

Transcript - Habinteg Accessible Homes Week webinar, 20 September

Habinteg CEO Nick Apetroaie: Hello. Hello and welcome everyone to what is our seventh year, Accessible Homes Week event, but also our first Accessible Homes Week event Online.

My name is Nick Apetroaie. I'm Habinteg's CEO and I'd like to say a few words as a way of introduction to today's event.

This year I feel it is an extra special week, given the significant decision taken by the Government this summer to raise the accessibility standard for all new homes in England to accessible and adaptable dwellings standard. That's Building Regulations M4 category 2.

For Habinteg, this decision has come after seven years of nonstop campaigning by colleagues, partner organisations as well as many individuals, disability campaigners, and people with lived experience of inaccessible housing who submitted consultation responses to the government as part of our campaigning with the HoME coalition.

But, while this is an important milestone, there is still much work to do to ensure that we maximize the impact of our proposed policy.

And why is that important? Well it's important because 1.8 million people in the UK are still in need of an accessible home and over 400,000 wheelchair users still live in homes that are neither adapted or accessible.

We still need local planning authorities to be thorough and proactive in planning for the housing needs of wheelchair users. By specifically naming M4(3) standards in local planning policies, with clear percentages of new homes required in each plan. And, the Government have said they need to consult further on the detail of the new policy.

We need this to happen as soon as possible because there is a growing need for flexible and accessible housing to meet the needs of disabled and older people. Because everyone benefits from accessible homes, not just individual households.

Public funds go further because accessible homes make social care more efficient and support other positive outcomes, such as better health.

We as a housing sector need to be ready and able to get on with building new homes to accessible and adaptable standards to alleviate that pressure.

Today, you'll hear from my colleagues Natasha Davies an Access Advisor with our CAE, the Centre for Accessible Environments, and Habinteg's Head of Development, Matt Kelly, on the accessible and adaptable standard, in just a minute.

Natasha will be talking with our host today, Christina McGill, Habinteg's Director of External Affairs and social impact about why we should be preparing for a lot of policy changes now.

While Matt will be discussing challenges and opportunities that local authorities and housing association may face when delivering new, accessible homes. We're also glad to have with us today Stanley Lau, from London Borough of Waltham Forest's Planning Team, to share how Waltham Forest is meeting the needs of accessible homes in the borough with support from CAE.

And finally, we'll also hear from Ben Williamson, Director of Architecture at PRP, on why building homes for multi-generational living should be given serious consideration.

Before I hand over to today's host, Christina McGill, I would like to thank you all once again for joining us, and don't forget to tune into our digital channels for the rest of our Accessible Homes Week, and please comment and share our content.

Thank you. And I will now hand you over to Christina.

Christina McGill, Director of Social Impact & External Affairs, Habinteg: Thanks, Nick, and welcome everybody to this Accessible Homes Week's session.

I'm very excited to be presenting this in our seventh year and particularly excited, as Nick mentioned, because back in July we had the news from the government that they are planning to introduce a new baseline for all new homes, and that baseline would be the Category 2, accessible and adaptable standard.

And we've been making the argument, along with many others in the sector, for that change for quite some time, so it's significant news for generations of people in the future, who will benefit from that accessibility and adaptability.

Moving on to that new policy environment is going to present some challenges as well as opportunities for local authorities, and other key players in the whole sector.

So today, we've sort of compiled an expert panel to help us get our heads around what some of those changes might mean and as well as learn from some of the expertise from people who are doing it at the moment.

So I'm really pleased to have such an experienced and expert panel with us. Nick's already given you an overview of who those people are. So without further ado, I'm going to open up and invite Natasha Davies from CAE to join me on the virtual sofa as it were, a bit of a conversation, so 'Hi Natasha'.

Natasha Davies, Access Adviser CAE: Hi Christina.

Christina: Hi. Thanks for joining in. And so the Centre for Accessible Environments do quite a few things to support the sort of accessible housing mission. Can you just give us an overview just before we get into the detail of what kind of work CAE do in this space?

Natasha: Yes, CAE provides technical access consultancy services, for example, will review clients that have been submitted at planning stage to check that they meet the Category 2 and Category 3 standard, depending on the requirements set by the local authority.

One of these local authorities has been Waltham Forest. So we've been carrying out design appraisals at planning stage. But CAE have also been involved with delivering bespoke training for local authorities on accessible housing on Category 2 and Category 3 access standards.

But we also tailor these to the needs, the local authorities that we work with and work across quite a variety of different teams, including building control, planning and housing teams.

Christina: Okay. Thank you. And obviously, for all of those it is really important for all teams to have a good understanding of the standards. And we're going to go onto find a bit more about that later on.

So the last seven years, the category 2 standard, for the most part around the country, has been part of that optional space in Part M and with it now coming on stream as the new baseline, you know, how confident do you feel about people's technical knowledge, you know, in terms of do the people that can't really understand the difference between the standards, do you think, in your experience?

Natasha: So the terminology is quite technical in comparison to when we had the Lifetime Homes standard in place, which is definitely a more catchy and memorable name, Category 2 and Category 3 housing doesn't quite roll off the tongue so well.

And historically, local authorities used to have a lot of in-house Access offices.

However, the number of these within local authorities has declined, and so often now technical expertise on accessibility is outsourced, often to Access consultants.

But there are a few, there are some local authorities that do have and still have in-house access offices, and it's really understanding the difference between the Category 2, accessible and adaptable home standard and the Category 3 wheelchair accessible housing standard, and the Category 2 standard or M4(2), as it's called, for accessible and adaptable homes, offers more enhanced access features and benefits that will allow homes to be easily adaptable, really over the lifetime of the household.

And for example, this will include features such as a step-free approach and space standards for the widths of doors, and hallways.

Whereas the Category 3 wheelchair accessible housing standard will still now be be down to local authorities to set the percentage of this, which is required.

Christina: Thank you. I wondered if Matt, you're on the line already I know. We're going to talk to you in more detail later on, but I just wondered, what's your perception of, you know, how easy people find it to actually sort of differentiate between M2 and M3 standards when it comes down to the practicalities?

Matt: Yeah, I have to be slightly careful. On what I say on this. There are probably several architectural design teams listening this morning, but everyone I've ever spoken to has really reassured me that they are fully across all the requirements under M4(2) and M4(3).

However, this hasn't always been my experience in terms of getting on site and as part of that brief. So, I think that the standards are still fairly new. There are some designers which are more experienced, some less experienced. And I think it's becoming all the more important now.

So yeah, I think it's really different. There's a real difference across the board, basically.

Christina: Yeah, thanks. And that's the context I was I was searching for so that if people wanted to brush up their knowledge and, you know, get that really across the standards so that when the rules change, they're ready for it. Natasha, where do you think... what's the most important stages of the planning and development process for that technical knowledge to really be applied?

Natasha: Well, I think a good understanding is really needed from the start of the design stage to ensure that the plans meet the technical requirements.

Plans submitted at planning application stage, local authorities will need to make sure that these plans meet the new baseline standards, and in addition to this, any wheelchair accessible requirement set by the local authority.

Also, it's really important that Planning departments working closely with building control and to ensure that these standards are met.

It's a lot more difficult to make changes at a later stage, particularly if it's going to then have an impact on space. And so it's really important to ensure that the design meets the standards as early on as possible.

Christina: Yeah, great. Thank you. So with the new rules coming in at some point in the future, and that really focuses on the accessible and adaptable standard rather than making a national rule for wheelchair accessible standards, the national proportion.

But do you think that changing the baseline will have any benefits for wheelchair accessible property planning as well?

Natasha: So the Category 3 wheelchair accessible standard will still be down to the local authorities to decide, and some local authorities already have the minimum requirement for this, which is great.

With the fact that the Category 2 homes will soon be taken care of through these baseline regulations, I think local authorities will now need to consider if the teams could spend more time and resources actually looking at the need for homes to be built to the wheelchair accessible standard.

So yeah, I'm hopeful that it will mean it will free up a lot more resources for local authorities to be able to do that.

Christina: Yeah, I think if something Habinteg will definitely be keeping an eye on. When we did a bit of research into local plans back in 2019 and 2020, we found that there were really relatively very few, I think it was around a quarter of local plans that actually had a policy for M4(3) homes.

And so we'd obviously want to see that really ramp up with the new policy framework. So, local plans are supposed to be reviewed on a five-year cycle.

So have you got any advice for local authorities who are you know, different parts of that cycle in respect of the new framework coming over the new rules coming down the line.

Natasha: Yes. So previously, the percentage would have had to be established within the local plans.

Now, this will no longer be the case. However, the Category 3 wheelchair accessible standard would still need to be factored into local planning policy and I think it is factoring in these new changes into planning policy, ensuring that that message is consistent and we need to make sure that information can be translated clearly, including details on things such as exemptions.

We need to think about how, also, this new baseline will have an impact on their approach and factoring in the transitional arrangements as well.

At the moment, I think it would mean keeping an eye out for any interim arrangements from the DLUHC and also looking out for that implementation date for the M4(2) Baseline Standard to be applied.

Christina: Yeah, thanks. And actually, just to be clear, I've just noticed a question in the chat that the department haven't yet given an indication of when the new rules will be coming into place.

So our conversation today is very much ahead of that announcement and trying to sort of match people's thinking about what to look out for when the announcement comes that we'll be pushing for the government to be clear very soon about when the new rules will come into place.

So final question for you, Natasha. This is the Chair's privilege as it's Accessible Homes Week at Habinteg. I'm going to ask you to say, is there anything special that CAE would like to promote during Accessible Homes Week or any special offers that you have going this week that you'd like the audience to know about?

Natasha: Yeah. So you've got 10% off our Wheelchair Housing Design Guide that can be purchased on the CAE website. And we've also got 10% off our next public training course on wheelchair accessible housing on it, which is coming up quite soon, on Thursday, the 6th of October. And this is a virtual course aimed at a wide variety of people, including architects, OTEs, building control and housing teams. And it's specifically in wheelchair accessible housing.

Christina: Fantastic. Natasha, thanks very much. Don't go too far because I know we're going to have further questions for you as we work round through other speakers.

So next I would like to welcome Stanley Lau. Stanley is the Planning Manager for major developments at the London Borough of Waltham Forest.

And as Natasha was saying he has been working somewhat with CAE on delivering the accessible housing commitment in that borough.

So welcome, Stanley. Thanks very much for joining us. And I wanted to just open - I'm not sure I know we've got 176 audience members on line and we don't know where they're from. So, some will be from London and some will be from outside London, I suppose - I just want to just start off by acknowledging the fact that because Waltham Forest is a London borough, your local plan will be in general conformity with the London plan.

And since 2004, the London plan has required that all new homes be well, and 90% of new homes, be either lifetime homes prior to the new standard, and CAT 2 after 2015 with the other 10% designed to wheelchair accessible standards.

So that's the kind of, the overall kind of picture in the GLA.

So my first question was, really, is that broadly what you're delivering there at Waltham Forest?

Staley Lau, Planning Manager, London Borough of Waltham Forest: Hi, Christina. Sure. In terms of local planning policy and this must be in general conformity with the London plan, which is also part of the development plan.

The Council's emerging planning policies align with the GLA policies and therefore officers at Waltham Forest are able to secure wheelchair homes through the imposition of planning conditions to any planning permission.

Christina: Great. And so how do you apply that policy across different tenures?

Stanley: So essentially, officers liaise with our housing colleagues, our planning officers and we look at the demand for wheelchair homes across the specific tenures. And based on current housing demand and housing need, our housing colleagues have asked us to prioritise new wheelchair homes as a social rented tenure.

Christina: Okay, and do you have planning policies which also apply to the private sector as well?

Stanley: Yes, sure. So, the planning policies range in terms of prioritising, that's something that we as officers try to target to emphasise. But there's also planning policies on providing wheelchair homes for other tenures, such as the open market or for shared ownership, for example.

Christina: Yeah, thanks. I wanted to ask Ben from PRP to comment on this because when we were just discussing it briefly last week and we were speaking about how the, kind of, the nature of the market has an impact on the perception around who wheelchair accessible properties are for.

I just wondered if you wanted to come in on that point, Ben?

Ben Williamson, Director Architecture, PRP: I think it's a very practical challenge of seeking to ensure that wheelchair adaptable homes or adapted homes are targeted towards those that need them. And I think there's certainly among many clients an understanding that you cannot easily direct sale property towards those parts of the market that need them.

Undoubtedly there are people in the sale market that want to buy those types of homes, but there's a lot more flexibility within social rented properties, for example, and shared ownership properties to target those homes towards those that need them.

So this is why we find often that these times types of homes get pushed towards the affordable tenures. But it is a practical challenge and it's in a market where our clients are seeking to be able to expand and ensure their market as wide as possible to be able to sell their homes.

It's difficult to target, shall we call them, specialist homes towards a specialist part of the market. So it's a practical challenge.

Christina: Yeah, thanks. But I guess that challenge becomes even greater once you're on to the second and third owner of a property, I guess.

So, Stanley we heard earlier from Natasha. Can you just tell us a bit more about how CEA helps Waltham Forest to deliver their planning intention in respect of accessible housing?

Stanley: Sure. So Waltham Forest has built a good relationship with CAE, so what officers do through Council on assessing schemes. The Council commissioned CAE to independently assess accessibility issues on proposals to ensure they meet policy requirements. As accessibility is a specialist field in itself, it's important that CAE provide important advice and to ensure the quality of developments is achieved from the outset.

And Natasha spoke earlier about how it's important to design these into the scheme because of the space impacts and that's something that planning is aligned with to try and involve accessibility matters at the early design stage, which is essentially the pre-application stage of the planning process.

Christina: Thank you. We sometimes hear developers are concerned that it reflects in Ben's comments earlier that Category 3 homes aren't necessarily that easy to self certainly if they're required to provide some Cat 3 in the outright sale part of a development. And how does Waltham Forest try to make sure that wheelchair users get to hear about the homes that are available to them.

Stanley: So I think what's important in Waltham Forest is how you advertise these homes. So at Waltham Forest, as part of any planning permission, there is normally a clause in section one six agreements that wheelchair homes are marketed exclusively for a period of one year and this is captured within a wheelchair accessible dwelling marketing strategy.

This strategy is prepared by the developer or owner, and it sets out how the wheelchair accessible units will be advertised to ensure that those who require wheelchair accessible homes are appropriately targeted.

The strategy would also specify that marketing efforts include the use of identified publications such as the local newspaper and accessible housing websites.

Christina: And you've mentioned that that's in the section 106 element of the planning permission. Why is it important that it's in that document? Or that part of the document.

Stanley: So generally as part of any planning permission, you'll have planning conditions or a legal agreement. And it's by placing an emphasis of, of such a clause, the strategy within a legal agreement, it adds extra weight as part of the plan, permission in terms of enforcing the it the intentions of that clause.

So it's always stronger to apply this within a legal agreement as opposed to a planning condition.

Christina: Okay. Thank you. I know there's a lot of work going on through campaigners and in some of the work Habinteg's doing in the social space on a digital solution, digital housing hunting solution for wheelchair accessible properties.

I'm really hoping that at some point in the future, all these different strategies kind of coalesce and it becomes a lot easier for wheelchair users to find a home that's right for them in the tenure that they're looking for.

And I'm sure that that kind of approach, as a best practice tip, is a really great one for other local authorities to follow. And I wanted to ask a bit about design considerations now, Stanley, and we know that the interior design of wheelchair accessible properties is really critical.

We know that they are designed with different spatial layouts that you might if you walked into such property, you might see you might feel quite a big difference in, say, the layout and design of the kitchen and bathroom in particular.

But that's not the only thing that people are looking for from a development, is it? So could you tell us a bit about the principles that you follow when you're setting out to plan a development that includes wheelchair accessible properties?

Stanley: Sure. So, ensuring, in terms of the external layout, if we are looking at the location of wheelchair homes, the proximity to any accessible parking spaces, small details, including the opening of communal doors and entrances, these are all important. And I wouldn't say that they're an oversight, but it's something that's not always well thought of at a planning application stage, because sometimes you'll add communal doors and entrances to wheelchair homes as part of maybe a block of flats.

And that can be quite heavy and difficult for someone as a wheelchair user in terms of having the physical aspects to be able to, open the door to access their property.

So it is small details like that, which we, thankfully, we engage with CAE about to try and remind developers that we have to carry this through as part of any planning permission.

Christina: Thank you. Matt, are you still with us? I can't see your face. I'm just wondering if, Matt, you've got any thoughts on that point as well as about the kind of, you know, outside of the dwelling itself? Those considerations when you're sort of setting out.

Matt: Yeah, I mean, that's I mean, outside of the dwelling and outside of the scheme itself, even I mean, the scheme behind me in my picture there, was one we built a few years back and we thought we were designed and built out fantastically accessible scheme. Until we noted that one of the barriers that any potential residents were going to encounter in the immediate built environment was a lack of drop curb.

So in order to access the nearest parade of shops, GP surgery, they would be unable to do so. So it's just about not just even outside of the units themselves. The scheme is about consideration in terms of the immediate built environment and access to services and those provisions as well, because they can take a tremendous amount of time to get in motion.

Christina: Stanley, you mentioned car parking just now in your reply obviously a lot of disabled people rely more on car use than non-disabled people might need to,

especially in London, because the transport system is patchy in terms of its accessibility. So how do you, how do you cater for the requirements for car parking when you're planning these kinds of units?

Stanley: So at least for Waltham Forest as a London borough, public transport is becoming more and more accessible and also, as probably a case in point, not all disabled people drive.

The council also works closely with Transport for London on schemes that would include free access and would look to improve accessibility across the scheme and beyond, as just mentioned. I can quote a recent example, which would include a possible secondary entrance at Walthamstow Central Station, which would provide step free access.

So officers are looking at ways to continue to promote level access, not just within the site but beyond that as well.

Christina: Great. Thank you. So Waltham Forest sound like they're taking a very thorough approach to planning and developing accessible and adaptable and wheelchair accessible housing.

You've done a lot to deliver on your planning commitments. Have you got any plans for improvements that you'd like to make? How do you want to build on this experience? Any room to improve on what you're doing?

Stanley: I think the first thing is that the Council would like to continue to work closely with CAE and design consultants and architects post planning.

So that's once planning permission has been issued to ensure that new wheelchair homes and the quality of the build is maintained and enhanced.

Where the council is able to affect. And essentially this is this would be through the building control section. However, the building control is an open market, so not all assessments are carried out by the council's building control officers and where building regulations approval is sought through the council, then building control officers have the authority to ensure strict standards are maintained on the development of wheelchair homes and the Waltham Forest would be keen to continue that.

Christina: Great. Thanks very much Stanley as one of the speakers. Don't go away. We'll probably have more questions for you.

Actually, there's one that's just come through in the chat, which I'm interested in

Ben Smith's comments, and it's very common for promotional images of new housing schemes to feature only non-disabled people, which isn't so much of an inclusive approach, but also exacerbates some of the problem of targeting appropriate.

Is that something? Have you ever spoken with developers about their marketing materials and the visual imagery of it and what goes up on the hoardings as a developments in progress and things like that?

Stanley: I think, yes, in terms of inclusivity, I think developers are more mindful and architects are more mindful of their CGIs. And therefore it's something that we don't normally have to mention, because when you see a CGI that's submitted to Waltham Forest, it generally captures those sorts of matters.

Christina: Yeah. Thanks Stanley. Okay. So I am going to move along to Matt Kelly now and know it is as Nick said at the beginning, Max is Habinteg's Head of Development and has got many years' experience of working on different sizes and locations of accessible housing development.

So just by way of intro, Matt, can you just give us a flavour of Habinteg's development principles and what our balance is between the sort of accessible, adaptable, regular general needs type housing and the wheelchair accessible properties that we develop?

Matt: Yeah, absolutely. Hello, Christina. Yeah, we take a sort of slightly different approach in terms of the provision or the split in terms of the M4(2) and M4(3) dwellings.

So in all schemes we build, there's a minimum of 25% of the new homes that will be built to M4(3). The remainder will be built to M4(2). And as part of that, making sure that the wheelchair accessible dwellings are pepper-potted throughout the scheme, a move away from the historical approach to putting all the wheelchair accessible dwellings together in one specific site, making sure that the scheme is fully, obviously, very importantly fully accessible throughout so that wheelchair accessible or disabled people are able to visit their neighbours and vice versa.

And I think one of the key points in terms of the success of that higher provision is making sure that very, very early engagement with the relevant local authority, enabling the team to make sure that the wheelchair homes we're building are reflective of the local authority's most acute needs.

So we've done a lot of work with Leeds City Council over the last four or five years and in different parts of the city they have very, very different requirements and the need for accessible dwellings.

In Harehills, as an example, there is a need for sort of larger family size, wheelchair accessible dwellings to allow for multi-generational living in the sort of Seacroft Bramley area, there might be a need for smaller dwellings for elderly people and so in Roundpay, where we've got one of our existing schemes, it might be family-sized accommodation, two and three beds.

So it's making sure that you don't just come up with a very blunt policy-compliant approach. It's making sure that it's the tailoring in terms of the provision to make sure it responds best.

Christina: Yeah. Thanks, Matt. And so we've heard from Stanley on how Waltham Forest tries to ensure there's an expert eye on new developments from the Pre-Application stage. And in your experience, how important is that?

Matt: Yeah, I think that's probably the single most important factor in the success of any accessible scheme, I know it's something that's been reinforced by both Natasha and Stanley, and it's something that I really need to reinforce as well in terms of all the sort of schemes that I've been involved with or encountered, which resulted in poor outcomes were ones where the principles of accessible housing design were tried or someone who tried to apply those retrospectively and obviously by that stage that later stage without sort of significant design change and which has an impact on cost, the outcomes are never really very successful.

And I think very closely linked to that is I mean the importance is obviously to involve the design team at the earliest possible stage with that concept of feasibility and also very closely linked to that is making sure that the design team is adequately briefed.

Stretching sort of right the way back to a vision document, the project brief the employers requirements and then all the way through construction. It helps if you've got a design team which is sort of has some previous experience in sort of the practicalities of designing and delivering accessible schemes.

But that's obviously not always practical and so reinforces the importance of an appropriate brief.

Christina: Thank you. I just wonder if you've got any thoughts on one of the questions that I spotted in the chat earlier and just talking about, you know, relative to the whole population and the population of disabled people, only 8% of disabled people using a wheelchair.

And the question from Josh McDonagh is, you know, the industry seem very focused on providing wheelchair accessible spaces rather than broader inclusive design principles.

I just wonder if you've got a response to that and why you know, how in terms of housing in I think the inclusive approach is being played out and how it balances with the native wheelchair users.

Matt: Yeah. I mean what I would say is one of the real benefits in terms of M4(2) to a lesser extent, certainly M4(3) in terms of the work we've done with various local authorities is that owing to its sort of adaptability, it represents the perfect basis by which to employ different principles, bearing in mind any sort of specialism.

Whilst our focus is obviously wheelchair accessibility, we found that the wheelchair housing design guide, M4 is the perfect basis by which to employ things that you might need for making dementia-friendly housing, for people with visual impairments and people suffering with things like ADHD.

It's, I think the adaptability of the standard is the thing which is most important so that it can be employed across a range of our emphasis is obviously wheelchair accessibility. But that's not to say that the homes we build on well suited to a wide range of impairments, disabilities.

So that's one thing I was.

Christina: Yeah, thank you. And so again, thinking about your practical knowledge and your experience, I'm sure that a lot of people, a lot of developers, when they're setting out to provide an accessible development, are thinking about that need for step free access.

And they might consider that some types of sites, if they are hilly, for example, might be impractical for that kind of development. People might be a bit concerned now thinking 'Well if Cat 2 is going to be the baseline, is that going to mean that there's whole swathes of the country where we're not going to be able to develop?'

So I just wondered where Habinteg has had a challenge in terms of more hilly sites, what kind of approaches have helped us to rise to that challenge?

Matt: Now, that's a really, really important point, and it's something that I thought very early on in my career with Habinteg it's a bit of a misconception, is that in order to develop a sort of successful, accessible scheme, you need to start with a site, which is so perfectly level. Don't get me wrong, it would be fantastic if they all were and it really would help. But sites like that are obviously incredibly rare in terms of gradients and topography.

They're not something that cannot be overcome with the necessary forethought. And I think it should be. It goes right back to my first point in terms of the appropriate

brief and making sure that the accessible housing principles are applied as importantly as other things like energy efficiency, sustainability, building safety.

And if you do that, you will achieve a successful outcome. Now, some I mean, the bulk of our work in more recent years has been in Yorkshire very, very hilly compared to where I hail and the sort of things that we've found to overcome that are of working with the site.

So I think most recently one of our schemes in Bramley was actually at the foot of a valley, there was a slope brought the way across and we worked with the site, saw careful placing of the dwellings.

We split the site into key zones trying to limit the use of costly earth, retainment and sort of engineering solutions wherever possible.

And obviously the avoidance of ramps and it's therefore really quite easy if you're thinking about the end user and the homes you're building at the earliest possible stage to achieve the outcome you require.

Christina: Thank you. And again, we were thinking about that kind of the world outside of the dwelling itself and some of the barriers that there might be immediately outside the property.

Can you say something a bit more about how we've tried to choose what we consider about the location when Habinteg is developing?

Matt: So I mean, we've got of several key criteria in terms of the ... rating of the site, access to public transport, for those who might not drive, access to services.

And as I spoke about the scheme behind me, we ticked all the relevant boxes. Yes, we've got shops within a very short distance, GP surgery, the same. But what we found, when we actually got on site, was that, actually, those residents or potential end users were going to face an immediate barrier in terms of, once they came off our fantastic, pedestrianised footways, they were going to encounter a barrier in terms of a lack of drop curb provision. The footpath on the main road immediately outside our scheme was in really poor condition.

There'd been a history in terms of lifting up the flags so things like cable, television, gas pipes, etc., and what it required was just early engagement with local authority and the highways team to make sure that those issues were addressed prior to the scheme being handed over and Let.

Christina: Thank you. I wanted to bring Natasha back in at this point. Natasha, I know that in the wheelchair housing design guide there are a few points around the exterior of a home that are brought up there.

And I just wondered so as a wheelchair user yourself, what kind of things you look for in an environment when you've been house hunting, what are the things that really matter to you most apart from what the home itself offers?

Natasha: Yeah, parking is a big one for me and having parking near, being able to have accessible parking outside my property, even if there's an accessible station nearby, your destination station, the other end might not be accessible.

So it's really, really important to have that flexibility. But also things such as accessible cycle parking.

I've got an adaptive bike and it's not something that's often you often find in properties that actually that something as simple as that can enable a wheelchair user to or disabled person to be able to use the outside environment more easily.

And then really, really simple things such as drop curbs and just the maintenance of pavements and, and just being able to be able to push across the smooth ground for me is, are big ones.

Christina: Yeah. That's really interesting. Stay there for a minute because there was a question from, the audience which I'm interested to get your views on. And it was around the Cat 3 standard itself and whether the specifications within it are truly fit for purpose for people's changing needs.

So, you know, the different kind of ergonomic needs of disabled people changing all the time, wheelchair which has power, wheelchairs, for example, and how the standard caters for a range of different wheelchair users.

I just wondered if you've got any comment on that or any thoughts about what might come down the track in terms of provision to that standard in the future?

Natasha: Yeah, yeah, definitely. Yeah. I think there probably are going to be limitations to what's out the standard at the moment. And I don't know whether historically that may be because a lot of the research focused on wheelchair users than say people that use mobility scooter users.

So yeah, I think I think it would be and people's needs are changing and different types of wheelchairs are available, large wheelchairs are available.

So yeah, I think there definitely needs to be some further research into that to see if, if, if this wheelchair accessible standard is, is fit for purpose. Because I'm sure there are, there are lots of people that it's not necessarily going to work for.

So yeah, yeah. I don't know any.

Matt: So I'll just add there, Christina, in terms of trying to overcome those issues whilst those things are being ironed out is that what we try and do is engage with the potential end user as early in the process as possible, try and work out if there are any person-specific adaptations that are going to be required.

And these are often really, really easily and cheaply incorporated during the construction phase as opposed to waiting until the property gets Let and handed over.

And I know it's not always possible. People's needs are changing all the time, but I think trying to engage as early as possible with who is actually going to reside in the dwelling can help overcome those issues.

Christina: Yeah, that's a really interesting point. And I think the actual kind of principle of consulting with the intended, even if it's not the intended households, the, you know, a community of interest in that intended provision is really important.

And the more that local authorities can do that and engage with disabled people on those matters at the early stage, I think I think the better. I've got one final question for you Matt, and it's a slightly I guess, a bit of an elephant-in-the-room question potentially.

So, you know, traditionally some developers-- and I think one of the questions in the chat outside of London developing particularly apartments to the accessible adaptable category, to standard, has been patchy around the country. And a challenge.

And I guess some of that is because, you know, with small flatted blocks, it can be a challenge around developing Category 2 homes because of the requirement for step free access and the need for a lift, which gets a bit expensive.

So with the regulatory baseline set to change, how would you like to see the new regulations account for that challenge around step free access?

Matt: Yeah, I mean, that's one of the key challenges I'm facing currently on a number of sites I'm building out. You've got that sort of tipping point between developing a sort of low-density scheme of houses and bungalows

and those schemes, which sit in between that, and sort of larger flatted blocks in multi-story towers-- in those sorts of schemes, the solution would be a sort of small flatted block under the old lifetime homes guidance.

Certainly, when I started out with Habinteg, a walk up block would be suitable and would be the answer in those instances. And we're not talking about that. There's certainly things you can do with a set of stairs. They're not all equal.

You can make a shallow step stair, making sure that there are adequate resting points on the staircase and that would therefore enable sort of small blocks of sort of sub 8 to 10 units, because the issue from a viability perspective is that in order to meet the M4(2) guidance for small flat blocks, you're going to need a lift provision.

So you've got a sort of double whammy in that in terms of the upfront capital cost, in terms of the installation of the lift and then the ongoing hit for residents in terms of the upkeep of that lift and the costs to the service charge, which can render the lift unviable. Certainly for anything less than 8 to 10 units, the provision of a lift is going to be really, really difficult to sort of finance, and then you've got the issue in terms of how many units you can sort or limit the number of units you can build on the site.

This then wraps up the whole issue around viability, which is in the current climate, especially one of high fuel cost inflation, and which uses grant subsidies, and it's availability is critical.

Christina: Just to summarise then, in terms of the bringing in of the new requirements, the new baseline, are we saying that rather than have a blanket approach, we would have an option for everything else within a dwelling to be done to the Cat 2 standard, but to provide an easy-going stair type scenario or something as an alternative to a lift and make that an allowable option?

Matt: Absolutely. Yes.

Christina: I think that yeah. Because traditionally with the lifetime home standard, was always felt to be reasonable because there was certainly some householders who would still benefit from the features of the interior, the dwelling being adaptable, and easily adaptable, and still managed the stairs when they needed to go out. So yeah. An interesting option.

I don't know if we have colleagues from the Department for Levelling Up Housing & Communities on the session today, but if we do, I hope they're listening to these suggestions and comments. And if we don't, we will certainly summarise some of the questions and comments that we, and the audience members, have been putting into the chat and feed them in to our departmental contacts.

So we're on 10 to 1. We've got about another 10, 15 minutes. So at this point, I'm going to invite - I'm going to try and come back to some more of the questions in a minute - but at this point, I wanted to invite Ben from PRP to talk to us.

Now, what Matt didn't cover, but he may have hinted at in certain points is that some of the bespoke work that Habinteg has done, working with Leeds Local Authority, for example, was to develop some homes that were particularly for larger families that included one or two disabled people and some of those were intergenerational families.

And so that's a lovely segue into Ben's presentation, which is all about... sort of a new vision, if you like, for intergenerational homes and the part that they might play in solving some of our housing challenges nationwide.

So over to you Ben and you're the only person that's been allowed a presentation. It's very colourful.

Ben Williamson, Director Architecture, PRP: Thank you very much.

Hopefully, the presentation will come up. Well, thank you, everybody. What I wanted to share was a little bit of PRP's experience of looking at housing design and how that we think needs to evolve and develop over time with obviously a particular focus on multigenerational living.

But it's a very practical journey. At the outset of our projects, we always start with a meeting, and that meeting sets the brief. We've talked about the brief today and the importance of it. And that brief often will set the mixture of dwellings that we get that is informed by things like planning, policy and also the local market.

And what I've heard an awful lot of is 'we know what people want because we know what sells, and what normally sells, are conventional homes'. Now, conventional homes sell for very good reasons because we all, not all, many of us, do live conventional lives. We grow up, we want to get a partner. We might have children, those children grow up. We might need a larger home eventually, perhaps those children will leave and we'll be empty nesters for a time. We might downsize in later life and perhaps end our days in a care home.

And there are conventional forms of homes that meet all of these needs that we really understand. However, maybe the children don't leave - about 20% of 25 to 34 34-year-olds with their parents - or maybe you don't want to go into a care home, maybe you can't afford to go into a care home, maybe you don't want to leave your community or you want to be cared for by your family.

And in those situations, you end up with multigenerational households.

These households do not suit conventional accommodation. There's very little that provides for these out there, but there are many, many households that live like this. It's very effective with grandparents perhaps looking after them, babysitting grandchildren with the family caring for and supporting the elderly.

It's a very, very effective form of household and it's very common. Apparently about 1.8 million multigenerational households in Britain today and growing. And so we think if we're to be inclusive and provide opportunities for all in our society, you need to look beyond just the conventional, and start to look at new models of housing.

And so for us, the Olympics provided an opportunity or more particularly Chobham Manor, which was the Olympic legacy development, where we developed a multigenerational house. And it was based on some very simple principles, many of which have been discussed today.

It starts with having a parking space close to the homes so that those that need and have a reliance on their car can get easily to the home. And it creates two independent dwellings directly off the street or entrances, I beg your pardon, directly off the street into two independent dwellings that can then be occupied by different generations of the same family.

But with a link and a connection across a shared courtyard that enables the interaction of that wider family in an effective way, so that you've got accommodation that can house multiple generations, but without all the difficulties of them all being grouped together into one single space. And these are the plans that we developed for it, and we built these out.

These are some of the pictures from the family kitchen, dining space downstairs, looking onto the courtyard, looking back into the house. And it creates activity on the streetscape. It sits within exactly the same plot as a conventional house type. And so it's not rocket science, shall we say, but it has proved incredibly popular. Not only does it provide for that multi-generational opportunity, but it creates huge flexibility for how these homes work.

The opportunity to have an au pair or a nanny live within demise, but not actually within the home, to look after children, to have a care worker, to enable and look after you in your own home.

But also things like having a separate annex that can provide a home office and things, things that have become incredibly helpful during lockdown where we've realised the benefits of having these flexible uses.

And we've also experienced the benefits of multi-generational communities where communities come together to support each other. And so we wanted to look at how we could extend the benefits of the multigenerational household to community living.

Now, this is Nine Wells in Cambridge, literally out in the shires where we developed a form of multigenerational house here. It was a three-storey house to the front accessed from the rear by a muse court to provide for that parking facility, an annex over the top.

And however, not just those homes, but integrating later living a student hall of residence, some starter homes, small, medium, and large homes delivered in a range of affordable rent, shared ownership, and sale tenure.

So we had a really, really mixed, diverse community that we hope can bring together all the benefits of creating effective, self-sustaining communities. And these are some of the images of the completed scheme, lots of open space, lots of places to get out, to meet your neighbour, to talk to your neighbour, actually meet the people you live with.

And because we were accessing a lot of these dwellings from muse courts to the rear of providing services, it meant the front of these homes can open directly out onto car-free spaces with no roads at all, just footpaths, pavements, and open space where the young, the old, mobility impaired alike can all get outside, be together, you know, enjoy the open space outside and help to promote that sense of connection and community.

But there is a really big thought. So for these types of property, multi-generational property were just large houses for sale and that caters for such a small part of the market. And these are needed across all tenures, across all areas.

And particularly when it comes to areas, it's not effective or practical to deliver large houses in dense urban environments. And so we saw the need to seek to develop the principles of the multigenerational household that can be delivered across tenures and in dense urban areas.

So we started by coming up with the shared family, multi-gen apartments, something that can be built into apartment blocks where you have two separate entrances, where you have a little annex if you like, to one side, a two bedroom flat to the other with shared kitchen dining facilities and the shared external amenity space.

However, we do recognize that there's a degree of inflexibility in here, and a lot of local authorities want housing that can provide for a range of different needs. And so we came up with the family multi-gen apartment, essentially quite conventional, one bedroom, two bedroom flat, but linked to a common external amenity space

so that it can be let to people who can live as a multigenerational household.

But if not, and if there's no need for that, the external amenity space can be subdivided and these properties can be let independently.

So very flexible, simple ways that if you can build in during the planning stage, that this opportunity for multi-generational living can be accommodated even in higher density and across tenure areas.

So you might ask, is this happening anywhere? Well, we are looking at currently at Truro. This is Truro in Cornwall, where we've developed a master plan for the development of this area, from the cathedral down to the foreground of the page, where we are trying to engage with a new urban community to deliver a new active urban community where you can have great places to make cafes and the like.

Looking out over the cathedral, creating accessible spaces that link you down through a series of streets with businesses, with activity, with community down to the river frontage and places that are great to be both during the day and during the night to promote community.

But in terms of accommodation, creating innovation centres, community spaces, work spaces for people to seed their businesses and accommodation, including student accommodation for 400 students, an extra care facility, a hotel, and 300 homes that we hope will include some of these higher density multi-generational units that can really help create a viable, diverse community in an urban setting.

And so in summary, we think if we're to be inclusive and provide opportunities for all, we do need to look beyond the conventional.

We need to look beyond what people buy and start to ask ourselves, what do people actually want? And I would end with this final thought that if we are going to come up with new methods and models for housing, perhaps we also need to be a bit like Steve Jobs.

He said people don't know what they want until you show it to them. Thank you.

Christina: Thanks so much, Ben, for that. And really a very, very interesting and inspiring slide deck. I really enjoyed it. I have one question and there's some audience questions, and I just wondered, can you just give us a flavour?

We've been talking about the accessible standards. So I just wondered in those designs that you just showed us, how the Category two or Category three, standards kind of play into that model that you've developed there.

Ben: Well, there's a wide variety of homes that can be developed based on very simple principles. And I think what we're finding is that actually what we need to be is less specialist or more general. So building in opportunities into the mainstream rather than creating specialist homes. So the concept of a multigenerational home is very simple.

The one that we developed at Chobham Manor was a Category 2 with Category 3 elements within it. But the principle is that you have places where different generations of the family can live, that they can access, and they can share spaces and be co-dependent on each other.

And that can be delivered as a Category 1, Category 2 or Category 3 home. It's just the thought process of seeing how properties can be developed that can enable space for multiple generations to co-exist in the same house.

So it's very flexible. I don't see that being anything that prevents it being accommodating of any range of needs.

Christina: Great. Thank you. So just again, following up on your presentation before we come to a couple of general questions. I'm going to go over by about 5 minutes here, but I just wanted to make sure we had some space for audience questions.

A point from Phil Bartlett to you asking, you know, how would you visualise controlling occupation? You know, once we're talking about that multi generation, once the older members of the family no longer need to be there, who then occupies that extra space.

So just to, you know, maybe what would your response to that query?

Ben: Well, I think this comes to the point about is this is a specialist home or is this a flexible home? And what we have found is that these homes have been hugely popular, not just because they can provide opportunity for multi-generational living, but those other aspects actually that families have seen as is a great opportunity to be able to have a home work studio. It's a great place that we could keep an au pair or nanny or we could, you know, if you're, you know, well enough off to be able to afford to create your own sort of breakout space, a place where you teenagers might live, you could have a cinema room.

Actually, there are a wealth of different uses that this space is that these houses and homes, flats as well create that can make them incredibly flexible.

So it's not really just about them being a place where your elderly parents can be perhaps, and then they don't need it anymore. They're homes that can be used in a wide range of different ways. And I suppose I would say we've seen this

at Ninewells in Cambridge, for example. Our client was understandably a little cautious initially about introducing this, where people pay more for this additional space and actually, they only sold the homes with this additional flexibility before any of the more conventional homes sold.

So in subsequent phases, every opportunity for the multigenerational flexible typology was delivered and there's a hunger in the market. So I don't think it is something that really just meets this accessibility need - it can do, but the wonderful thing is this can become something that is universally popular and that can appeal to a wide range, enabling these homes to be delivered across a great a much greater volume that makes them more accessible, more so making more opportunity for people to own them and live in them and benefit from.

Christina: Great. Thank you Ben. So I think we've got time for one more question before we before we wrap up. And I guess I am going to go to the question of costs, but I wonder if maybe Matt might be a good person to start with on this question.

So, you know, it's come up a couple of times in the chat, but in summary, how do we address the costs? The additional costs of delivering accessible housing?

Housing full stop is an expensive business and in different areas of the country can be in a greater or lesser challenge to actually get that out of the ground.

Accessible homes, surely they're more expensive. How are we going to deal with that?

Matt: Well, I think there's two elements that when you give consideration to cost is the first one, which is the viability issue, which we've spoken about. It's about how many units you can achieve on a site.

And I think something very simple in terms of removing the current dispensation, ensuring that you can have the use of walk-up blocks, would certainly help from a viability perspective. And then you've got the actual physical cost in terms of developing accessible homes.

And I think if you look at outside of the kitchens and bathrooms and you're talking and the space is such that the sort of it goes back to the brief and the careful planning because I mean, the cost of a switch or socket or socket or window lintel or threshold, these are all that the cost is the cost.

It's about the height and where they're planned and the way in which the homes are designed. I think there are, the additional cost is within the kitchen and bathroom.

And I think the other thing is that we're talking about a level playing field in terms of from corporate house builders, housing providers, local authorities.

If everyone's working to the same standards, the market will work itself out. Those are the things that will have to be delivered. We need to remove this sort of central dispensation from the three dragons viability assessment, some people being able to not deliver those points on the basis of viability. If everyone's working from the same standard, I think there will be an adjustment within the market to reflect that.

Christina: And can you remember, I think, actually I think Habinteg may have tweeted on it and Nick Apetroaie tweeted on it first thing this morning that the the additional cost of building to the Cat 2 standard when it was first estimated for, you know, the nation's favourite house type a three-bedroom semi.

I think the additional costs am I right in thinking was £521 per unit. Was that per home?

Matt: That sounds about right. It's marginal certainly. I mean, the big costs obviously in the M4(3) with additional detailing around an adjustable kitchen and a bathroom, it but yeah, like I say, it's minimal. And I think that level playing field is so important.

Christina: Yeah. Thank you so much. Well, I think I'm going to wrap up there. I just want to acknowledge one thing. I think twice I slipped and I referred to new homes as units. And I think somebody has admonished me, very justifiably in the chat there, because I guess part of the reason or the main reason that this whole area of practice, and area of work, is so important is that we are talking about people's homes and places where people wish to thrive and to live healthy lives with a high level of wellbeing.

So I would endeavour in future not to use the word unit, because that doesn't at all support that mission. But thank you so much to all of our speakers today once again for joining us. Thank you to everybody for tuning in.

And there will be a copy of the presentation available afterwards, I think.

So, if you had an email with the joining details, we will invite you again with details of where to find that. And it just remains for me to encourage you to engage as you wish with the Accessible Housing Week and content.

So if you check out Habinteg's social channels on Twitter and LinkedIn, there's plenty going on this week.

Habinteg's 2022 Accessible Homes Week webinar
www.habinteg.org.uk/fah

We've got some original blogs, some videos and lots of people joining in, and we'd love to hear your comments and contributions on the social channels.

So I think that's it. Thanks everyone very much for joining us and have a great afternoon.