

**Matter 1: Housing Standards**

- a. What is the relationship between the Housing Standards MALP and the Draft Interim Housing SPG?

Paragraph 3.32A refers to a range of housing standards being brought together in the Housing SPG. These standards should be set within the London Plan, the policy box as well as the text, and we seek changes of wording to bring this into effect.

- b. Does it need to be made clearer that the advice and policies apply to both residential new-build and conversions?
- c. Do the Mayor's proposed alterations (with regard to Housing Standards) appropriately reflect the national advice referred to in the introductory paragraph above?

To be consistent with national policy, the alterations need to reflect the distinctive conditions and pressures in London. In our view, more should be done to provide a distinctive London approach to all housing standards.

Policy 3.8 deletes the reference to Lifetime Homes, with a further deletion of the Glossary definition, even though these are recognised nationally as best practice standards which have been in the London Plan since 2004.

All new housing should be built to be accessible and able to meet changing needs over a lifetime, and therefore the Lifetime Homes standard or an equivalent should be the default standard for all new housing. Under the London Plan, 87% of new homes were built to Lifetime Homes standard in 2012, but the weakening of this strategic direction will undermine the provision of disabled friendly housing in London.

To realise the goal of meeting housing need it is essential to have accessibility at the centre of housing and planning strategies. Without radically improving access and design standards we will continue to produce too much housing where people can't get to or through the front door, where they can't access all the rooms in the house, where they can't use the bathroom, where they have to stay in hospital for much longer because their home is inaccessible, or where they can't live independently or safely. All for want of designing housing to access standards that are available, tried and tested and extremely cost-effective.

Lifetime Homes are embedded within the policy debates in London and much valued by many community and voluntary sector organizations. They are also an important foundation for Policy 7.1 Lifetime Neighbourhoods. We see no reason why the reference to Lifetime Homes cannot remain as a distinct London approach sitting alongside Categories 2 and 3 of the new national standards.

Policy 5.3 Sustainable Design and Construction deletes the Code for Sustainable Homes when some authorities argue this should be applied until the 2016 Building Regulations come into effect. The alteration also deletes the expectation that "new development in London will seek to achieve the highest code level possible (in particular for energy). We think this is a mistake, given that the expected 2016 version of the Building Regulations when compared with the Code for Sustainable Homes will have several shortcomings, neglecting fabric sustainability, overheating, internal air quality, orientation & solar gain, embodied energy & life cycle of materials. Source: Dr Dan Greenwood, University of Westminster at Conference, 22 April 2015, 'Future of Policy and Standards for Low and Zero Carbon New Homes'.

Relevant parts of the Planning and Energy Act 2008 are still in force as Section 43 of the Deregulation Act 2015, which would amend it to exclude domestic units, has not yet commenced. This Act enables Local Planning Authorities to set "reasonable requirements" for energy use and energy efficiency in local plans. "Thus planning policies can be adopted which require the energy used in new developments to incorporate:

- a specified proportion of renewable energy sourced from the locality of the development
- a specified proportion of low carbon energy sourced from the locality of the development

LPA's can also require new developments to meet energy efficiency standards which exceed those of the building regulations in force at the time, for example by requiring a particular Code for Sustainable Homes rating.

It is also relevant to note that there is an Energy Performance Buildings Directive, Directive 2010/31/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010, together with an Energy Efficiency Directive, Directive 2012/27/EU of 25 October

2012. Under the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive all new buildings must be 'nearly zero energy buildings' by 31 December 2020 (public buildings by 31 December 2018).

Our conclusion is that the London Plan should continue to strive to achieve the highest standards possible for energy and changes are needed to the proposed alteration for paragraph 5.26.

- d. Is the evidence in the Integrated Impact Assessment Report on Housing Standards sufficiently robust?

No. The assessment of the impact on air quality is clearly inadequate, whereas a proper assessment would have justified the alteration referred to above (question d)

- e. How will it be determined whether or not a room is 'functional and fit for purpose' (policy 3.5 C)?
- f. Paragraph 3.32A refers to the standards being sound 'in terms of need and viability'. Is the evidence in the documents entitled 'Viability Assessment' and 'Evidence of Need' sufficiently robust?

The viability assessment

- g. Are paragraph 3.36 and Table 3.3 sufficiently aspirational?
- h. What is the justification for 'strongly encouraging' a ceiling height of 2.5m (Table 3.3)? Does this introduce a degree of uncertainty?

Creating uncertainty for developers needs to be avoided. Instead of strongly encouraging this should read "required".

- i. What is the justification for the 90% figure in policy 3.8 (c)?

At present very large numbers of people are routinely denied housing that meets their needs or will fail to meet their needs should they become disabled, have a period of significant illness, start a family or get older. Accessible housing is crucial for many disabled and older people but it is also important for people in many life stages and circumstances: homes that don't have an accessible WC on the entrance level or where walls do not have the capacity for supports to be added will fail to meet the needs of many people.

Many disabled people live in accommodation that does not meet their needs: research shows that one in five disabled people who require adaptations to their home say their accommodation is not suitable while 145,000 disabled people aged 65 and over report living in homes

that do not meet their needs. If we just talk about wheelchair users – who are only one section of disabled people – research shows that more than four out of five homes in England do not allow a wheelchair user to get through the front door and that at least 78,300 wheelchair user households in England have unmet housing needs, amounting to at least 240 households in an average local authority.

Evidence:-

No place like home 5 million reasons to make housing disabled-friendly  
- Leonard Cheshire Disability (2014)

Our research found that councils are not thinking about disabled-friendly housing, despite the growing number of disabled and older residents:

Only 5% of homes in England can be visited by someone using a wheelchair;

- 5 million people in the UK have a mobility problem and could benefit from a disabled-friendly home;
- One in six disabled adults and half of all disabled children live in housing that isn't suitable for their needs;

Only 16% of councils could provide any data on the number of homes in their area which were wheelchair accessible. Only 10% of councils could provide any data on the number of homes in their area built to Lifetime Home Standards. Only 9% of councils could provide any information on how many homes were built to wheelchair accessible standards in the past three years. These statistics are based on FOI responses from 288 authorities (76% response rate)

Councils will have to have collected detailed and costly evidence before they can ask developers to build homes to either Lifetime Homes or wheelchair accessible standards. But our research shows that councils simply do not have this evidence in place. We question whether it is cost-effective to ask each council to do their own evidence-gathering exercise, especially at a time when council resources are being squeezed. There is a real danger that councils will feel unable to commit time and money to gathering evidence and therefore will fail to

put any standards in place. There is also no clarity as to how many disabled and older people a local authority will need to have to justify 100% Lifetime Home Standards or a certain proportion of wheelchair accessibility.

Lifetime Homes are ordinary houses and flats which incorporate 16 design criteria that can be universally applied to new homes with an average cost of £1,100 (The CLG Housing Standards Review Consultation Impact Assessment).

These standards actually save money in the long run, by ensuring that things like grab-bars and stair-lifts can be easily and cheaply installed if people's needs change.

Muscular Dystrophy UK - Breaking point : The crisis in accessible housing and adaptations (September 2015)

Accessible housing and adaptations are vital in allowing individuals and families affected by muscle-wasting conditions the best possible quality of life and levels of independence at home. However, following an extensive survey of people affected by muscle-wasting conditions, carried out between July and September 2015, and Freedom of Information requests to local councils, this report uncovers a crisis in accessible housing, which is having a devastating effect on people's lives. Our alarming findings reveal that families are falling into serious financial hardship after exhausting their savings to fund vital housing adaptations, because Disabled Facilities Grants from their local council simply cannot cover the costs. Other individuals and families affected by progressive and often life-shortening muscle-wasting conditions are ending up trapped in homes that can no longer meet their mobility needs. Some are confined to downstairs rooms because they can no longer get up the stairs; others, who are wheelchair users, are unable to use their wheelchairs indoors, or have no turning space, which can often mean limiting access to their own bathrooms and bedrooms. Due to a lack of available housing and long waiting lists, these individuals are unable to move home and can wait years before they get the support they need.

All local authorities to hold a register of accessible properties. We were concerned that a number of local authorities who responded to our

Freedom of Information requests had no disabled housing register, and no way of recording what properties they had available. It's essential that local authorities can quantify their accessible homes, and that they know where they are located.

Camden Council, where 122 people need a wheelchair accessible property, with 0 properties currently available. Other results from London Boroughs.

	Number on waiting list	Number of available properties
London Borough of Bromley	59	0
London Borough of Bexley	171	25
Lambeth Borough	83	0
Croydon Council	176	0
Royal Borough of Greenwich	77	3
Merton Council	Info not held	0
Hackney Council	121	0
London Borough of Havering	14	0
London Borough of Tower Hamlets	129	info not held

Aspire - Wheelchair accessible housing – waiting for appropriate housing in England (October 2014)

We found that around 24,000 wheelchair users in England are waiting for appropriate social or affordable housing. When matched with freedom of information responses on wheelchair accessible properties allocated to wheelchair users, we calculated that it would take 6 years to meet current demand if allocation rates continue at the current rate. This does not even take into consideration wheelchair users newly coming into the system looking for accessible housing. Research also found that local authorities that had outsourcing arrangements were unable to provide details of their waiting lists and relied on housing

associations and arm's length management organisations to take the lead in this area.

At the heart of the problem is the lack of housing options available to disabled people; there simply is not enough wheelchair accessible housing in the country to meet the needs of our population.

Government data shows that fewer wheelchair accessible homes were built last year than in 2005. More wheelchair accessible housing would be a start and make sure that more people can live independently and go about their everyday lives. This paper calls for:

Ten per cent of all new build properties to be wheelchair accessible so that stock levels around the country increase.

A separate bidding scheme with a national register where wheelchair accessible homes are taken out of the general needs system when they become vacant and made available to wheelchair users waiting for housing on local authority housing lists first. This will improve allocation rates of wheelchair accessible properties to wheelchair users.

We have found that 20% of people with Spinal Cord Injury are discharged to nursing homes because of the absence of an independent housing option. Aspire has consistently called for requirements set in the London Plan for wheelchair accessible housing to be applied nationally. We found that 18,392 wheelchair users were on Council waiting lists for housing in England. Data supplied represented 77% of all local authorities in England. By projecting our results across the whole population, we found that there were nearly 24,000 wheelchair users in urgent need of wheelchair accessible social or affordable housing in England.

- j. Does paragraph 3.48A provide sufficient clarity with regard to the provision of lifts? How would a prospective developer know whether or not a viability assessment would be required? Should any parts of paragraph 3.48A be included within a policy?

The reference to viability assessments should be deleted as the Mayor's Viability Assessment for the alterations has already dealt with this issue. This found that there were no additional costs overall and that when

separating out the cost of requiring a lift this only amounted to between 2 and 2.4% of base building costs. Step free access for all dwellings is a very important standard in terms of equality and human rights and should be included in the policy box.

- k. Do the Minor Alterations (Housing Standards) have any significant implications for other policies in the London Plan and if so how have they been addressed?
- l. Do the Minor Alterations (Housing Standards) have any significantly adverse implications for the private rented sector and /or for the provision of starter homes and if so how have they been addressed?

Yes. The alterations will see a decline in standards, as the standard for wheelchair accessibility only applies to those homes where the local authority has responsibility for allocations or nominations. It is unacceptable that where disabled people seek to buy or rent privately they will not have the choice of a wheelchair accessible home and instead will have to go down the costly and lengthy route of adaptations.

- m. Has the issue of security been considered by the Mayor (Building Reg. Part Q) and if so what conclusions were drawn?
- n. Are the monitoring and review mechanisms and the Transition Statement, in relation to the Housing Standards, sufficiently clear and robust?

No. The Transition Statement should cover all the present standards currently being revisited in the MALP.