

Habinteg
Accessible homes. Independent lives.

Designing for inclusion: understanding the 'why'

Housing Ireland, 5 March 2026

Accessible homes. Independent lives.

About Habinteg



- Habinteg has over 50 years experience delivering and championing accessible in inclusive neighbourhoods.
- Habinteg's consultancy team, Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE) is UK's leading authority on inclusive design

Image: Habinteg properties, Leeds, 2018

The impact of an accessible home

“It’s also brought back something I really missed: being able to share a bedroom with my husband. We had to sleep apart for nearly seven years...

...my mental health has improved massively. I feel happier, more confident, and more in control of my environment.

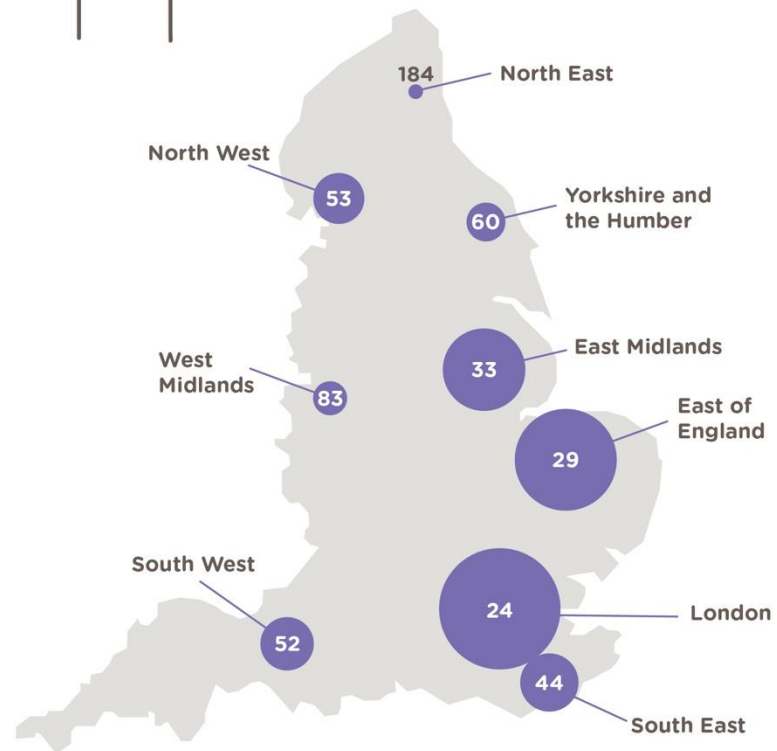
I’m not stuck in one room anymore. I can move around freely, and that’s made an enormous difference to my peace of mind



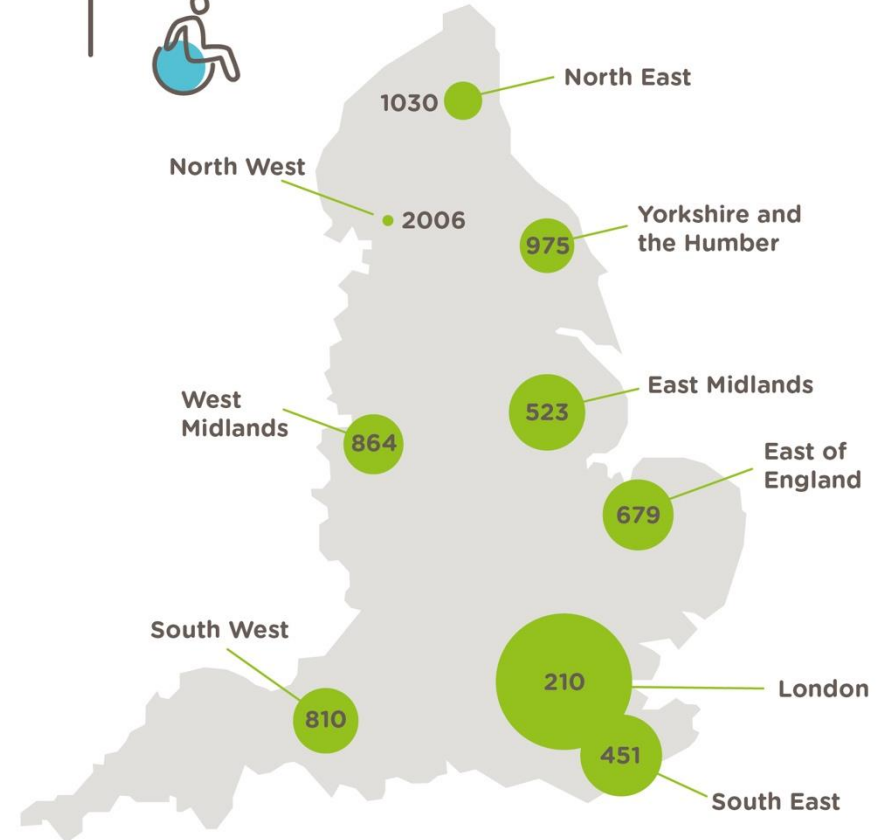
Planning forecast in England



Accessible & adaptable
(inclusive standard, M4(2))



Wheelchair user dwelling
M4(3)



Accessible and adaptable: 1:184 North East. 1:24 London

Wheelchair user dwelling 1:2006 North West 1:210 London

In an ideal world every project would benefit from co-design

“The meaningful involvement of end users in the design process”

- Enhances User Satisfaction and Ownership



- Fosters Innovation and Creativity



- Improves Efficiency and Effectiveness



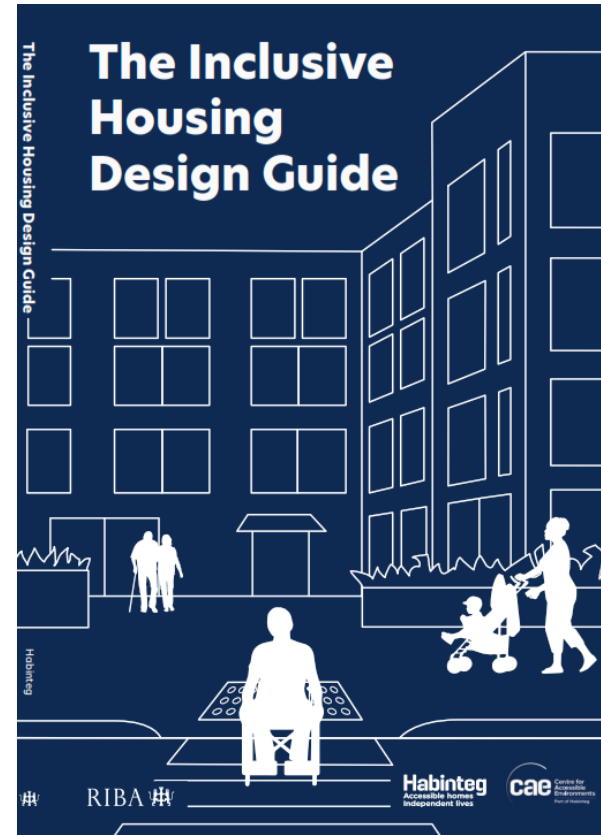
- Builds Better Relationships and Trust



- Encourages Empathy and Ethical Design

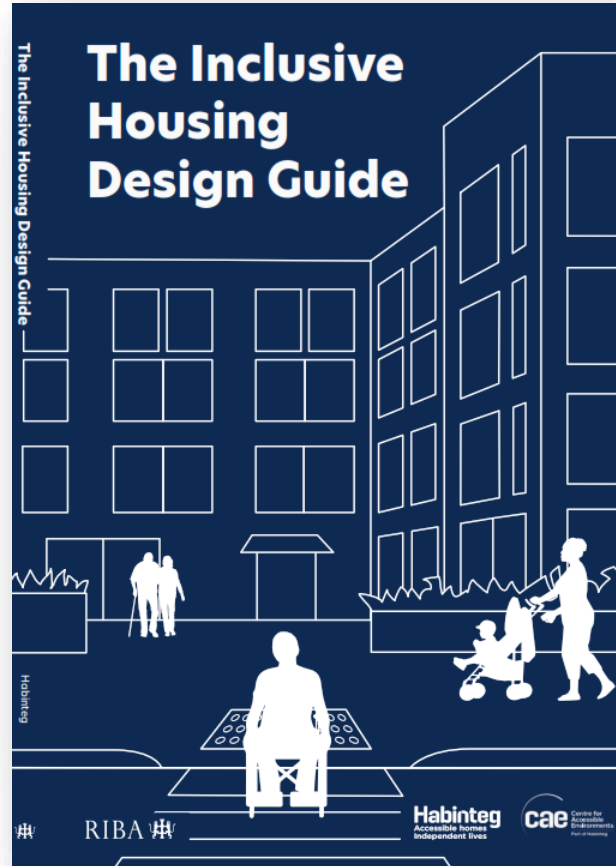


Seeking out real world perspectives when full co-design isn't possible..

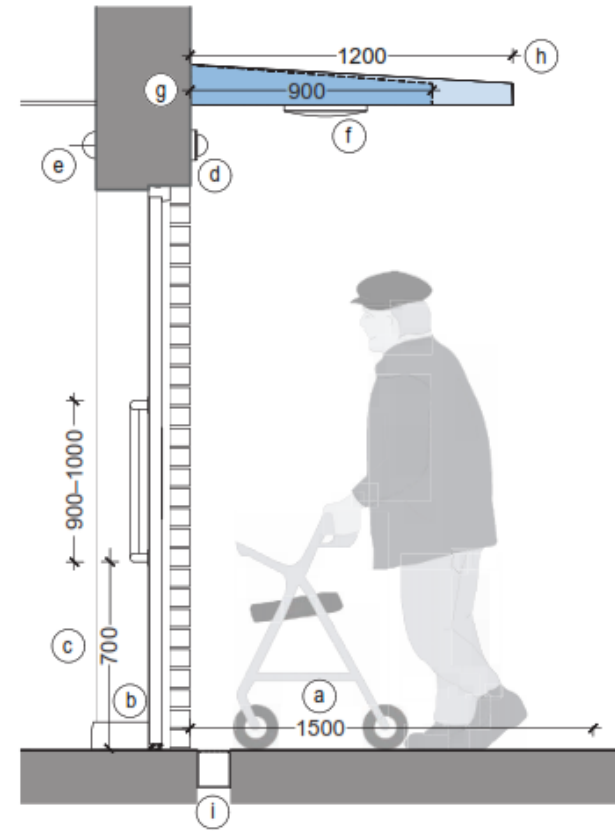
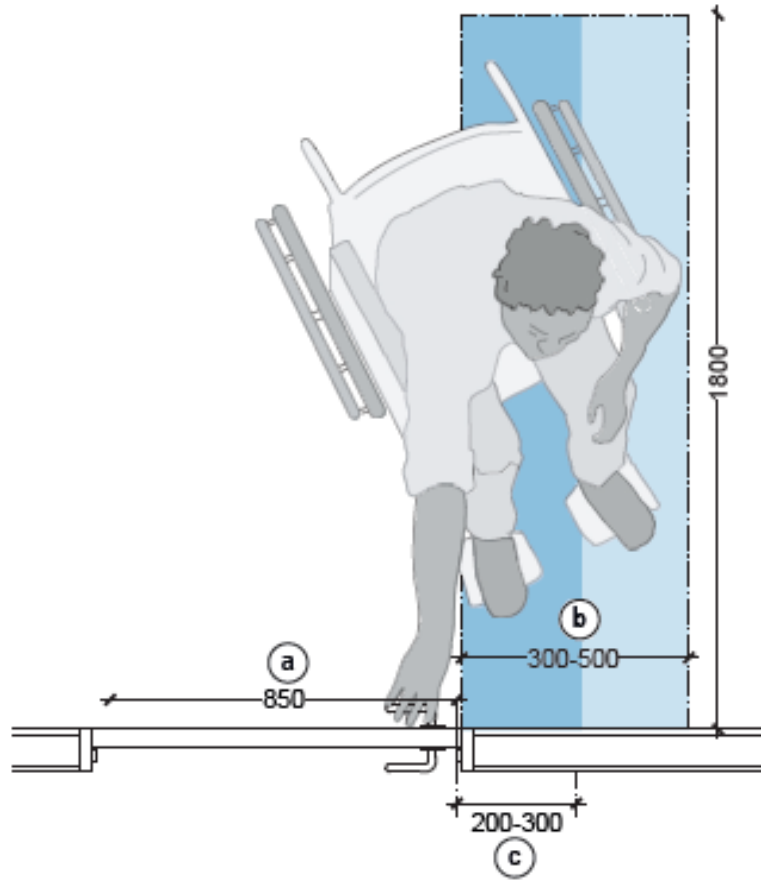


Try to consider why, not just 'what'

Design guide wisdom – approaches to consider



Exceeding minimum requirements – quality impact considerations



Insights from real life

Insight: Impact of unsuitable lighting

Adverse effects from lighting can be an issue for people who experience sensory overload or have visual or cognitive impairments. They can be relatively easy to address if considered from the outset. This includes avoiding the use of single light sources that create pools of harsh light, reflection, glare and confusing shadows, and avoidance of abrupt changes from light to dark between rooms or different areas in a room. Lighting should not create flicker (visible and imperceptible) or buzz and hum from switches and lights. Levels and quality of light and colour temperature (warm/natural/cool) should be considered. Careful attention to lighting that is adaptable to individual requirements will assist with the following:

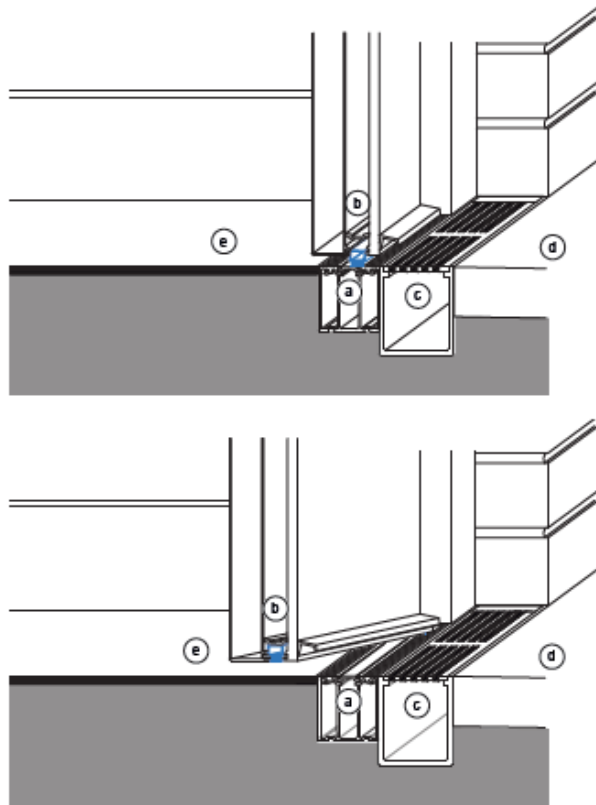
- wayfinding to enable people to use their home more easily
- reducing the risk of accidents, slips, trips and falls
- enabling activities in kitchens and bathrooms to be carried out more safely
- enabling people to lip-read and read sign language more easily
- creating calming or stimulating environments
- reducing disruption to regular sleeping patterns
- reducing distress from sensory overload that can impact on ability to function.



Insight: Outdoor seating

Seating that provides a place to stop, rest and pause, and experience the health benefits of getting outside should be provided at regular intervals across the whole development. It can encourage people to get out of their home who might otherwise be unable to do so, due to limited mobility or standing tolerance, limited balance, shortness of breath or with poor stamina. Appropriate seating can encourage social interaction while also assisting a person who needs to pause and take time out, such as away from a busier communal space (Figure 1.6).

Sometimes the 'how' is critical



Key:

- a.** 0mm door threshold - height of threshold to be coordinated with the internal floor finishes prior to installation to prevent upstands.
- b.** Gasket/drop seal - seals the door when it closes/retracts when the door opens.
- c.** Integral drainage channel with metal grille - flush with no upstands.
- d.** External paving to be flush with drainage and zero threshold with no upstands and laid to falls 1:60 away from building.
- e.** Internal floor finishes and depth to accommodate zero threshold and ensure unrestricted door opening.

Figure 2.5 How to achieve a zero threshold



It's not just about the dwelling...

- inaccessible shops and amenities
- Inaccessible public transport
- lack of dropped kerbs
- pavement parking

"I cannot use my wheelchair to travel around my local area. There are too many vehicles blocking the paths"

"A lot of the local road crossings do not either make an audible sound or have tactile buttons underneath that you can feel to know if it's safe to cross the road".

"In our cul-de-sac there are no paths in and out meaning you have to walk on the road which isn't suitable when you have a child with no danger awareness."

"Public transport is infrequent; therefore, costs are spent on taxis, or not going out."

7 tips for delivery

Plan inclusion
from the start

Your
customer is
expert go
direct or draw
on expertise

The right
contractor,
engaged in
your why!

Challenge
perceived
limitations

Early
nominations
can help!

Post
occupancy
evaluation =
learning for
next time

Think 'why'
not just 'what'

The impact of an accessible home



“Words aren’t enough to describe my happiness about my new home.

Everything is accessible to me and easy to manage, from the front door and bedroom to the toilet and kitchen. I have enough space to move around freely.”

Thank you

www.habinteg.org.uk

www.cae.org.uk

Accessible homes. Independent lives.
