

## THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUSIVE DESIGN

When the UK government began to impose better access into and around new buildings in the 1990s, one of the strongest objections came from the National House Builders Federation, who described the proposed regulations as "a wholly disproportionate response to a very limited problem." Thankfully, such lobbies were ignored, and that's just as well, because it means that the regulations we refer to when building houses today encourage the creation of more inclusive property designs and environments that anyone can use.

Many self builders recognise that creating a dwelling for life means incorporating elements that will allow them

to continue living in their home if they face reduced mobility, hearing or vision in the future. As the UK's population is getting older, it's more important than ever that new property designs cater for elderly inhabitants.

Recent research released by the Office for National Statistics estimates that the total UK population aged 80 and over will double to more than six million by mid-2037. Bearing in mind that the annual cost of injuries due to falls among older people is currently £1 bn (according to the Design Council), let's hope that more house developers aim for the kind of pioneering inclusive design often seen in self builds.

Below: Oversized doorways (such as this design by Urban Front) are helpful for wheelchair users, parents with pushchairs and for tasks such as carrying in the shopping



cater well for wheelchair users, while tall or set-back units are often inaccessible. Such scenarios can be overcome thanks to fold-out or extendable worktops, lower surfaces and the careful arrangement of appliances.

The same rules apply for bathrooms, where space can often be limited. Wetrooms are great for accessibility because the shower area can double up as an extra manoeuvring zone, plus they allow for someone to

wash whilst seated – including a shower chair will cater for this.

With glazing, avoid horizontal window bars or high cills that block the line of vision for wheelchair users. The best views and quality of light are generally found at the top of buildings, so make sure that these spaces are accessible. Getting to upper storeys need not be a problem for most if the flight is shallow and therefore easier to manage, suitable for a stairlift or if you incorporate a domestic lift into the design.

### Navigation

Most of us build up a map of our homes in our heads, which we use to get around, most obviously when it's dark. However, for some people with cognitive impairments, this isn't as easy. Bringing contrasting features into different rooms can help to define spaces. Consider varying ceiling heights or creating changes in the colour and texture of floor and wall finishes. Those with dementia may be confused by strong patterns

or shapes on wallpaper, so having a uniform finish can help in these scenarios. Good sound insulation will be a boon for those with limited hearing as it will decrease the effect of reverberation between rooms – soft surfacing, such as carpeting, will also aid this.

Strong contrasts in the hue and feel of steps will be easier for those with impaired vision to navigate. The same rule applies to external footpaths: create a straightforward route to the property entrance, incorporating dramatic visual elements to make them easily memorisable. Placing handrails on both sides of stairs and paths is also helpful. Little details are important outdoors, such as good lighting and an easily-read house number. The addition of a wind chime by an entrance is an attractive guidance method.

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