

UK ON VERGE OF ACCESSIBLE HOUSING CRISIS AS POLL SHOWS MOST BRITS WANT HOMES TO SUIT ALL AGES AND ABILITIES

- **Nearly three quarters (72%) of UK adults think all new homes should be built to be suitable for all ages and abilities. Half of all Britons (48%) don't think society does enough to enable people to live independently and safely at home as they grow older.**
- **Despite this, the English Housing Survey shows that the vast majority (93%) of UK homes don't meet basic accessibility standards – and many developers are not building new homes that are suitable for people as they age.**
- **The Centre for Ageing Better warns of an 'accessible housing crisis', with planning policy failing to properly deliver homes that everyone can live in.**

A poll of more than 4,000 UK adults shows that most people want every new home to be built in a way which is suitable for all people of all ages and abilities. Nearly three quarters (72%) of people polled by YouGov agreed that homes should as standard be built to be suitable for people of all ages and abilities, while nearly half (48%) disagreed that UK society does enough to support people to live at home safely and independently as we age.

The research, commissioned by the Centre for Ageing Better, illustrates the degree to which people would be happy to buy a home which came with features like level access entrances, walk-in showers or handrails. A third (33%) of those polled said they would be encouraged to purchase a home with these characteristics, with a further 48% saying they would be neither encouraged nor discouraged. Amongst younger people, there is a large market for these homes. A quarter of 18-24s (25%) and 25-34s (28%) say they would be encouraged to buy them, with around half saying they would be neither encouraged nor discouraged.

While national rules say a proportion of every development should include homes which are accessible or could be adapted in future, the responsibility for managing this falls to local authorities. However, national planning policy is fragmented, with no clear guidance, and there is no standardised way to assess current and future need for accessible homes in an area. Local plans which would deliver accessible homes are often rejected.

More than three in five (61%) respondents don't think their current home would be suitable for a person with a disability or an older relative to move around. Amongst over-65s, nearly half (45%) personally worry about themselves struggling with everyday activities like cooking, bathing or eating in the future and almost a third (32%) worry about whether someone else in their household would struggle with the same tasks.

According to the English Housing Survey, just 7% of UK homes meet basic accessibility standards. One in five homes in England is deemed non-decent, with non-decent homes disproportionately lived in by people in later life – many of whom manage long-term health conditions or disabilities. New-build homes are often aimed solely at first-time buyers and do not consider the needs of a diverse range of occupants over the lifetime of the home.

The Centre for Ageing Better is calling for a radical overhaul of housing policy, aimed at delivering accessible homes which are age-proof, flexible and suitable for everyone. Developers and councils should be required to build every new home to Category 2

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standard, meaning that they are accessible for someone with a disability and, if needed, can be easily and cost-effectively adapted to meet additional needs.

Dr Anna Dixon, Chief Executive of the Centre for Ageing Better, said:

“The woeful state of today’s housing stock is amongst the worst in Europe. With more and more people living for longer, and many of them managing health conditions, this situation is unsustainable. We are facing an accessible housing crisis, putting unnecessary pressure on individuals, families and public services. If we do nothing, this will only get worse.

“There is a big market for homes that everyone can live in, regardless of their age or ability. Our research shows a strong public appetite for age-proof homes which enable people to live active and fulfilling lives – whatever their situation.

“We need everyone responsible for building new homes to get on board and give people what they want. National rules must be strengthened, and planners within local authorities must work with developers and builders to enforce them. As we seek to build more homes, we must make sure that they are suitable for everyone.”

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Notes to Editors

For more information, please email media@ageing-better.org.uk, contact us on 07795 620 698, or call **Emma Twynning** 020 7420 5243 / 07792 537 452 or **Matt Dolman** 020 3862 9185 / 07969 089 078.

- The **Centre for Ageing Better** is a charity, funded by an endowment from The National Lottery Community Fund, working to create a society where everyone enjoys a good later life. We want more people to be in fulfilling work, in good health, living in safe, accessible homes and connected communities. By focusing on those approaching later life and at risk of missing out, we will create lasting change in society. We are bold and innovative in our approach to improving later lives. We work in partnership with a diverse range of organisations. As a part of the What Works network, we are grounded in evidence. Visit us at ageing-better.org.uk or follow us on Twitter [@Ageing Better](https://twitter.com/Ageing_Better).
- All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. Total sample size was 4,488 adults, including 1,110 adults over 65. Fieldwork was undertaken between 25-29 January 2019. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).
- The current mandatory accessibility requirement for new homes is known as M4(1) (Category 1). This requires that a property provides reasonable provision for most people, including wheelchair users, to visit. The more stringent M4(2) (Category 2) and M4(3) (Category 3) are optional. The Centre for Ageing Better is calling for M4(2) to be the new mandatory minimum, as it incorporates features of M4(1) but has the additional benefit of providing homes that can be adapted to changing needs of our population, meaning that properties can be easily (and cheaply) adapted so that anyone can live in them safely and independently regardless of need. Making M4(2) the minimum standard is already in place or in process in cities including London, Manchester and Sheffield. The full accessibility requirements can be found [here](#).
- The English Housing Survey is a continuous national survey, commissioned by the Government. It collects information about people’s housing circumstances and the condition of housing in England. The most recent version can be found [here](#).
- The impact assessment within the Government’s Housing Standards Review estimated that a three-bedroom terraced home built to Category 2 costs around £1,500 more than its less accessible equivalent in build costs and additional space. The review can be found [here](#) (page 38).