

SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 4 THINK PIECE – BLOG – OUR PLACES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

Introduction

The Scottish Government is keen to bring together views and ideas from a wide range of sectors and to explore the priorities Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) should address.

In the twenty-third in a series of Think Pieces, Grant Carson, Director, Employment and Housing Services, Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living sets out his thoughts on Scotland2050 on our places for disabled people. The opinions expressed are that of the author and we hope that they will stimulate debate and discussion.

Building a more accessible world for us all..... Scotland's Hidden Housing Crisis.....

As a professional working in the housing sector for over 25 years, I have frequently heard evidence of people eating, sleeping and bathing in one room and family members carrying people upstairs and between rooms. The costs of inaccessible housing are well documented, and include impacts on independent living, increased need for social care, more reliance on carers and family members, accidents (including those that are life-changing or fatal) and avoidable hospital admissions.

Ultimately, finding appropriate, accessible housing can transform people's lives for the better. Disabled people reported improved health and wellbeing, and enhanced prospects for employment and study where their homes met their accessibility requirements.

Yet despite all the evidence disabled people report severe shortages of accessible houses across all tenures, and research clearly shows a shortfall of over 17,000 homes for wheelchair users. Social housing is particularly pressured, with long waiting lists as disabled people seek adaptable, affordable homes with greater security of tenure than the private sector.

Information on the accessibility of properties is particularly poor in the private sector. Estate agents, for example, do not typically provide information about the accessibility of private lets or houses for sale, again making social housing an easier option.

Disabled people across Scotland face numerous barriers to finding the right home or remaining in their current home, including the chronic shortage of accessible housing to buy or rent and a shortage of available funding to carry out major adaptations

This can and does result in Disabled People being inappropriately discharged into inaccessible homes which they cannot enter or leave without assistance or face being detained in an institutional setting; for example stuck in hospital or residential care against their will.

There is also a need for a single cross tenure design and adaptability standard – ensuring that all new build houses have sufficient space to allow for people’s changing needs over time – Housing For Varying Needs is urgently in need of review and updating.

Everyone in government and engaged in any form of public service knows the projections in terms of growth in our ageing population.

But it’s not so clear that this is translating to what that means for reshaping our housing portfolio so disabled people can stay as independently as possible - and as cost effectively as possible - in their communities.

Over the next 20 years there will be 256,000 more households headed by someone aged over 65, and 123,000 of them will be headed by someone over 85. Statistically around 43,000 of these older people will use a wheelchair at least part of the time.

Yet, between 2008 and 2016, 132,994 new homes were built in Scotland, yet only 1,427 were built to wheelchair accessible standards – which is about 1%.

It is obvious to me that we simply need to build more accessible homes! The poor progress over the last eight years clearly shows local authorities are failing to plan for and develop housing to meet the needs of Scotland’s older and disabled citizens. The Scottish Government should therefore set and monitor a new national target of **at least** 10% of all new build homes (for sale or for rent) to be designed to full wheelchair standard or be easily adaptable to meet the standard (LA’s should be free to build more than 10% to meet local demand if necessary) – This could be achieved either through Planning Policy or through changes to the Building Standards.

Author biography:

Grant Carson, Director, Employment and Housing Services, Glasgow Centre for Inclusive Living and has over 25 years’ experience of the social housing sector. At GCIL Grant is responsible for managing and developing Home2Fit – Scotland’s Accessible Housing Register (www.Home2Fit.org.uk) Grant also served as a Non-Executive Director of Greater Glasgow and Clyde Health Board for 8 years.