

The Ultimate Guide to Finding an Accessible Home

disability
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There are 14.1 million disabled people in the UK and the population is ageing rapidly, yet only 9% of English homes currently provide even the most basic accessibility features. Data from the **English Housing Survey** shows that 91% of homes do not provide the four main features that would make it even 'visitable' by a disabled person.

Habinteg Housing Association estimates that more than 400,000 wheelchair users are living in homes that are neither adapted nor accessible.

Just 2.4% of new homes currently being built will be suitable for wheelchair users, outside of London this figure is just 1.5%

That is why Disability Horizons and Branch Properties Accessibility Specialists have again joined together to bring you the ultimate guide to finding an accessible home.

Our updated and improved guide for 2021 will give you a comprehensive overview of everything you need to know to help you find the new home – from start to finish. We aim to help you understand the accessible housing market and accessible features, as well as give you practical and straight-forward advice on how to find a property that suits your needs, whether you are buying or renting.

We have also included handy checklists and note sections where you can write down your preferences and requirements to determine exactly what you need.

1. Think about what you need

Firstly, narrow down your access requirements. Broadly speaking, what level of accessibility do you need? Designers and architects consider a range of factors when designing an accessible home, so think about what specific, practical features will matter most to you.

Read through the list below and, for each element that applies to you, make notes on what your exact requirements are so that you'll know what you need to consider. We have a handy notes section at the end where you can do this.

- ❖ Moving around outside
- ❖ Using outdoor spaces
- ❖ Approaching your home
- ❖ Negotiating the front door
- ❖ Entering and leaving the house
- ❖ Dealing with callers
- ❖ Negotiating internal doors
- ❖ Moving around inside
- ❖ Storing things, including equipment
- ❖ Moving between levels within the building
- ❖ Using living spaces
- ❖ Using the kitchen
- ❖ Using the bathroom
- ❖ Using bedrooms
- ❖ Windows and heights



Pinpoint specific features

Now that you have thought about what you need, it's good to identify how these will translate to the real world. Think about properties you've lived in before and what access features have made the most difference to your daily life.

Then take a look at the list below of the main accessible features and adaptations available and tick the elements you know you will need to live comfortably.

You may find that you don't actually require the full list of adaptations, which could open up your housing options.

For example, you may find that you can look at 'General Needs' housing (i.e. ones that are applicable to everyone) as well as specialist housing – more on this below in our section on 'understanding the housing categories'.

For the things you do need, head down to the notes section so that you can expand on the applicable areas and how they need to work for you.

- ❖ Access to upper floor via stairlift
- ❖ Access to upper floor via wheelchair lift
- ❖ Grab rails
- ❖ Walk-in bath
- ❖ Roll-in shower
- ❖ Ground floor bath, shower or wetroom with level access
- ❖ Ground floor WC
- ❖ Low-level countertops/sink/appliances/plug points etc
- ❖ Accessible kitchen storage
- ❖ Specialist storage/cupboards around the house
- ❖ Extra space for wheelchair manoeuvrability
- ❖ Smart controls, such as for lighting or heating
- ❖ Fixed or tracking ceiling hoist
- ❖ Intercom/entry-phone
- ❖ Level access to all main living floor rooms
- ❖ Level access to garden/grounds
- ❖ Paved garden or one with smooth paths
- ❖ Level or ramped access to the property
- ❖ No steps on approach to property
- ❖ Off-street or unrestricted on-street parking³
- ❖ Supported living (warden or other assistance available on site)



Imagine your dream home

Forget about accessibility just for a moment. It is important that you take some time to think about what you are looking for in a new home without getting bogged down in the access requirements.

What style of property do you want? Do you want open-plan modern or something more traditional? How will you use the space? What about that fireplace you've always dreamed of? Or the sun-soaked patio that you can't wait to have a glass of wine on in the hazy summer evenings? Make sure you think about these important lifestyle factors too.

Location – Where do you want to live? This could range from a specific street that you have fallen in love with, to an entire town or city. Remember to consider local transport links too, or access to roads if you drive. Also, what local amenities do you need nearby?

Type of property – Are you looking for a flat, bungalow, detached house, terraced house etc.?

Bedrooms and bathrooms – It may seem obvious, but make sure you know your minimum number of bedrooms and bathrooms. Think about space for personal assistants/carers too or visiting family.

Style of property – Period, modern or new build? Do you prefer the character-filled period features of a Victorian terrace or the sleek modern style of a new-build home?

Key features – What are your must-haves?

From gardens and garages to built-in wardrobes and other essential storage, nail down a few of the features you don't want to live without.



Don't forget the budget

What are you realistically prepared to spend? Think about how much you can afford to pay on a mortgage or in rent, including if interest rates rise, rent prices increase or service charges are changed. Don't forget additional fees too, such as solicitors or estate agents' fees if you're buying, and deposits if you're renting, as well as moving costs.

Remember to adjust your budget for different types of property. For example, would you be willing to spend more on a two bed house than you would on a two bed flat?

If you're buying, you will also need to think about whether you need to factor in any extra cash to make adaptations. There is nothing worse than finding your dream home, just within your budget, and then realising you will have nothing leftover for and construction costs for improvements.

If you are renting, some landlords are in a position to agree to adaptations. Depending on your circumstances, you may be eligible for some assistance, such as Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and/or a Discretionary Financial Assistance (DFA). There is more on the cost of adaptations below.

2. Think about accessibility and adaptations

The ‘accessibility’ of a property generally relates to the structural features already in place. This could include level access, wider hallways and a toilet and/or shower room on the ground floor.

Adaptations, on the other hand, are modifications to a property, such as adding grab rails, a door-entry system or roll-in shower.

If you think you will need adaptations to be made, we’d recommend looking at new-build houses as they are now required to be built with accessibility in mind or be more easily adaptable – see more on this in our section on ‘understanding the housing categories’.

Define immediate must-haves vs future adaptations

Whatever your needs, be prepared to compromise! Unfortunately, it is unrealistic to assume that you will be able to find a property that meets all your needs and is ready to move into straight away. But that doesn’t mean you won’t be able to find your dream home.

Think about what features you NEED to be built-in when you purchase a house or agree to rent it, and what could be adapted or improved before or after you move in.

The overall structure and layout of the property should be your fundamental priority. You can add many adaptations, depending on what they are, relatively easily. However, when it comes to major internal rearrangements that involve a lot of work, you may find that the cost and disruption is prohibitive or too intrusive, or the landlord or council isn’t willing or able to make them.

Minor vs major adaptations

The nature of adaptations can usually be classified as either minor or major. This mainly relates to the amount of work and relevant cost attached to the adaption being made.

The table below provides a brief snapshot of what can be considered a minor or major adaptation, but this is not an exhaustive list.

Minor adaptations	Major adaptations
Grab rails and stair rails (outside and inside)	Level access showers and wet rooms
Lever taps	Stairlifts (straight or curved)
Lighting improvements	Ramps
Door entry system/intercom	Kitchen alterations
Door widening	Automatic door openers/closers

Consider the cost of adjustments

Below is a table with some examples of typical adaptations and estimates of how much each would cost to complete. Please remember that these are only meant to give a rough idea of costs and may vary significantly depending on the property and where in the UK you live.

Adaptation	Cost
Installing a ramp	£450
Widening an entrance door	£2,500
Widening internal doors (4 doors)	£2,000
Installing a stairlift	£9,600
Installing 10 grab rails	£2,500
A wetroom conversion from existing bathroom	£3,500
Adding a ceiling hoist	£1,750 - £3,000

If you are buying from a vendor, it will be your responsibility to organise and pay for the adaptations. If you're buying a newly-built home from a developer, it is worth discussing adaptations at the plan stage as your specific requirements might be able to be built into the home.

However, as developers have to comply with NHBC New Build guidelines, which means they have to be built as per the regulations and plans already submitted, they may not be able to make any changes.

If you're renting and require adaptations, a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) can help pay for them. It is means-tested and goes up to a maximum of £30,000 in England, or £36,000 in Wales. The average grant is actually less than £10,000.

In order for you to access a DFG, you will need to plan to live in the property for up to five years after work is completed, and your landlord will need to agree to the adaptations and helping to secure the grant.

They'll need to write a statement of intent confirming that that the property will continue to be occupied by you as a disabled tenant for that time period.



3. Start looking for properties

Looking for accessible and wheelchair-friendly properties is hard. Well-known property portals, such as Rightmove and Zoopla, aren't particularly helpful. There are very few accessible properties listed, but using the keywords wheelchair, accessible, disabled and disability should help you to find them.

When you do locate one, most listings don't really take accessibility into account. However, some will include floorplans and pictures. These are extremely helpful in showing beneficial features, such as what rooms are on the ground floor, what level access is like and whether the flooring inside and out will suit your needs. If a property you're looking for online doesn't have a floor plan, get in touch with the estate agent or landlord and ask for them.

If you need help finding an accessible home to rent, below are some organisations that may be able to help you and also companies specialising in accessible housing:

<p>Branch Properties Accessibility Specialists</p> <p>www.branchproperties.co.uk</p>	<p>Branch Properties specialises in finding, letting, and selling accessible and inclusive homes. As of late summer 2021, Branch Properties is the only 'Dedicated Estate Agency Specialising in Accessibility in the UK' committed to finding and promoting accessible properties. By working with our clients, Branch Properties takes the stress and strain of finding, letting or selling your home!</p>
<p>Abode Impact</p> <p>www.abodeimpact.co.uk</p>	<p>Abode Impact is looking to create change within the private rented sector in London. It will buy new-build, wheelchair-accessible flats, and rent a proportion of them out at a somewhat subsidised rent and is looking to sell the others.</p>
<p>Accessible Property Register</p> <p>www.accessible-property.org.uk</p>	<p>This website was set up by people with disabilities to address the issues they experienced. The site lists second-hand properties from sellers who had adapted their home and, understanding the issues they'd experienced, were enthusiastic to find a buyer also with disabilities who could benefit from these adjustments.</p>
<p>AccessiblePRS</p> <p>www.accessibleprs.co.uk</p>	<p>AccessiblePRS is a property consultancy agency, specialising in accessible design and strategy. It helps property investors and private landlords understand the relevance of accessibility to create more housing stock.</p>
<p>Aspire</p> <p>www.aspire.org.uk</p>	<p>Aspire is a spinal injury charity that helps with short-term housing needs - e.g. if you want somewhere to live while you're having adaptation works done on your own place. It's worth checking the Aspire vacancies page as it has waiting lists.</p>
<p>Alzheimer's Society</p> <p>www.alzheimers.org.uk</p>	<p>The organisation has produced a Dementia-Friendly Housing Guide with detailed advice for those living with dementia.</p>
<p>Golden Lane Housing</p> <p>www.glh.org.uk</p>	<p>Golden Lane Housing is focused on creating greater access to housing for people with learning disabilities. It lists accessible homes for rent or those under local housing associations.</p>
<p>Habinteg</p> <p>www.habinteg.org.uk</p>	<p>Habinteg's mission is to champion inclusive communities by providing and promoting accessible homes so that people with disabilities have the highest levels of independence, choice and control over their lives.</p>

<p>Home Improvement Agencies</p> <p>www.findmyhia.org.uk</p>	<p>The Home Improvement Agencies website enables you to search for local organisations that make adaptations to homes.</p>
<p>The Papworth Trust</p> <p>www.papworthtrust.org.uk</p>	<p>The Papworth Trust exists, “to make a positive difference to the lives of disabled people,” part of which includes housing. It is classed as a social housing provider, renting homes at either social or affordable rates. Many, but not all, of its properties are wheelchair accessible.</p>

Shared ownership

Many new developments that will be offered under shared ownership are being built to Equality Act 2010 and Part M of the Building Regulations Standards. This can be an opportunity to get onto the property ladder without breaking the bank and there are some great developments out there. So, depending on the area you live in, check to see whether there are any accessible houses under the shared ownership scheme.

Use local authorities

Your local authority is also a great place to start when looking for an accessible home. You should reach out to your local one and ask whether it operates any specialist accessible-housing schemes and currently has any accessible homes on its books.

Your local council should be able to give you some useful advice, if nothing more concrete, and it will also work with occupational therapists, who may be able to give you more personal and specific guidance and help.

Search for your local authority website on Google to find contact information.

Top searching and viewing tips

We’ve put together some additional tips to help you when searching for the right property and out viewing houses.

- 1. Speak to your local estate agents.** Registering on their books will ensure you are in their minds when any relevant houses come up.
- 2. Be clear on what you need.** Give your top requirements and priorities and be clear where you can and can’t compromise. Although with property searching you often have to compromise somewhere along the line, it’s worth stating what you NEED and want up front.
- 3. Be specific and ask over and over again.** Don’t just ask whether a property is ‘accessible’ - be specific. For example, ask whether there are any stairs leading to the property or within it, or if there is a bathroom on the ground floor?

Some agents don’t really understand what accessibility is, or your individual requirements, so you need to break it down. If we had a pound for each time we heard, “Well, there’s just one step” we would be very rich!



4. Take a ramp to viewings if you can. This will make getting in and out of properties easier if it's not yet fully accessible.

5. Have a tape measure to hand. Knowing how much room there is for you to move around the space is vital. If you can't get into the house initially, you can ask an agent to measure critical spaces and internal door widths so that you know what you're getting and can look into whether they can be adapted.

Branch Properties

If you haven't yet found your home, Branch Properties can find it for you.

At Branch Properties, we start with the assumption that full accessibility in the housing market is an essential and basic right. We aim to create systemic change within the industry.

We are dedicated to providing a service for disabled buyers and renters searching for a home in which they can live in comfort and independence. As of summer 2021, we are delighted to be the major go-to **'Dedicated Estate Agency Specialising in Accessibility in the UK'**

We do the work for you, so you don't have to. We will create a tailor-made portfolio of suitable properties for let or sale from which you can identify your accessible or adaptable home.

When we are searching on your behalf, we undertake initial viewings to make sure the properties live up to their description and take a video for you to see for yourself. We also give you a comprehensive report on the search and all properties that could work, with pros and cons.

Where adaptations are necessary, we can project manage and bring together service providers that can make the changes to ensure that accessible housing happens.

Visit the [Branch Properties website](https://www.branchproperties.co.uk) now for our help.

4. Understanding the housing categories

Finally, there are lots of interpretations of what accessible properties are and different developers, agents and others use different terminology. Our helpful jargon buster will demystify any terms you come across.

Category 2 'Accessible and Adaptable Dwellings'

These properties comply with this requirement when a new property makes reasonable provision for most people, which includes wheelchair users to access and enter the dwelling, and access habitable rooms and sanitary facilities on the entrance level.

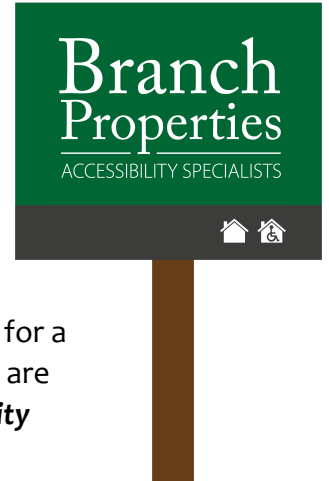
Wheelchair Accessible Throughout

Meet the design standards from the 'Wheelchair Housing Design Guide'

These properties have been designed to meet the latest wheelchair accessible housing design standards, offering extra space and full access to all rooms and facilities for wheelchair users.

Wheelchair Accessible Essential Rooms

Comply with the 'Wheelchair Housing Design Guide' within the 'Housing Corporation Scheme Development' standards



These properties are designed or adapted to provide access for wheelchair users to essential facilities of the property (that is, a bedroom, bathroom, toilet, living room and kitchen). Other rooms in the house, such as additional bedrooms or bathrooms, may not be wheelchair accessible.

Lifetime Homes

These meet the space standards of 'Lifetime Homes' developed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, but not all criteria

'Lifetime Homes' are deliberately designed to be easily adapted for wheelchair users or people with disabilities, and most accessible improvements are both cost effective and quick to complete in this type of property.

Main features include a level approach/entrance and wider doorways. Properties may also have an internal flight of stairs, but these will be wide enough to accommodate a stairlift. This category will cover the majority of new-build housing. Easy Access

Compatible with the design standards in 'Mobility Standard Housing (1974)' and Part M of Building Regulations (2000)

The main features of these properties include a level approach, wider doorways and more space than in 'General Needs' houses (see below for more details). These properties may contain an internal flight of stairs, but there will be enough space to accommodate a stairlift.

This category is broadly the same as 'Lifetime Homes' above, but follows slightly more of the specific design guidance in Part M of Building Regulations.

Step-Free

No published access design guidance

These properties are considered 'General Needs' houses but have a level approach or entrance into the property. Many of these properties will be step-free throughout, and where there is an internal staircase, there will be enough space for a stairlift.



Minimal Steps

No published access design guidance

Properties that do not meet any accessible housing design guidance and have a limited number of steps to enter the property. These properties will have no more than four steps to access the front door and are likely to be ground floor properties.

General Needs

'General Needs' houses do not meet any of the above criteria

Properties in this category will have more than four steps or a ramp access steeper than 1:10 to access the front door. These properties are generally unsuitable for disabled people or those with limited mobility without adaptations or access improvements.

We hope you have found our **Ultimate Guide to Finding an Accessible Home Useful**.

You can use the checklists below to narrow down your exact requirements and take it to viewings to help you assess how accessible the property is for your needs.

Please let either Disability Horizons or Branch Properties know if you have any questions or queries at all. Simply email editor@disabilityhorizons.com or info@branchproperties.co.uk.

Here's looking forward to your new, independent and accessible home!

Access Requirements Checklist: page 1

<p>Using and moving around outside (e.g. step-free access from the house to the garden, flat/paved surfaces, easy access to sheds/garages, large driveway)</p>	
<p>Approaching your home (e.g. path from street to front door, path from parking to front door)</p>	
<p>Negotiating the front door (e.g. door opening in rather than out or vice versa, wide door opening)</p>	
<p>Entering and leaving the house (e.g. storage in the entrance hall, easy locking doors)</p>	

Access Requirements Checklist: page 2

<p>Dealing with callers (e.g. entry phones, video display)</p>	
<p>Negotiating internal doors (e.g. no internal doors, easy-to-grip handles sufficient space between doors)</p>	
<p>Moving around inside (e.g. space for turning circle, access to essential facilities)</p>	
<p>Storing things, including equipment (e.g. space for wheelchair storage and equipment, easy access to storage)</p>	
<p>Moving between levels within the building (e.g. hand rails, stair lift)</p>	

Access Requirements Checklist: page 3

<p>Using living spaces (e.g. room for seating arrangements, electronic controls and switches at the right height)</p>	
<p>Using the kitchen (e.g. low countertop, easy access to oven, hob, fridge-freezer etc)</p>	
<p>Using the bathroom (e.g. hand rails, accessible bath, hoist)</p>	
<p>Using bedrooms (e.g. space for dressing/undressing, easy-access storage for essential equipment)</p>	
<p>Windows and heights (e.g. easy opening mechanism, window locks, able to view from)</p>	

Specific Features and Adaptations: page 1

Use this checklist to pinpoint what access features and adaptations you need.

Access to upper floor via stairlift		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Grab rails		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Walk-in bath		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Roll-in shower		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Ground floor bath, shower or wetroom with level access		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		

Specific Features and Adaptations: page 2

Ground Floor WC		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Low-level countertops, sink, appliances, plug points etc		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Accessible kitchen storage		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Specialist storage/cupboards around the house		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Extra space for wheelchair manoeuvrability		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		

Specific Features and Adaptations: page 3

Smart controls, such as for lighting or heating		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Fixed or tracking ceiling hoist		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Intercom/entry-phone		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Level access to all main living floor rooms		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Level access to garden/grounds		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		

Specific Features and Adaptations: page 4

Paved garden or one with smooth paths		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Level or ramped access to the property		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
No steps on approach to property		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Off-street or unrestricted on-street parking		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		
Supported living (warden/other assistance available on site)		
Must have		
Preferred		
Non-essential		