

## **Recommendations arising from scheme assessments - Designing Older Persons' Housing for the Future**

### **Access**

There should be level access, through ramps if necessary, to both front and rear entrances. This should include level surfaces up to the threshold, avoiding raised strips that have to be negotiated by wheelchairs or could cause a hazard to someone with a mobility or sight problem. Where there is ramped access, these should be provided together with seamless handrails and edging to avoid wheels leaving the surface.

Appropriate dropped kerbs also need to be installed in order to access vehicles, whether they are the tenant's own or those such as Dial-A-Ride or the Ambulance Service providing a service to the tenant. Attention should be given to the quality of pathway surfaces leading to the dwelling.

### **Accommodation above Ground Floor**

A number of schemes are currently without assisted access to first and above floors meaning that they are unsuited to people with a mobility problem or are likely to become unsuited in time as the person's ease of mobility decreases.

### **Barriers on Pathways**

Many pathways are protected by stepped railing layouts to prevent cycle access. These however can be problematic for anyone using a wheelchair or scooter and before installation the needs of such users need to be considered.

### **Mobility Scooters**

There is an increased need for scooter parking, preferably covered and outside the home itself; the best arrangements are those where the scooter can be brought safely and easily into a rear garden area. Scooters also need dedicated charging points, and suitable provision should be included in the electrical installation or upgrade.

### **Car Parking**

Few of the current schemes for older people have numbers of parking spaces that have stood the test of time. Older people are driving longer in their lives, and their neighbours are increasingly likely to own a car, and from a younger age.

Most schemes have pressure on their parking spaces and design should assume that each dwelling is likely to possess a car, and the space provided needs reserving against use by others in the area.

Also important is that the person's own vehicle can be parked close to, and ideally within immediate sight of the home, to decrease the challenge of getting to the vehicle and to increase the person's sense of personal security.

### **Entrance lobbies and hallways**

It is essential that these are generously proportioned to allow good mobility for people using wheelchairs, scooters, shopping trolleys or walking frames. Turns in movement routes should be avoided.

### **Wheelchair standards**

Dwellings should be able to accommodate someone in a wheelchair, whether this may be a temporary or permanent condition. Circulation space, turning circles and doorways should be designed to wheelchair standard so that the housing continues to be available to someone when their mobility is significantly diminished.

### **Doors**

Careful consideration should be given to door openings, to avoid opening into circulation space, or limiting movement within a room. Sliding doors can offer a good solution where layout permits, particularly for someone with mobility difficulties. In communal corridors, magnetic door releases (in the event of fire) should be used, to improve visual appearance and reduce the barriers to peoples' mobility.

### **Windows**

Design should allow for high levels of natural lighting both to assist people with poorer vision and to create a sense of space and airiness for people who spend a large part of their time indoors. There should also be the means to open them by someone with limited mobility; many catches, for example on kitchen windows, simply cannot be reached by current tenants.

### **External Space**

Older people value access to garden space, which should be readily accessible whether in separate units or shared homes. In the latter, these should have well maintained circulation areas and garden furniture to enable maximum benefit.

Individual properties without both front and back entrances are seen as undesirable and must also be considered unsafe in the event of a fire.

Balconies can provide dwellings above the ground floor with a greater sense of connection with the world outside the home. Conservatories can enhance the sense of space and connection to outside, especially where older designs have created small kitchens, bedrooms or living rooms at the rear of the property.

Good light conditions are important to older people for visibility and can help positive mental attitudes. In some schemes tenants have complained about light being blocked by trees. The proximity of trees and large bushes to properties needs to be considered in order to avoid future light deprivation.

## **Security**

The security of entrances should be carefully considered, but ensuring usability by tenants. In the case of individual properties, key safes should be provided to enable emergency access by support staff. Door entry systems have been upgraded in all Category 2 schemes so that they are secure, accessible by the disabled and by visiting Community Wardens, and callers can make direct contact with each flat.

## **Consumer Units**

Units should be located where a tenant can access them without the need for a step-ladder or where movement into a confined space is required. Appropriate location will diminish the high number of calls to the Community Warden or Lifeline services where the electricity supply has been tripped and the tenant cannot reach the unit.

## **Bathrooms**

The most common difficulty faced by older people in un-adapted properties is that of the bathroom, where the bath presents a major hurdle, or, for many, an impossible one. For someone with movement restrictions the bath can be a real threat to their health and safety.

Level access shower areas should be provided, together with vertical support and horizontal screens which can offer restraint to prevent a possible fall. Stepped shower trays, steps up to showers and small shower cubicles which offer limited movement should be avoided if possible.

Tenants have complained that their bathrooms are not close enough to their bedrooms, especially at night, when negotiating distance and hallway corridors can raise the level of risk. If possible, en suite bathrooms should be provided. In many dwelling designs there is the potential for walls to be knocked through to link bedroom and bathroom directly.

## **Kitchens**

The kitchen is an important part of the home for most older people; they should be able to move around freely, so galley type designs should be avoided. If they can accommodate a small table area, this can enhance the sense of space in the home. Where equipment is fitted consideration should be given to ease of use, for example, pull-out ovens and cupboards. Kitchens should be designed to be able to accommodate a washing machine, dishwasher, fridge and freezer.

## **Bed-sit accommodation**

Bed-sit accommodation can no longer be considered an acceptable offering as they have proven to be difficult to let because of their space limitations.

## **Living rooms and bedrooms**

The most 'successful' and appreciated homes are those which have generously proportioned rooms and additional space, which can be used as a second bedroom, utility room or hobby space. Older people will increasingly have been used to having spare space for a variety of activities in the home, and come to older peoples'

housing with interests and with belongings that they would wish to retain. Many tenants have close contact with their families and the ability for a supporting brother, sister or a grandchild to stay is seen as being of great benefit.

### **Soundproofing**

Some tenants have complained about the noise they get from neighbours who have become increasingly hard of hearing. Developments and improvements need to ensure that dwellings are adequately insulated from this kind of transferred noise.

### **Storage**

Design should incorporate generous storage including airing cupboards, and space for outdoor clothes, walking aids and shopping trolleys. Individual homes will require storage space for increased use of different refuse bins for recycling.

### **Heating**

Contemporary standards should ensure high levels of energy efficiency in older persons' housing. Redditch Borough Council has been undertaking a comprehensive programme of double glazing and the renewal of the heating systems in this sector, and the greater majority of planned work has been completed.