

Clive Betts MP,
Chair,
Communities and Local Government Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

10 January 2018

Dear Clive

Re: Housing for Older People Enquiry: Lifetime Homes briefing points

I am writing in follow up to the oral evidence sessions to the CLG Committee enquiry into Housing for Older People.

Following some reference to the Lifetime Homes standard during the evidence sessions we would like to provide a few points of clarification on the extent of use of the Lifetime Homes standard prior to the 2012-2015 Review of Housing Standards.

National requirements

The Lifetime Homes standard was never a national mandatory standard for all new homes, rather it could be invoked by planning authorities who could set targets within their local planning policy – this is similar to the current situation that applies to the national ‘optional’ access standards Category 2 and Category 3. The GLA and Brighton and Hove are notable areas that set policy that requires all new homes to meet the Lifetime Homes Standard. In London this policy dates from 2004 and has now been revised to reflect the new optional access standard Part M 4 Category 2.

Some very basic elements of the Lifetime Homes standard were incorporated into Part M of the Building Regulations in 1999 to introduce a national minimum standard of accessibility for all new dwellings. These basic elements are still present in the Part M Category 1 standard, but are not adequate to guarantee sufficient access and adaptability to meet the wide range of needs that can be met with Category 2 homes. For example a ‘waiver’ is permitted where some elements such as step free access prove challenging to deliver due to a factor such as a sloping site.

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Grant funding

Where developments were delivered with the assistance of capital grant, the HCA Affordable Housing Programme provided only strong encouragement to use the Lifetime Homes standard rather than establishing a firm obligation. Meeting the standard would put bidders in a stronger position to receive grant, but was not a condition of application.

At the time that the new Part M Categories were launched for consultation the HCA stated in an addendum to their prospectus for 2015-2018 that there would be “No additional requirements above Part M (Access to and use of buildings) of the Building Regulations for access standards for grant funding purposes.” However the restriction on specifying standards did not apply to specialist housing. In its guidance on design of homes for vulnerable people and in the Care and Support Specialised Housing Fund Prospectus the HCA refers to and encourages use of the HAPPI principles – although these principles don’t constitute a design standard in the same sense as Lifetime Homes.

There was a point at which English Partnerships (EP) standards, '*Places, Homes People*', did require Lifetime Homes standards to be met on all EP projects and when the HCA and English Partnerships merged (2009/10), they consulted on a new set of standards which were predicated on LTH. However the change Government in 2010 halted this process.

Code for sustainable homes

Some committee members will also be familiar with the Code for Sustainable Homes and its relationship to the Lifetime Homes standard. In this context aspects of the Lifetime Homes Standard could be used to amass Code Credits in order to achieve a specific rating. Because of the way this worked it would be difficult to reach Code Level 4 without using the Lifetime Homes standards. I understand that some planning authorities would specify that Lifetime Homes Credits should be used to achieve Code Level 4 status in their area.

The Code was withdrawn along with other standards as a consequence of the Review of Housing Standards.

Review of Housing Standards

As an impact of the Review of Housing Standards any Local Authority that already set specifications for use of the Lifetime Homes Standard (either as part of Code compliance or as a standalone requirement) was allowed to ‘passport’ the Local Plan requirement into the new Category 2 optional requirement without proof of need or viability.

Rates of delivery

All of these points set the context for the estimated delivery rate for Lifetime Homes which was commissioned from Adroit Economics by DCLG as part of the Review of Housing Standards.

In their report they estimated that around 40% of Local Planning Authorities had some kind of policy regarding Lifetime Homes. They calculated that the overall proportion of new homes due to be delivered to the Standard in 2015 stood at 31%, with the expectation that it would rise to 47% by 2024 if there were no changes made to policy.

As you know, Habinteg are of the strong opinion that maximising the number of Category 2 Homes that are built across the whole range of tenures is a very important strategic tool in meeting the current and future housing needs of our ageing population. So I very much hope that this note helps to clarify the policy history in this somewhat complex area.

I'm extremely grateful to my colleagues Julia Park of Levitt Bernstein and Jeremy Porteus of the Housing LIN for their input in discussing the background to the content of this letter and I would like to thank the Committee once again for their time and attention to detail on this topic.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christina McGill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christina McGill
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