

## Consumer and industry views of Lifetime Homes

This research study provides an independent evaluation of the desirability and acceptability of the specific Lifetime Homes design features based on the views and experiences of over 300 Lifetime Homes residents themselves. In addition, the study sought to establish the views of the private sector builders, sales staff and letting agents regarding Part M of the Building Regulations and Lifetime Homes house-building initiatives and regulations.

- f** Whilst many residents were unaware that their home was a Lifetime Home, eight in ten thought that the concept was a good idea.
- f** Most residents viewed most of the 16 Lifetime Homes design standards as important.
- f** A quarter of residents said that they were unaware of any special features in their home but almost two-thirds (64 per cent) spontaneously mentioned at least one of the Lifetime Homes design standards. Wider doorways and the downstairs toilet were the most frequently mentioned.
- f** This research suggests that, other than the level threshold, consumers generally do not notice the changes. Some features, such as the large bathroom and downstairs toilet, are a positive attraction and benefit to most people.
- f** Sixty per cent said they would choose a level approach to their front door in preference to having a step; only 10 per cent had reservations about the absence of a step.
- f** Assuming that there was no difference in the cost, just over half would prefer to live in a Lifetime Home rather than a similar home without the design features (four in ten had no preference).
- f** Just over half would expect a Lifetime Home to cost about the same as a similar property without the design features but four in ten would expect it to cost more.
- f** From the trade perspective, the introduction of new accessibility standards under Part M of the Building Regulations had not been as onerous as feared. It has, as expected, had an impact on costs but less than anticipated.
- f** Sales agents interviewed seemed generally unaware that change had taken place.
- f** It is possible that the impact of Part M has yet to be noticed by consumers (as many builders sought to get around the need to implement the changes on existing sites).

## Lifetime Homes

The Lifetime Homes standards incorporate 16 design standards to make homes more flexible, convenient, safe and accessible. These standards were developed in the 1990s by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Lifetime Homes Group. Many homes around the country have now been built to these standards. In October 1999, Part M of the Building Regulations, which deals with accessibility, was extended to cover homes as well as public buildings.

## Consumer research

Many residents were unaware that their home would be classified as a 'Lifetime Home' and only half had heard the term before the interview took place. A quarter of residents said that they were unaware of any special features in their home but almost two-thirds (64 per cent) spontaneously mentioned at least one of the design standards (see Table 1). Wider doorways and the downstairs toilet were the most

frequently mentioned. A third said that a special feature of their home was the wider hall and the same proportion spontaneously mentioned the easy-to-reach switches or sockets.

Car-parking access, the entrance level living room, and accessible bathroom fittings were hardly mentioned spontaneously, though some people commented on the lever taps.

Eight in ten thought that a car-parking space close to the entrance to their home was important; six in ten considered an extra wide parking space important. Eight in ten said the covered entrance with outside light was important to them. A downstairs toilet was universally popular but only half thought it important to have the space and plumbing to install a shower in it.

Seven in ten said that the low level, easy-to-open windows were important; three-quarters felt the sockets, switches and control heights were important. Many people were unaware of the wall panel which

Table 1: Awareness of the Lifetime Homes features

	<i>Spontaneous</i>	<i>Prompted</i>
Level/gently sloping entrance	16%	99%
Covered front door with outside light	11%	98%
Easy to reach switches/sockets etc.	26%	97%
Living room at entrance level	-	96%
Wider doorways	39%	95%
Open space in downstairs rooms	-	92%
Accessible bathroom fittings	-	90%
Downstairs toilet	27%	88%
- with space for shower	14%	
Car parking space close to entrance	-	87%
Low level easy-to-open windows	11%	86%
Space downstairs for a bed	-	67%
Strong walls in bathroom & toilet for grab rail	-	61%
Provision for house/stair lift	10%	55%
Extra wide parking space	-	41%
Removable wall panel for <i>en-suite</i> bathroom	-	31%

Note: The sixteenth design standard applies to easily accessible communal stairs and lifts which are fully accessible for wheelchairs.

could be removed to make the bathroom *en suite* and only a quarter thought this was important. Only a third of those in houses or upstairs flats thought the possibility of installing a lift from the ground floor was important.

Although around one in ten residents had reservations about the level approach to their front door or main entrance, six in ten would choose this over a step given the choice and a further three in ten had no preference.

Given the choice, a third said they would prefer narrower hallways and larger internal rooms, three in ten would opt for the current arrangement of wider hallways and corridors and smaller internal rooms. A quarter would prefer a more open plan arrangement. For residents, it is a question of balance between the benefits of spacious hallways for visitors, children to play in, turning buggies/wheelchairs etc. against the limitations this places on space for furniture or to simply move around in living areas.

### Industry views

Part M has had a significant impact on building practices and costs but not as much as was feared. It was suggested that the industry took advantage of phased introduction to put off its implementation on sites for as long as possible.

Part M was thought to be hardest to accommodate in the lower cost, smaller houses where margins are tighter and the amendments are likely to lead to a larger site being required. There was some suggestion that it is also problematic at the luxury end of the market.

Sales agents seemed to be generally unaware of the changes. Those selling new homes built to the revised specification seemed to have only encountered negative reactions from prospective purchasers about sloping access that has been designed in such a way to make it seem like a ramp. It was thought that the larger bathroom and downstairs toilet could be sold as a positive benefit.

Whilst there was no resistance to the principle of applying even tight specifications to housing

dedicated for disabled people, the main point of disagreement was with applying such regulations across all new homes.

The industry perception was that only a very small proportion of the purchasing public would positively benefit. It was suggested that some of the Part M specifications might be an active disadvantage for non-disabled people. Odd room-to-corridor proportions, outward opening doors etc. were thought likely to weigh in on the negative side. However, the industry may concede that, for the most part, the changes are quite subtle and there is real doubt that the end user will even notice the design changes. Some of the specifications may have real benefit to a broader audience.

Builders and regulators have taken the regulations on board. There has been little feedback from sales and the views of home buyers are unclear as only a few of the Part M specified homes have been sold. This should be followed up in further research if anecdotal feedback indicates consumer resistance or rejection.

### About the study

302 residents in Lifetime Homes were interviewed face to face in their homes. The Lifetime Homes residents were occupants of properties owned/built by the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust (203 residents) or Habinteg Housing Association (99 residents). The interviews with builders and other professionals were undertaken using a combination of face-to-face and telephone interviews. Eleven interviews in total were completed among professionals.

The research was undertaken between August and October 2000.

### How to get further information

Further details about this research can be obtained from Leslie Sopp, who at the time of the research was Head of Market Research at Consumers' Association. He is now Head of Research at The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. He can be contacted at: Chartered Accountants Hall, PO Box 433, Moorgate Place, London EC2P 2BJ. Telephone: 0207 920 8738; fax 0207 920 8687; email: [leslie.sopp@icaew.co.uk](mailto:leslie.sopp@icaew.co.uk).

The full report, **Living in a Lifetime Home: A survey of residents' and developers' views** by Leslie Sopp and Liz Wood, is published for the Foundation by YPS (ISBN 1 84263 018 0, price £12.95).