

National Assembly for Wales  
Environment and Sustainability Committee  
PB 10  
Planning (Wales) Bill  
Response from Leonard Cheshire Disability

The Planning (Wales) Bill: Consultation response by Leonard Cheshire Disability



1. Leonard Cheshire Disability is very grateful to have the opportunity to respond to the Environment and Sustainability Committee's consultation on the general principles of the Planning (Wales) Bill.

About Leonard Cheshire Disability

2. At Leonard Cheshire Disability we work for a society in which everyone is equally valued. We believe that disabled people should have the freedom to live their lives the way they choose - with the opportunity and support to live independently, to contribute economically and to participate fully in society.
3. We are one of the UK's largest voluntary sector providers of services for disabled people with over 250 services across the UK including care homes, care homes with nursing and homecare services. We aim to maximise personal choice and independence for people with disabilities and all of our services are designed to meet the needs and priorities of the people who use them.
4. This response focuses on issues where we have a specific expertise and knowledge, both as the UK's largest voluntary sector provider of social care services to disabled people and as a leading disability campaigning charity. As such, we have not sought to respond to all elements of the Committee's terms of reference for its inquiry

The general principles of the Planning (Wales) Bill

5. Leonard Cheshire Disability notes and welcomes the stated aim of the Bill to deliver a planning system which would help "to deliver sustainable places that include homes, jobs and infrastructure."<sup>1</sup>
6. We believe that any conceptualisation of a 'sustainable home' needs to incorporate it being readily-adaptable to the needs of disabled people.

Disabled-Friendly Homes

7. Living in suitable accommodation is crucial to our wellbeing. The Building Research Establishment reported in 2010 that 45% of all injuries

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government, Planning (Wales) Bill, Explanatory Memorandum, Paragraph 3.10

occur in the home - and that the less accessible someone's home is, the more likely they are to suffer an injury. In total, the cost of poor housing to the NHS alone amounts to more than £600m every year.<sup>2</sup>

8. Unsuitable housing can also have an enormous impact on quality of life. There are some things none of us should have to endure in twenty-first century Britain. That includes washing every day in your kitchen, at the sink where you peel your potatoes and wash your plates, sleeping in a living room instead of a bedroom or using a toilet that has no privacy because a door prevents someone using a wheelchair from entering. But our nation's shortage of disabled-friendly homes is forcing thousands of people to live in these Victorian conditions every day.
9. While some homes in Wales are either fully accessible, or ready for the adaptations that people will need as they age, or become disabled, too many more are simply not disabled-friendly.
10. A significant proportion of Welsh homes can only be adapted to include features such as stair lifts, grab rails or a wet room at significant cost, while for hundreds of thousands of others these adaptations are simply impossible. In 2008, the 'Living in Wales' survey found that 22% of households including someone with a long-term illness, disability, or infirmity had adaptation needs that had not been met.<sup>3</sup>
11. The severe shortage of adaptable and accessible homes is placing enormous stress and pressure on thousands of disabled and older people, as well as the care system and the health service.
12. As a result of their homes not being disabled-friendly, far too many people are forced into care or hospital when they would rather continue to live at home. This has a severe impact both on individuals and Welsh taxpayers as a whole, because a single trip to hospital (for someone who slips on the stairs because they can't install a stair-lift or a grab rail) costs an average of almost £1,800.<sup>4</sup> This is 60% more than the average cost of building a new home to Lifetime Homes standards.
13. Further, every hip fracture costs the NHS over £28,000<sup>5</sup> - and brings no end of pain and upset to families across the country - but many could easily be prevented by the installation of grab bars in halls and bathrooms, for less than a fifteenth of the price.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Roys, M. Davidson, M. Nicol, S. Ormandy, D. and Ambrose, P. (2010) The real cost of poor housing. BRE

<sup>3</sup> The Living in Wales Survey 2008

<sup>4</sup> Source: Cabinet Office unit cost database (2011/12)

<sup>5</sup> Better outcomes, lower costs: Implications for health and social care budgets of investment in housing adaptations, improvements and equipment: a review of the evidence

<sup>6</sup> Calculation based on £1800 / £28000 – Source: Cabinet Office unit cost database (2011/12)

14. These unnecessary accidents and hospital admissions place extraordinary resource pressures on care services, paramedics and hospital wards. It also contributes to preventing a large and growing section of society from living independently with dignity and being afforded the same rights as non-disabled people.
15. Worse still, as the number of disabled and older people grows, this hidden crisis is only going to get worse. 1 in 10 people in Great Britain report some kind of mobility problem<sup>7</sup> - that's approximate 310,000 people in Wales who are likely to need a disabled-friendly home.<sup>8</sup>
16. Ultimately, the current shortage of disabled-friendly homes is not conducive to community or individuals' wellbeing. Nor is it in line with the aims and intentions of the 'Framework for Action on Independent Living' launched by the Welsh Government in September 2013.

### What is the solution?

17. Building a home to disabled-friendly standards - called Lifetime Homes Standards<sup>9</sup> or Welsh Quality Housing Standards - involves, among other things, building it with wider doors and walls strong enough for grab-rails to be installed in case the owners need them in the future.
18. It is estimated that building homes to such standards costs an average of only £1,100<sup>10</sup> extra per property. Wheelchair accessible homes, specifically designed for those who use wheelchairs, cost a little more<sup>11</sup> but are essential to ensuring that disabled people can live comfortably and safely.
19. Building more of these homes is not only is this the right thing to do - it's also the sustainable thing to do; it's something that actively secures the well-being of future generations, and meet the needs of the current disabled population.
20. Adapting a property after it's built is much more expensive and less effective. While not adapting it condemns people to the misery of Victorian strip washes, forces them to sleep in their living room rather than their bedroom, or exposes them to nasty and costly slips, trips and falls caused by lack of grab rails, hoists or stair-lifts.

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<sup>7</sup> The Hidden Housing Crisis -Leonard Cheshire Disability

<sup>8</sup> The Office of National Statistics' June 2014 population estimate for Wales was 3.1 million.  
3.1 million / 10 = 310,000

<sup>9</sup> Full details available here:

[http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/data/files/For\\_Professionals/accessible\\_revisedlthstandard\\_fi nal.pdf](http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/data/files/For_Professionals/accessible_revisedlthstandard_fi nal.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Estimates vary. The CLG Housing Standards Review Consultation Impact Assessment estimated the average cost as £1,100. A previous CLG estimate put the average cost at £547. DCLG The Future of the Code for Sustainable Homes, 2007

<sup>11</sup> Around £13,000 for all sizes of home, according to CLG, Housing Standards Review Consultation: Impact Assessment

21. In the worst circumstances, people like Ruby (below) lose valuable time with their disabled children due to the inaccessibility of their homes. This is a disgrace, and one which needs to be addressed immediately.

#### **Case study: Ruby Nash**

Ruby lives in Barry in South Wales with her son Cody, who has the degenerative muscle condition Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Cody currently finds it difficult getting up the stairs on his own, and this will only get worse as time goes on and his illness progresses.

Ruby: “I’m very worried about what will happen if we have to stay here once Cody has to use a wheelchair. He won’t be able to sleep in his bedroom, or use the bathroom privately, and the impact on his life, our lives, will be enormous.

“There are new developments being built in Barry, but neither the council nor private developers are building enough homes to cater for families like us who need them.

“We are gold priority on the Homes 4U list (the local housing association), but there’s not a single available home in the area which is suitable.

“The life expectancy for someone living with Duchenne is only 27 years. Our precious time together shouldn’t be wasted struggling to get out of the front door, or get down the stairs, we should be able to enjoy our lives together while we can.”

#### *The potential value of the Planning (Wales) Bill*

22. We understand that the Planning (Wales) Bill, as introduced, provides a statutory requirement for Welsh Ministers to prepare and keep up to date a national land use plan (to be known as the NDP).

23. We also understand that the intent of the Bill’s provisions is to provide a legal framework for addressing issues “such as housing demand, search areas for strategic employment sites and supporting transport infrastructure, which cut across a number of local planning authorities, to be considered and planned for in an integrated and comprehensive way.”<sup>12</sup>

24. We believe the Planning (Wales) Bill, therefore has the potential to provide a legal framework by which the shortage of accessible homes for disabled people across Wales can be addressed in a strategic fashion.

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<sup>12</sup> Welsh Government, Planning (Wales) Bill, Explanatory Memorandum, Para 3.29

25. In particular, we believe that the Welsh Government should make a public commitment to using its prospective powers over planning to require:

- Every new home in Wales to be built to Lifetime Homes standards as part of the WHQS; and
- A minimum percentage (we believe this should be at least ten percent) of all new homes to be built to full wheelchair accessibility standards.

### Conclusion

26. We hope our response to this consultation is helpful to the Committee in its consideration of the principles of this important legislation, and we would be very happy to provide further information as required.

27. For information, we have attached a link to our UK-wide [Home Truths Campaign](#) launched in July 2014, highlighting the very real housing crisis facing disabled people and their families.

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