

# RUTLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

## LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

### ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS STUDY

FEBRUARY 2017

#### 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Local authorities are no longer able to impose their own planning policies regarding dwelling accessibility. They may opt in to national optional standards if they wish, which we must consider through our Local Plan Review.

#### 2. THE OPTIONAL ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

- 2.1 The new Building Regulation M4 is in three parts:

**M4(1) – Category 1** Visitable Dwellings (all dwellings, as existing)

**M4(2) – Category 2** Accessible and adaptable dwellings (optional)

**M4(3) – Category 3** Wheelchair user dwellings (optional)

These do not apply to change of use.

- 2.2 M4(2) is similar to the Lifetime Homes Standard, but less stringent regarding construction methods. It would not be practicable in every case, as information on the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) website points out. For instance, step-free access to entrance, garden and communal areas is required at a slope not more than 1:12. There must be a living room on the entrance storey. Where dwellings have 3 or more bedrooms, there must be a toilet with room for a level access shower. An accessible bathroom must be on the same level as the principal bedroom. Also, except for specialist housing for older people, there is unlikely to be sufficient justification for lifts to flats in Rutland given typical building heights.

- 2.3 M4(3) is a higher standard. Within this category, there are two sub-categories. (a) is a **wheelchair adaptable** dwelling. They are intended to be easily adapted to wheelchair use after completion. (b) are wheelchair accessible dwellings which can be readily usable by a wheelchair user at the point of completion – these can only be requested where the local authority nominates the resident. In particular, M4(3)(b) has requirements for larger kitchens.

#### 3. MEETING THE NEED FOR ACCESSIBLE PROPERTIES

- 3.1 The SHMA 2014 Chapter 9 (Table 69) estimated that the number of people in Rutland with mobility problems would increase from 1,464 in 2011 to 3,263 in 2036.

- 3.2 Whilst not every person with mobility needs will need a property to the higher M4(2) accessibility standard, people's needs may change over time and properties built to M4(2) provide greater flexibility compared with M4(1) which is the normal minimum required by the Building Regulations. Nonetheless, properties constructed to M4(1) already have a useful degree of accessibility for many people and can sometimes be adapted further, albeit at additional expense for the Council or owner.
- 3.3 Table 1 of "Housing Standards Review - Cost Impacts", DCLG, September 2014 shows that M4(2) accessibility would add £520 to £940 per dwelling (not including the cost of additional space associated with the standard). M4(3) access would add £7,764 to £23,052 per dwelling. The extra floor space associated with M4(2) accessibility varies from £722 for a flat to £2,166 for a 3 or 4 bedroomed house (Table 17a, based on the former Lifetime Homes Standard).

#### **4. CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 Many respondents to the Local Plan Review Issues & Options consultation support the Council indicating in general terms the types of housing that are required, but without being excessively prescriptive. There was some support for updating the accessibility standards.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 Given the increased number of people with disabilities forecast in Rutland in the period to 2036, from this perspective ideally all new build dwellings could have been required to meet at least M4(2) where practicable. However, due to viability issues it is proposed that this only be required where either the need is greatest or where it is most viable.
- 5.2 Therefore, it is recommended that the M4(2) accessibility standard as a minimum be required where practicable for:
- Specialist housing for older people and people with disabilities
  - Bungalows
  - Detached dwellings (including link-detached) of 4 bedrooms or more, where the impact on viability for dwellings of this size and nature would normally be minimal.
- 5.3 Careful wording of the policies would be needed regarding:
- the accessibility levels for older people's specialist housing, some of which under national guidance may count towards housing targets even though they may be classed as Residential Institutions;
  - the proportion of properties (included in the overall totals) to meet the higher wheelchair adaptable/accessible standard of M4(3). It is suggested that a target of 1% to 2% of strategic allocated sites may be appropriate. National research (cited in 'Guide to available disability data', DCLG, March 2015) shows that 3.3% of households contain a wheelchair user, but the needs and aspirations of wheelchair users will vary considerably.
  - properties in Conservation Areas if the access may be out of character.