unsuitable accommodation because the supply of accessible homes is not meeting the demand. There is specifically a shortage of accessible social housing which Disabled people predominantly need due to the affordability and security of this tenure. Disabled people spend years on waiting lists for an affordable, accessible home, with many forced to rely on the private rented sector (PRS) where 1 in 3 Disabled people live in unsuitable accommodation.²² This is extremely concerning due to the lack of affordability in the PRS in London and the fact that as Disabled people we are more likely to experience poverty.²³

Living in inaccessible homes means living in homes which are not built to allow us to use their facilities. Living in inaccessible homes leads to the significant deterioration of Disabled people's physical and mental health and heightens feelings of anxiety and depression. We are also more reliant on the care system to assist us in our homes, less likely to be employed and must endure hospitals beyond discharge dates as our homes do not accommodate our basic needs. All this has profound consequences on Disabled people's physical and mental health and severely impact Disabled people's ability to live healthy independent lives.

National government, local authorities and developers have a significant role in ensuring the delivery of suitable housing for Disabled people.

Current accessibility building standards, particularly Part M of the Building Regulations for England and Wales, have produced generally inaccessible homes especially for wheelchair users. M4(1) – a visitable home - is compulsory for all new housing developments and M4(2) – adaptable home - or M4(3) – wheelchair adaptable/wheelchair accessible - are optional.²⁴ In 2020 the Government consulted on mandating higher standards and in 2022 committed

21 Habinteg (2022) Wheelchair users subjected to decades-long wait for new accessible housing Available at: [Wheelchair users subjected to decades-long wait for new accessible housing | Latest news | Habinteg Housing Association](#)

22 Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Britain's Hidden Crisis [Housing and disabled people: Britain's hidden crisis.](#)

23 Joseph Roundtree Foundation (2020) UK Poverty 2019/20 [UK Poverty 2019/20 | JRF](#)

24 Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (2015) Access to and use of buildings: Approved Document M [Access to and use of buildings: Approved Document M - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

to raising minimum mandatory standards to M4(2).²⁵ However, nothing happened since then and new homes are still being built to M4(1) standard. Raising mandatory standards for new-build homes was also recommended by the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee in May 2024.²⁶

Chapter 10 - Changes to local plan intervention criteria

Question 87

Do you agree that we should we replace the existing intervention policy criteria with the revised criteria set out in this consultation?

We support in principle the proposal of replacing the existing intervention policy criteria with the revised criteria set out in this consultation, but we believe the Government should go even further. The Government should ensure that housing accessibility standards and targets are in place and that all local authorities deliver according to standards and targets to ensure older and Disabled people lives in homes that meet their needs. The Government should:

- raise accessibility standards for all new build homes by making M4(2) the new regulatory baseline;
- introduce a national target of 10% wheelchair accessible homes
- set an expectation in the NPF that the Planning Inspectorate should challenge any local authority if their local plan fails to:
 - a) set specific requirements for the delivery of a proportion of all new homes to meet M4(2) and M4 (3) standards;
 - b) Include sufficient evidence addressing inclusive design and access for Disabled people in terms of housing, public spaces and the wider built environment.

²⁵ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (2022) Raising accessibility standards for new homes: summary of consultation responses and government response. [Raising accessibility standards for new homes: summary of consultation responses and government response - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/111111/raising-accessibility-standards-for-new-homes-summary-of-consultation-responses-and-government-response.pdf)
Accessed on: 15.02.23

²⁶ Levelling up, Housing and Communities Committee (2024) Disabled People in the Housing Sector report
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmcomloc/63/report.html#:~:text=We%20launched%20our%20inquiry%20into,of%20disabled%20people%20in%20England.>

In addition, national Government should develop a standardised and robust methodology that local authorities should use to assess Disabled people's housing needs and deliver accessible and adaptable housing, as well as wheelchair-accessible housing. This should include both the current and projected needs of the local population, the existing stock and potential future needs. It must account for the size, type, tenure, accessibility demands and supply of the local area. The Government should amend the planning practice guidance to include a standardised and robust methodology. Therefore, if Local Authority's did not apply a specific target of M4(2) and M4(3) standards in their local plans, the Planning Inspectorate should challenge them, and this should be reflected in the NPPF.

Chapter 12 - The future of planning policy and planmaking

Question 105

Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?

Yes, it is disappointing to see that in terms of future plan-making reforms, there is currently no reference to amending the Part M of the Building Regulations.

Current accessibility building targets based on the standards set out in Part M of the Building Regulations for England and Wales, have produced generally inaccessible homes especially for wheelchair users²⁷. M4(1) – a visitable home - is compulsory for all new housing developments and M4(2) – adaptable home - or M4(3) – wheelchair adaptable/wheelchair accessible - are optional. In 2020 the Government consulted on mandating higher standards and in 2022 committed to raising minimum mandatory standards to M4(2).²⁸ However, we are still waiting for this to be implemented, and new homes are still being built to M4(1) standard. Raising mandatory standards for new-build homes was also

²⁷ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (2015) Access to and use of buildings: Approved Document M [Access to and use of buildings: Approved Document M - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/424242/Access_to_and_use_of_buildings_-_Approved_Document_M_-_GOV.UK.pdf)

²⁸ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (2015) Access to and use of buildings: Approved Document M [Access to and use of buildings: Approved Document M - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/424242/Access_to_and_use_of_buildings_-_Approved_Document_M_-_GOV.UK.pdf)

recommended by the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee in May 2024²⁹.

We strongly urge the Government to:

- raise the accessibility standards of all new homes, making M4(2) the national baseline for all new-build properties.
- revise the NPPF, explicitly requiring all local plans to include a specific policy and target for new wheelchair accessible and adaptable M4(3) of at least 10%.
- Set an expectation in the NPPF that the Planning Inspectorate should challenge any local authority if their plan fails to:
 - a) set specific requirements for the delivery of a proportion of all new homes to meet M4(2) and M4 (3) standards.
 - b) Include sufficient evidence addressing inclusive design and access for Disabled people in terms of housing, public spaces and the wider built environment.

Chapter 13 - Public Sector Equality Duty

Question 106

Do you have any views on the impacts of the above proposals for you, or the group or business you represent and on anyone with a relevant protected characteristic? If so, please explain who, which groups, including those with protected characteristics, or which businesses may be impacted and how. Is there anything that could be done to mitigate any impact identified?

The NPPF is a key document that sets the tone and direction for local planning policies. As such it can play a strong role in ensuring that housing plans comply with the Equality Act in that they "advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it".

We believe that Government's proposals included in this consultation to revise the NPPF fail to produce a positive impact on older and Disabled people because they do not provide a robust basis to address the housing needs of older and

²⁹ Levelling up, Housing and Communities Committee (2024) Disabled People in the Housing Sector report

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmcomloc/63/report.html#:~:text=We%20launched%20our%20inquiry%20into,of%20disabled%20people%20in%20England.>

Disabled people and do not encourage the delivery of accessible, adaptable housing and wheelchair accessible housing. Our key recommendation to achieve this is that 'accessible housing' is considered as a key element to the planning framework in a parallel way to 'affordable housing'. This should be reflected in the revised NPPF.

We urge that every opportunity is taken to ensure that Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) opportunities are maximised, and that more emphasis is given in the wording of the NPPF to promote the impact of inclusive and accessible design on Disabled people.

Currently, Disabled people in this country face disparities when it comes to housing. Across all tenures, there are a significant number of Disabled people living in inaccessible housing. 1 in 3 Disabled people in the private rented sector live in unsuitable accommodation, 1 in 5 in social housing live in unsuitable accommodation and 1 in 7 who own their own homes live in unsuitable accommodation.³⁰ A recent enquiry into Disabled people in the housing sector by the Levelling up, Housing and Communities reported a multitude of housing issues faced by Disabled people: including impacts on dignity, wellbeing and health due to living in unsuitable accommodation for long period of time, a lack of accessible homes for sale and barriers to making social and private homes accessible.³¹

The housing crisis felt by Deaf and Disabled people in this country has far-reaching consequences. Living in inaccessible homes means that we are stuck in hospital beyond discharge dates as our homes are not equipped for our needs. This puts more pressure on the NHS and the care system and negatively impacts our quality of life.

For individuals, living in inaccessible homes has major impacts on their physical and mental health.

This impact included injuries from having to interact with a living environment that contains many physical barriers, leading to long-term damage to their health. Inaccessible housing forces individuals to adapt to environments that were not designed with their needs in mind, leading to avoidable physical harm.

³⁰ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Britain's Hidden Crisis [Housing and disabled people: Britain's hidden crisis.](#)

³¹ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Britain's Hidden Crisis [Housing and disabled people: Britain's hidden crisis.](#)

Additionally, inaccessible homes often create a constant state of stress and anxiety for Disabled people.

A significant shortcoming of the revised NPPF is that there is no suggestion to provide a clear, explicit definition of accessible housing in the document. The framework glossary should also include a clear definition of accessible housing. The Government should revise the NPPF to incorporate an explicit, clear definition of accessible housing. The term 'accessible' is used inconsistently in the NPPF. This does not embed a clear goal to ensure we are building accessible housing stock. The definition should reference Part M of the Building Regulations ensuring that the adaptability and accessibility of new-build homes is interwoven throughout the NPPF to avoid misinterpretation. Accessible homes should be considered as a key element to the planning framework in a parallel way to affordable housing.

Accessibility should also be considered in the context of the wider built environment. This includes access to the immediate proximity of a house and as well as shops, transport, services and amenities should form part of the NPPF considerations.

We also believe that a significant shortcoming of the revised NPPF is that the way that planning interfaces with building regulations is not dealt with at all in this proposal, specifically the issue of the optional categories 2 & 3 in part M of the building regulations. This is crucial to encourage the delivery of accessible homes across the country.

Planners across all local authorities should be expected to apply consistent housing accessibility guidance and standards, regardless of where Deaf and Disabled people live. This already happens in London where local authorities are expected to build 90% homes to M4(2) accessible and adaptable standards and 10% wheelchair user homes (Policy D7, London Plan). Contrary to what happens in London, across England we are continuing to build homes that are inaccessible and cannot be even adapted (M41 is still the default option).

The NPPF should operate in tandem with enhancements to the Building Regulations to deliver higher accessibility standards and features for all new homes and should make an explicit reference to Part M of the building regulations and the categories 2 & 3. The optional 'Category 2' accessible and adaptable housing standard should be made obligatory for all new build homes.

In addition, the Government should revise the NPPF, explicitly requiring all local plans to include a specific policy and target for new wheelchair accessible and adaptable M4(3) of at least 10%. There are 400,000 wheelchair users currently living in unsuitable accommodation and more than half of local authorities in England do not set any accessible housing targets. Introducing a mandatory national target of 10% would encourage the delivery of wheelchair user homes that are greatly needed across the country.

To help local authorities meet their obligations under PSED and help the Planning Inspectorate ensure the needs of Deaf and Disabled people have been adequately assessed in local plans, we recommend that the presumption in favour of sustainable development is altered to include accessibility, and with this objective, disability is integrated in the definition of sustainable development, particularly into the social objective of sustainable development. The needs of Deaf and Disabled people go however beyond housing and planners should be encouraged to look at the spatial environment and issues of accessibility e.g. transport in conjunction with housing. This should be reflected in the NPPF.

The social objective of the current definition of sustainable development could be amended as follows: “to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of – *insert “accessible”* - homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations, *insert “including the needs of Deaf and Disabled people”*; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities’ health, social and cultural well-being.”

The meaning of accessible should make explicit reference to Part M of the Building Regulations as well as to the BSI standard PAS 6463 on Design for the Mind: Neurodiversity and the Built Environment which provides guidance around how to make environments inclusive for neurodivergent people and covers sensory needs, from lighting and acoustics to thermal comfort and wayfinding. It is crucial that any place, including housing development, is designed to not only meet the needs of people with mobility impairments but also Disabled people with different kinds of impairments, including neurodivergent people.

It is also important to ensure effective enforcement of standards and targets in order to maintain public confidence in the planning system. We are concerned

that the Government's proposal does not seem to properly tackle the issue of viability assessments which are being used to reduce the number of accessible, adaptable and wheelchair accessible new-build housing in England. Research by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission found that viability acts as a barrier in the supply of accessible houses. This is because there is an imbalance in negotiating power between local authorities and developers. Local authorities do not have enough time and expertise to adequately challenge developers viability assessments.³²

As the planning system relies on local authorities to ensure that the new-build houses reflect the needs of the local population, we are concerned that they are not given resources to achieve this. In fact, 57% of councils agree it can be difficult to get developers to build accessible homes.³³ We therefore recommend that:

- The Government should adequately resource local authorities to enable them to challenge viability assessments, where needed, and ensure they are not used to prevent or reduce the number of accessible and adaptable new-build housing.
- The government should challenge the 20% profit expectation of developers, and not allow them to wriggle out of contributions where that level of profit cannot be achieved.

Assessing Disabled people's housing need for effective planning and delivery

While having accessibility standards and targets in place is necessary to ensure all Disabled people have access to housing that meet their needs regardless of where they live, it must be acknowledged that targets only reflect the minimum requirements that all local authorities are expected to comply with when planning and delivering accessible housing. This means that in some local authority areas there might be a higher need for wheelchair user homes depending on the current and estimated future increase in the number of wheelchair users so the local authority should be expected to build beyond 10% wheelchair accessible housing if evidence suggests the need for it.

Planning relies on local authorities having accurate data about the housing needs of the population. This includes the housing needs of Deaf and Disabled people.

³² Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Britain's Hidden Crisis [Housing and disabled people: Britain's hidden crisis.](#)

³³ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Britain's Hidden Crisis [Housing and disabled people: Britain's hidden crisis.](#)

However, evidence suggests that local authorities have very limited knowledge and/or data regarding the number of Disabled people in their areas, the impairments they have and their housing needs. Housing providers also have very scarce information around the accessibility of their housing stock, 65% do not know whether the social or affordable rented housing in their area is accessible or not.³⁴ This underpins the inability of Local Authorities to accurately plan and deliver the homes needed for their local area and can be seen by the fact that more than half of local authorities do not set any targets for accessible housing in their local plan.³⁵

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) should be revised to include an "explicit" requirement for councils to assess Deaf and Disabled people's housing needs locally and include good-quality information about Disabled people's housing requirements in their local plans. The Government should also develop a standardised and robust methodology for LAs to collect data about Disabled people and their housing needs. This methodology should be included in the planning practice guidance associated to this document to all LAs in England.

Data should include the number of people living in the area, their impairments, accessibility needs and other requirements that Disabled people might have, such as living close to their support networks, being close to accessible public transport as well as medical and social care support services.

We are also concerned that housing accessibility and inclusive design standards are often treated by local authorities as nice-to-do rather than statutory requirements. We are worried that the Planning Inspectorate may have approved Local Plans that pay insufficient regard to the needs of Disabled people, risking a breach of the anticipatory reasonable adjustments duty and the public sector equality duty. We believe the NPPF should clarify that the Planning Inspectorate, responsible for examining local plans and assessing whether they are sound, has the authority to challenge any local authority if their plan fails to:

- Set specific requirements for the delivery of a proportion of all new homes to meet M4(2) and M4 (3) standards

³⁴ Equality and Human Rights Commission (2018) Britain's Hidden Crisis [Housing and disabled people: Britain's hidden crisis.](#)

³⁵ Habinteg (2022) Wheelchair users subjected to decades-long wait for new accessible housing [Wheelchair users subjected to decades-long wait for new accessible housing | Latest news | Habinteg Housing Association](#)

- Include sufficient evidence addressing inclusive design and access for Disabled people in terms of housing, public spaces and the wider built environment.

Engagement with Disabled people

We are concerned that the revised draft NPPF does not make any proposal aimed at improving engagement with Deaf and Disabled people and Deaf and Disabled people's organisations around housing and planning, including the need to involve Deaf and Disabled people at pre-application stage.

While Disabled people are not a statutory group to consult with, we believe they need to be consulted with at pre-application stage. This is important in strengthening the voice of Disabled people and demonstrating how local authorities are discharging their obligations under the PSED. Local authorities' practice on consultation with Deaf and Disabled people is weak and this, coupled with reductions in funding for Deaf and Disabled people's organisations, makes it difficult to contribute to formal consultation processes. We recommend that governments at national and local level need to be much more effective in engaging Disabled people at both at the strategic and operational levels to meaningfully reflect their input, in a continual cycle of improvement. To achieve this, national Government should amend the NPPF to explicitly require that Disabled people are consulted during the pre-application phase of new local plans to guarantee meaningful engagement.

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