

**London Assembly Planning and Regeneration Committee –  
Tuesday 28 November 2023**

**Transcript of Agenda Item 5 – Accessibility and Planning – Panel 1**

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** We move on to our main item of business, a discussion on planning and accessibility in London. The meeting will be split into two panels. We will be later joined by the Deputy Mayor for Planning, Regeneration and Skills, Jules Pipe [CBE] and Lisa Fairmaner, Head of London Plan and Growth Strategy, to discuss and reflect on what we have heard from our experts today this morning in terms of how we ensure we can continue to integrate accessibility into the way that we design our city and reflect on how it is experienced in its current infrastructure.

I am going to welcome our guests, we will start with Dr Teri Okoro, Founder and Director of TOCA Architects; Jane Wilmot OBE, Chair of Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel; Hallie Banish, Campaigns and Communications Manager; Ruils; Laura Vicinanza, Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Manager at Inclusion London; Fara Muneer, Head of Business Development at Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE); and Harriet Bell, someone who has asked herself to be described as having an ability impairment who can speak to the barriers they have encountered, and a real pleasure to have met you recently at the London School of Economics (LSE) roundtable on the future of the London Plan. What a fantastic line up we have. Thank you all for being here.

For the purposes of live captioning, can guests and Assembly Members introduce themselves when speaking for the first time. Before we get into the questions, I also wanted to say something, and again excuse the clumsiness of my language, but I have had the pleasure of working with campaigners working on these issues, disabled Londoners and beyond, and they have always said that there is a spectrum of language that may be seen as appropriate or suitable and unfortunately this conversation does not happen as often as it should, which means I do not think there is a fluency in people's language around this. Therefore, if at any point - personally, I will say this just on behalf of myself as Chair - there is a need to correct the language that we use, please do feel free to do so. I do not want to necessarily speak on behalf of Committee Members in regard to that, but one thing, for instance, I have been told is that rather than to describe people as having disabilities, you say disabled people, and then people with impairments, rather than saying people with disabilities, because we attempt to use the social model of disability, which speaks to the idea that people do not have disabilities but rather it is the design of society that disables people. Therefore, please come in at any point with language that needs correcting.

I am going to get us started on our first question. I will be kicking us off with what are the most significant challenges that those with impairments currently face in navigating the built environment in London? I imagine everyone can speak to this. We will start with Laura, then if others are able to indicate as and when they are ready to come in that would be grand.

**Laura Vicinanza (Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Inclusion London):** Great, thank you for your question. Yes, unfortunately disabled people face a number of accessibility barriers when navigating the built environment and these prevent us from enjoying the same opportunities as non-disabled people. This is despite the recognition that all deaf and disabled people have the same rights as non-disabled people.

One of the key accessibility barriers, and let me clarify that when we talk about accessibility we do not just talk about physical accessibility, we also talk about accessibility in terms of meeting the needs of deaf people, people who are neurodivergent, people who have any medical condition for which they identify as disabled, people who have experienced mental distress or mental trauma, therefore this is really important for me to say. One of the key accessibility barriers from our perspective is the inaccessibility of the street space. We know unfortunately there are still obstacles on pavements, clutter, dockless bikes, e-scooters, and also the design and state of roads is often a big challenge for people with visual and mobility impairments.

There are often not-dropped kerbs in some areas, which means that entire sections of the pavements are no-go zones for wheelchair users. Often there are no alcoves or benches. That means that people are unable to stop and rest. There are disabled people who can cycle by the way, and the cycle infrastructure is often inaccessible with narrow lanes that cannot be used by tricycles, handcycles, and other non-standard cycles and also a lack of storage facilities for non-standard cycles. These of course are just some of the accessibility barriers. I could talk for ages.

But when we look at public transport of course there are a series of accessibility barriers. We know unfortunately that just 92 out of 270 Tube stations are fully accessible in the sense that they offer step-free access. Buses, even though they are most affordable and accessible form of transport, still present a series of challenges for disabled people. One of the key issues is that the bus infrastructure is often poor, there is not seating for people, and this is a key problem, for example, for people with chronic fatigue or might need to rest while they are waiting for the bus to come. Also, we have received so many concerns by people with visual and mobility impairments around bus stop bypasses because their design is a problem for many people because they are expected to step on to a cycle lane in order to get off the bus and get on the bus.

Then our focus has been on housing and how inaccessible the state of housing is, not just in London, but across England. All disabled people have really the right to live in accessible homes that meet their needs. Unfortunately, we know that this is not often the case and living in an accessible home is really a postcode lottery. I just wanted to say that in London the situation is likely better compared to the rest of England in the sense that we have higher accessibility standards, we have accessible housing targets in place. However, disabled people still find it really hard to find accessible homes. Specifically, there is a shortage of accessible housing in social housing, which is the tenure that disabled people disproportionately need and live in the most.

We do not have to forget that disabled people are more likely to be living in poverty compared to non-disabled people. If you look just at London, over 30 per cent of disabled Londoners live in social housing compared to ten per cent of non-disabled Londoners. There is clearly a need of increasing the supply of accessible housing across all tenures but specifically in social housing. Within the Greater London Authority (GLA) through planning there is a key role to make sure that we deliver, not just more homes, but the right kind of homes for all. We can also make sure that all disabling barriers to active travel and public transport are removed to make sure that all disabled people can live independently.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** Thank you, Laura, that was really extensive and helpful. I know that we had indications from Fara and Teri to come in on this.

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** Hi, I am Fara, Head of CAE. We also sit within Habinteg Housing Association, which is known for its stock of accessible and

adaptable homes. Part of CAE we have been running a service for 15 years supporting London's third sector in terms of advice on access and inclusion. Just some of the themes we have picked up from London's third sector might be useful as well. Particularly around step-free access that Laura mentioned as well, the lack of accessible homes, this is about equity and equality. If a lot of young people or people looking to get on the housing market, London is expensive, they want to move to commuter towns as well. However the lack of infrastructure of the transport system, we are not just talking about Transport for London (TfL), we are talking about the Network Rail service.

Although post-COVID we have been able to work from home, there is a need also to come into London for offices as well. Therefore, the holistic view around access to work, access to affordable homes, access to neighbourhoods and communities, where in terms of the planning, and we at CAE often look at plans, multi-site plans coming in from local authorities, we are asked to review them. We are picking up themes such as, great, it is an accessible flat or apartment or home, but can they get out the door, can they access their local services, how far away are they from their local accessible bus system.

The buses are generally much more inclusive within London but the infrastructure around the buses, we have had many occasions where bus drivers will not even stop if they see somebody waiting at the bus stop. Therefore, there are a lot of challenges that disabled people have to make and they do not want to spend their whole lives challenging every single shop or bus or train station. Wayfinding is a big issue within London as well, planning their journeys if they are going from A to B and they need to have that information before, typically it is on websites but not always. Then historic buildings as well, that is often a challenge thrown back to access consultants or local authorities around, "We cannot make this change because it is a historic building".

We at CAE have been into Westminster Abbey and we have made it more accessible, therefore we do not think it is a challenge that cannot be overcome. There is always a way and a means. We have also been training young disabled Londoners to enter this sector because there is a real lack of people who are making these decisions around planning, around building, therefore, to have some support to encourage more disabled people to come into the sector, to have more representation in terms of diversity. Very commonly you might have heard the word "reference man" or "reference woman" and typically you will see in a lot of professions that people just do not have the training or the background of knowledge to really think a bit broader than their own reference points. These are my key issues and I will pass over to Teri.

**Dr Teri Okoro (Founder and Director, TOCA Architects):** A lot of the points I was going to raise have been mentioned already. However, just to look at it strategically, for their day-to-day life people with impairments are disabled because they cannot go from door to door when they want to go on a journey like everyone else. Therefore, if maybe the bus system works for them, they get to a point where the train does not work and most train stations are not accessible, their domestic spaces that they inhabit are not accessible. The public arena and spaces, which they have to navigate in their daily life, are not always accessible.

These elements represent people's everyday reality at home and going out. When you think about leisure and going around commercial spaces, they encounter those same problems. Therefore, every element of their day-to-day living is filled with issues and challenges, therefore we cannot say it is just one area or another, we have to look at it systemically and any solution will need to be on a holistic basis. I will stop there and let others contribute.

**Harriet Bell:** Thank you, I am Harriet Bell, and I am here as a private individual, although I have worked in the heritage sector for over 30 years and am currently working in access advice. In terms of specifics from my own point of view as a regular wheelchair and scooter user, I would agree with everything that has been said already. There are specific things around scooters charging, storage, and room for scooters in lifts. There are three different classes of mobility scooter and a lot of the lifts do not have enough room for the larger ones. That is a particular issue if you want to travel with another person as well. A lot of the built infrastructure only allows for you to be cared for as a disabled person and not to be a carer. I travel with my kids a lot and when they were young, I found that a particular challenge.

Steps and thresholds are an endless, persistent problem absolutely everywhere across London and across the country as well. I just do not know how to emphasise the importance of that and how easy it is for people to make the changes and how much they do not. Revolving entrance doors immediately separate people with mobility impairments - and not just mobility impairments - out and they are a real problem, particularly for office buildings.

The availability of loos is something that has not been mentioned as well in terms of the built environment, making sure that there are enough loos being built, that we know where they are, and my life is dominated by thinking about loos. It is not glamorous, but it is what makes life possible.

In terms of heritage, I hear what you are saying about people using built heritage as an excuse for not doing things. There is a fearfulness in the heritage sector about how to address inclusive access and a lack of awareness about it and a lack of confidence about it. I would like to see some recommendations around showcasing good practice much more widely across the sector, not just for the high-end buildings, and we know how well it can be done in the attractions, but also across the more ordinary built environment, much of which we have, and we have to know how to adapt. Thank you.

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** I am a deaf person from Hammersmith and Fulham. I would like to agree with everything that has been said so far but I would like to bring to the table the perspective from blind and visually impaired people that most of us never talk about. Blind and visually impaired people have great difficulty in navigating the built environment. They have to put up with staggered crossings. Do you have any idea how difficult staggered crossings are for blind and visually impaired people? The problem is for them there is no information on the ground to tell them which way to turn when using a staggered crossing. As sighted people we can see where the stagger is, but they have no information, which is a real problem. They have great difficulty in navigating bypass bus stops and cycle lanes because they do not know where to cross. They cannot hear the cyclists and they are nervous. They really suffer from lack of tactile paving in the correct places. Old-fashioned paving because nobody bothered to take them out. They suffer from pedestrian crossings with audible tone or tactile beeps that do not work. It is a regular occurrence.

Therefore, really, we need to think about how blind people have to navigate the pavements. The pavements have to be clear; they do not want overhanging branches and they do not want clutter; they do not want dustbins in the wrong place. If I was a blind person, I would be quite frightened. They are very brave people. Thank you.

**Hallie Banish (Campaigns and Communications Manager, Ruils):** I am Hallie from Ruils Independent Living, a Deaf and Disabled People's Organisation (DDPO). I agree with all of the points made and I just want to make a point about consistency and reliability of design elements that are meant to be accessible. For

example, lifts, which are brilliant and provide access for so many, but often are poorly designed. Lift shafts are poorly designed and often out of service, therefore people are unable to plan ahead or, if they do plan ahead to make a journey, again their journey has been interrupted often without warning and any sort of notice ahead of time. They arrive somewhere and suddenly they are not able to continue on their journey and this goes exactly back to the principle of inclusive design, making sure that the elements that are included are inclusive but also they are consistently working.

I also just wanted to make a point about the implementation of inclusive design. Often the policies and principles are in place and people understand them, but the implementation does not always get carried out in the correct way. It is done in the letter of regulation but not in the spirit, therefore it leads to absurd situations like accessible housing with adjustable height worktops that are glued in place on installation, therefore they do not do what they are intended. There are situations like that happening and often behind the scenes and it is not until people go to interact with what are meant to be accessible designs and then they are not accessible.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** Thank you very much, Hallie. That was really substantial from the panel, and I am grateful for that. To some extent we have answered the subsection of my next question, which was going to be about the specifics of types of infrastructures that might pose barriers. We have covered that in terms of stations, lifts, bus stops, therefore I might move us on to the next two questions, which I am going to combine so that I can give my Members an opportunity to come in sooner as well. This is around the London Plan. I am very grateful that the panel have laid out the significant challenges that they face, or disabled Londoners face, in terms of the built environment.

Moving on to, for instance, the London Plan, could any of you tease out what you think in the London Plan addresses accessibility and inclusivity in the built environment and whether this has a positive impact or a negative impact on disabled Londoners.

**Dr Teri Okoro (Founder and Director, TOCA Architects):** I do not think I properly introduced myself the last time. I am representing the Design Council, but I am also a registered access consultant. The London Plan, and we have to accept that good practice in inclusive design is constantly moving, so the London Plan is a few years old and reflects its time. What is considered good practice now has moved on. I use the section relating to housing design quite a lot because my practice undertakes that. There is good intention there, but it is not always properly implemented everywhere. I know that a lot of the social housing providers are really quite good with sticking to it and ensuring compliance but when it comes to the private developers, who may not be regulating themselves so much, then the outcome is not quite the same.

Also, when we are thinking about developments where they agree car free parking, people who are disabled by that because they are not providing adequate parking quite close to their dwellings. There is a need for wheelchair accessible housing, but we know that below a certain height it is not essential or provided, therefore there is a discrepancy there. It may be future-proofing if it cannot be provided at the start and also any accessibility needs to be provided from the boundary of the site right into the dwelling and not just starting with the dwelling, ensuring that other units within the facility can be visited by people who are disabled and not just a particular unit, which is meeting the criteria.

In that sense it is working. In some of the other areas others may have more experience but in the public realm it does not always accord. Even sometimes when you have achieved it, when Maintenance are called, they do

not carry the spirit of inclusive design and things are fitted which go against that and ruin the good intentions of the original designers. I will let others contribute.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** That was really helpful, Teri, thank you.

**Harriet Bell:** I agree very much. Obviously, the intention was very good. From looking at planning applications, one of the most useful hooks is the insistence on no disabling barriers. That is very important. Perhaps what is missing is thinking about refurbishment. Again, so much of what we are looking at is refurbishing many historic and other properties across London and we are not in a situation where everything is new build. It is important to have that hook in the London Plan.

I recognise what you are saying about the public realm. It is there and we want to use it. Tightening up engagement as well at a very early stage needs to happen in the next version of the [London] Plan because it is there but it is very much best practice type of wording rather than it being an insistence upon that and an insistence upon that being demonstrated through the development process as well by developers. That is a really important thing.

However, it has been helpful in terms of having policy. Policy D5 is helpful to make developers pay attention, provided the local authority feels that it has the support to do so. That is not consistent, in my experience, across the piece, working for three different ones in London.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** Thank you. Harriet, can I just do a follow up? What is it you think between those three local councils that you have worked on and the different ways that they have approached it, what do you think the difference was between them? What were the additional circumstances?

**Harriet Bell:** There are different cultures and perhaps there is a feeling that inclusive access is something for authorities within the Central Activity Zone (CAZ) perhaps more than the outer boroughs. Hammersmith and Fulham [Council] is generally seen as a beacon of good practice wherever you are. However, otherwise that is a pattern that I am generalising about but possibly represent things. There is a reluctance to impose things on smaller medium-sized enterprises or smaller developers. There is a sense that the financial burden is too great.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** Thank you. That is really helpful. Jane, I saw an indication from yourself.

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** The London Plan, it is very good at the beginning of the process; the planning approval side. However, it does not solve the issue of how we end up at the end of the process with a building that is fully inclusive. There are so many ways of dropping the ball between giving planning approval and I would quite like the London Plan to make it much more explicit that it is not enough to give planning approval. Somewhere along the line, the Mayor [of London] had to set out planning at the beginning, approval at the beginning is one thing, but what you need is to follow it through and many developers do not always follow it through because nobody is looking. I do not know what we can do about this. I have been involved in a big project in Hammersmith and Fulham from the planning approval right through to completion. I have observed how many times people could drop the ball. Consultants not understanding inclusive design, the developer not making sure that the consultant and the contractors comply with inclusive design. Really, by paying attention to detail, and I do not quite know how the London Plan can change the culture there. Thank you.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** That is a really helpful question to leave us with, Jane, thank you. Are there any other contributions?

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** I wholly agree with Jane and one of our recommendations was, as part of that process from when the planning is granted, there are conditions, there may well be, but this is really down to Building Control. Typically, you will have a local authority Building Control Officer or you may have an approved Building Control Officer in the sense that they may be run by private companies. That is where we would want some training or some sort of enforcement of the things that Jane mentioned in terms of making sure that those are implemented.

I was just going to add to that that a lot of local authorities ten to 15 years ago would have an Access Officer who would be supporting a lot of this work that we are saying in terms of ensuring planning applications are reviewed. Some local authorities such as Jane's one [Hammersmith and Fulham] have an Access Panel, I think Newham [Council] has one, which is also based on co-production, and the City of London [Corporation] has a City of London Access Group (CoLAG) as well, which is more of a consultation one. We would wholly recommend that all local authorities have an Access Panel, primarily made up of disabled people and maybe access expertise as well. You are seeing that in TfL and Network Rail, they also have set up Access Panels.

A gap within the London Plan is around student and hotel accommodation. We are starting to see, because space is such a premium in London, even some apartments are being built where they have some form of student living where you may have private bedroom space and bathrooms, but shared living spaces. We are looking at different standards and trying to work out how we assess this in terms of access. Data is king really. How do we measure the effectiveness of the London Plan if data is not broken down into the protected characteristics? That is going to be critical for us and for the London Assembly to assess the 80 per cent of homes and buildings already built, so should we have something in there to target that area?

It frustrates me that the Government puts a lot of effort into carbon neutral and money and funding behind it. If they put the same effort and funding into inclusivity, we would be in a much more equal place.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** Thank you, Fara. Teri, Hallie, Laura and then I am going to move us on.

**Dr Teri Okoro (Founder and Director, TOCA Architects):** Coming back briefly on the local authorities and different cultures and practices, sometimes it is to do with the funding, so they have to be innovative in how they get the resources. Waltham Forest [Council] has good practice. They have an Access Consultant embedded in the Planning department, who looks at all the planning applications. They may be funded by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). We know that the planners themselves may not be knowledgeable to be able to review the designs. They probably need to upskill themselves to some kind of basic level and then be able to have the resources to call on internally as well as external panels to look at it.

With anything which is out there, you may have the best policy, but if it is not carried through then it is just words on paper. It is tackling the process. The Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) has recently come up with a plan in which you embed inclusion and accessibility right at the outset of the project through to completion. It may be a bit too complex for simpler projects, but at least there is something out there that is good practice that anyone can use right at the start to ensure that it is embedded in their project. Thank you.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** Fantastic, thank you. Some of what we are straying into now will be questions that other Members in the Committee will ask, so I am going to refocus us back on the London Plan specifically and the impact it has on disabled Londoners.

**Hallie Banish (Campaigns and Communications Manager, Ruils):** Several of the points I was going to make have been made, but I want to reiterate the importance of accountability at the end of the process and throughout to stay in line with the London Plan. There are a lot of great intentions there, but we are seeing planning authorities passing many submissions for refurbishment that degrade accessibility. For example, replacing ramped entrances with steps and then having a lift alongside them, rather than keeping something that was already accessible. It is challenging to then go back and say, "The previous design was more inclusive". There is a lack of engagement and co-production with local deaf and disabled people. Embedding co-production into the London Plan and saying, "This is best practice".

Jane said, in her previous report, this is the golden thread. This should be done at the very start, before any plans are even being made. There should be engagement with the deaf and disabled people that it is going to most directly impact. Crucially, have a broad representation of deaf and disabled people. We know that some things may work for some, some things may not work. Great examples of this are zebra and pelican crossings; both are different options, but they are not accessible to all disabled people. It is coming up with innovative solutions, but part of that process of coming up with these solutions is co-production, you need the voice of deaf and disabled people to tell you their experience and from their perspective what will work and what will not.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** Brilliant. Thank you, Hallie. Laura, did you want to come in on this?

**Laura Vicinanza (Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Inclusion London):** Yes. I am not going to repeat what everyone has just said; great stuff. I want to talk a little bit about the policies which are in the London Plan, such as Policy D5, inclusive design, which we welcome as a policy, because it basically says that all development proposals need to submit a Design and Access statement and that needs to be accompanied by an Inclusive Design statement. In principle that is great, but the policy needs to be implemented locally, otherwise there is no point to having a policy in place. What we see is that there is a limited understanding sometimes among developers, the regulatory profession, the construction profession and local authorities around what inclusive design principles are and what they mean in practice.

Unfortunately, as Hallie and others were talking about, there isn't a meaningful co-production with deaf and disabled people locally. What that means is that we end up designing places which are discriminatory by design, and we build inequalities into places. We could prevent that if we spoke to people locally. The last point is we do not think inclusive design is really a strategic priority of the London Plan, so maybe this is what should happen in the next iteration of the London Plan. If I look at housing, for example, why do we have a supply of affordable homes and a supply of new homes as key performance indicators (KPI), but a supply of accessible homes is not a KPI? Surely disabled people want to see how many accessible homes are being built each year and how many we need every year. We need to make sure that the success of the London Plan is also measured against the number and quality of accessible homes that are being built.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** That is brilliant. Thank you, Laura. Over to Assembly Member Baker now.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thanks very much, Chair, and thanks, Panel, for your answers so far. Some of the things I am going to raise you have covered, but please feel free to add or refer. My first question is about more recent



developments. It is to Fara, Teri and Jane, although the rest of the Panel may have views. In your view, how well have the principles of inclusive design been implemented in recent developments in London?

**Dr Teri Okoro (Founder and Director, TOCA Architects):** It is mixed and depends on the passion of the designers or the developer. One good example, which I would like to highlight, is the new headquarters for the RNIB. That, obviously, incorporated, not just the usual provision for disability, but included neurodiversity, which is one thing people are taking increasingly on board. That is a shining example. Another one, which is a bit older, which received a Construction Industry Council (CIC) Inclusive Environment Award [in 2016], is the [Civic] Offices of Camden Council at 5 Pancras Square.

That was excellent in its wayfinding. Quite often people are talking about accessibility, but this was one where the use of colours was able to differentiate the different floors. That assists, not just those with visual impairments, but also those whose English may not be their first language, "Go to the blue floor, go to the green floor". It makes life much easier. If you get design right for people with impairments, it works for a wider range of people. I am sure other may have more examples.

**Elly Baker AM:** That is interesting. Thank you, Teri.

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** I wanted to add into that that what we are seeing is -- obviously if they ask CAE to come in, they are already more than halfway there. I absolutely agree with Teri. There seems to be a strong focus on neurodiversity, in terms of buildings. Our work, and I am sure Teri and whoever else, provides advice with pan-disability; we look at everything. It is great to see somethings being focused on. What we are seeing sometimes is in terms of the London Plan, you have 90 per cent Category Two, or the accessible and adaptable. There are then two categories within Category Three, which is accessible homes. One is that it is built for a wheelchair user, but there may be some adaptations to be made, and there is one that they can just move into straight away.

The one with the adaptations, sometimes we find it is a huge retrofit, which is not the purpose of it. That is possibly where, in terms of planning, officers need to check that and also the people who are involved in terms of signing that off as well. Typically, we are seeing developers come to us and say, "Yes, we have the London Plan. We have to build ten per cent of our homes here to be wheelchair accessible, but we cannot find the people to move into them". You may sometimes see a condition where they have to market them for a year. How do they market them? Commonly they say they do not know. Habinteg is doing some work around that. There is a real lack of Rightmove [UK property sales and rental website] for social housing providers -- how can they do that?

CAE and Habinteg are doing a publication with [the Royal Institute of British Architects] RIBA Publishing to look at the specification and the fit out of a home once it has gone through planning. This will help, but there is a real need for training advice and some good practice examples of how homes have been marketed and for the end user to know where they go to find these homes.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thank you. Jane, did you have anything to add?

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** Thank you very much. In Hammersmith and Fulham, we have done quite a lot of work in making sure that applications and approvals are accessible and inclusive. I would like to quote a couple of examples where we have done really well. The council had a big project to redevelop the civic campus. This had been a major project for six or

seven years. I have been very privileged to be co-chair of that project as a local disabled resident. What we managed to achieve is to inspire everybody, the developer, the Council and the Housing Association partner, to be totally accessible and inclusive. We coined the phrase “being ruthlessly inclusive”. That means everybody had to be ruthlessly inclusive.

The other thing we have inspired people about is not dropping the inclusive design ball throughout the whole process. That really changed things, because it means that for purpose of environment for disabled people in any building it depends on 50 per cent is down to design, but 50 per cent is how you manage the building, how you make the building work. We managed to inspire the people who are going to be running the building to be accessible and inclusive and to think about how people enter the building, how people who have neurodiversity who may be anxious and how you provide a quiet space. That had to be found; things like that. It was quite exciting to work on this. Thank you.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thanks very much. Thanks to Jane and Teri there for giving specific examples. Does anyone else have any examples of good practice when it comes to inclusive design that they would like to raise that they have not already. Harriet?

**Harriet Bell:** This is to do with public realm, but the City of London Street Accessibility Tool (CoLSAt) is very good. It recognises a range of impairments. Although there is not necessarily one catch-all design solution that is a very good example.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thank you. Hallie?

**Hallie Banish (Campaigns and Communications Manager, Ruils):** I wanted to raise an example that is currently happening at the moment with TfL. They are doing an accessible crossing trial at Manor Circus in Richmond. They are employing technology called SmartCross to make the crossings more accessible for all users. In this specific example, a zebra crossing was being turned into a pelican crossing, which was not accessible for people who are unable to use push buttons. Due to the fact that there was engagement and co-production with local disabled people, TfL recognised that this was going to be a problem for quite a few people who were using that local crossing. They now have the SmartCross box installed on the temporary crossing. There is a trial period of the next nine months while the works are happening with a goal that this is employed across London.

It is something that was already being done in Hull City Council and they have taken that principle and applied it here. At the moment it is a pilot, but we are hopeful that it will turn into something that will help all Londoners be able to access crossings.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thanks, Hallie. My next question is again to Fara, Teri and Jane, but again please come in. In your experience are London Plan policies on accessibility being translated effectively into local plans across London?

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** If I could come in there, because Habinteg has done a bit of research on this. London Plan itself is brilliant. We always reference it when we are speaking to other local authorities as a great example of 90 per cent and ten per cent. Within London local authorities the data, when we looked at it, was less than 50 per cent had translated it. There is a lot of ambiguity. In terms of local authorities, from what I have seen, and I have previously worked in a local authority, is a lack of data. If you are forecasting ahead in terms of the need for wheelchair

accessible homes, surely you should have that data from your Children and Young People's teams and your Early Years, and you are not just thinking of the individual, you are thinking of the family as well. It is the tenure of what is available as well, in terms of wheelchair accessible homes.

The other thing that we are picking up is a lack of confidence in terms of where they place these homes. If you are looking at an apartment block, sometimes they are placed all on the ground floor. We ask for a choice, not just of where you live but the view from where you live. It should not all be on the ground floor. That is a real issue for people wanting to choose where they want to be.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thank you, Fara. Teri?

**Dr Teri Okoro (Founder and Director, TOCA Architects):** I feel that on the new build developments where the local plans are mirroring the London Plan then the requirements are better implemented. However, quite often when it comes to refurbishment and things like that, it is not so rigorously enforced. The standards of access statements are varied. There are people who have proper information within their standards that may have been done by a specialist who has consulted with others. Then there are some which are really quite light, but the standards are accepted. Maybe we need greater rigour in the contents of the access statements that are being accepted. Maybe they are sent back as being not quite up to the standards. Again, the mechanism is there, but the process through which it is implemented is not always so effective in practice.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thank you. Jane?

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** I can confirm that in Hammersmith and Fulham the London Plan policies have been included in their Local Plan and in their supplementary planning documents (SPD), because my group insisted on it.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thank you, Jane. I thought that might be your answer.

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** What I would say is the London Plan is only focusing on new builds. That is a mistake, with hindsight. What really matters is what we are doing with existing buildings. In Hammersmith and Fulham, they are making a big effort to retrofit their council stock, because there have been so many complaints that when people move in it does not work. I have to say, like every local authority, the Housing department is not great. They are too used to the old-fashioned way of working. They are not really used to working with people. However, we have a new Director of Housing, who is absolutely committed to changing that; it will take time and top of the list is repairs. We are doing our best in Hammersmith and Fulham. We do not always get it right, but that is where we are.

**Elly Baker AM:** That is brilliant, thank you. Fara?

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** That was a really useful point about retrofitting. Something you could start with social housing providers is: do you know your own stock? They have the same issue with Habinteg. When building surveyors or whoever it is do stock condition surveys, can we put a few access questions in there as well for them? It is not a big ask. It may add another five minutes, if we are looking at some key issues. Again, you do not know how to improve if you do not know the state of what you currently have.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thanks, that is really helpful. Teri?

**Dr Teri Okoro (Founder and Director, TOCA Architects):** Yes, I wanted to come back on that point of maintenance and the fact that we do not have a joined-up process. They may be a budget for maintenance and if you were looking at accessibility at the same time, that budget could be used more effectively across a lot of areas. That is nothing to do with the London Plan, it is to do with how organisations operate. It is not just housing organisations, it is the large infrastructure companies as well.

**Elly Baker AM:** That is a really good point: is it embedded in everything that is done or is accessibility done separately. Thank you very much. I want to return now to transport. We touched upon it quite a lot already, because I know how important it is, but just to make sure we have talked about it, and you have had an opportunity to say everything you would want to. I am going to start with Jane, but then anyone who has any responses. Are there any specific recommendations or changes you would propose to enhance accessibility in London's transport system?

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** There are two, mainly. Tube stations, of course. I do not have to say much about that, we all know what the issues are. The other thing that really matters to disabled people is the pedestrian environment, how you cross the roads. There are so many different issues to think about: blind and visually impaired people; deaf people, who might not hear how quickly the cars are coming; and people with autism and neurodiversity, who are not very confident. What I have been trying to talk about in Hammersmith and Fulham is doing something to organise the priorities as outlined in the Highway Code with disabled pedestrians at the top, able-bodied pedestrians next, bike users, ambulances, commercial vehicles at the end.

What needs to happen now is to redesign the roads to reflect these priorities. The conversation is only just beginning. I am saying: what can we do to slow down the motorists and support all the other people who need to use the highway. Thank you.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thanks, Jane, that is really helpful. Does anyone have anything else on transport that we have not raised?

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** Yes, I am Chair of the Network Rail Access Panel, so I will bring in some of the insight there as well. One of the key things, not just local authorities, but even public bodies like TfL and Network Rail, should be doing an equality impact assessment (EIA). We have seen some poor examples of that. Within Network Rail there is a big piece of work around diversity impact assessments (DIA) saying the same thing: making it digital, making sure there are peer reviewers. For us at the Panel really scrutinising, "Have you really thought through some of the data that you are presenting there?", looking at things like the census and reassessing demographics in that area as well. Those are key things that people are missing out.

Step-free, obviously, is a big issue within the transport system. Sometimes I have been on some of the [London] Underground systems. There may well be a lift, but it may be a mile away in terms of the distances they have to travel. There are no points of rest along the way as well; these are real issues. They may tick the box, but let us really look at that. Often lifts go out of order. When they are planning that should be an immediate thing that goes up on Twitter or their website or wherever. You may have seen recently in the news that the Government has backed down on the potential closure of ticket offices. People power is really

important. Listening to the voice of disabled people is so critical. It is nice to see one example where the Government did listen.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thank you, Fara. Harriet?

**Harriet Bell:** I have a few things, one of which is crossing speeds at crossings. I know that there has been an amendment recently on that, but that is an exclusive practice, particularly in some of the central areas where there is not enough time for many of us to cross. I have already mentioned more room in lifts and the vertical movement. A movement away from shared surfaces, shared surfaces seem to be a persistent thing. I had hoped they would have gone out of fashion by now, recognising what happens there, and being clearer about that in the London Plan would be helpful. Electric vehicle (EV) charging, there is the new publicly accessible standard on that, but also, mobility scooter charging, it is a real barrier to movement if you do not have places to charge your scooter. You do not go out, because you do not want to break down.

Wayfinding, particularly points of arrival into London. For people coming in as visitors it is confusing environment. There needs to be consistent wayfinding, which Hallie has mentioned, right across the piece, making sure it is particularly emphasised at the stations and places where people come in. Having got lost in the last two days on the way to City Hall I can speak to that.

**Elly Baker AM:** A note for us perhaps, yes. Thanks, Harriet.

**Dr Teri Okoro (Founder and Director, TOCA Architects):** Two points I wanted to raise. The first one is that we are all familiar with the notion of transport hubs, where there is the intersection of buses and trains and things. Quite often they are distant from the homes of local people. What we need to start to think is maybe another approach and having a lower category of nodes, whereby in those locations they are fully accessible and then from there you could get to the hub. Otherwise, people are having differing distances they have to travel to get to an accessible transport location and they have to pay a lot more, using taxis and things to achieve that.

The other thing to raise is night time travel. In the daytime it is easier to access and travel, but at night-time it is more difficult; wayfinding is more difficult and there may be safety issues and things. We need to consider both day and night, otherwise some people will decide not to go out at certain times of the day.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thanks, Teri.

**Hallie Banish (Campaigns and Communications Manager, Ruils):** Yes, that is absolutely a point I was going to make. Additionally, on top of the different hours that people are able to travel or restricted to travel, there is a big reliance on people. People are a part of this as well. You could have the most inclusive design, but if it relies on people to utilise that design properly and they are not understanding or empathetic and the attitudinal change is not made then that can be a real barrier. I am especially thinking about bus drivers and people working at ticket offices. There are two things that we need to have happen: we need to start having the built environment reflect the changes that we want to see in attitude. Currently, there is some upskilling and training needed and general empathy is lacking.

There are some good things that are happening: co-production with local bus companies to help drivers understand the needs of disabled people. However, they are often limited by their roles. There is an

intersectional need often for disabled people and the needs of the driver; there are a lot of competing interests. Having that attitudinal change addressed would be a good place to start.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thank you. Fara?

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** Yes, good points raised there. We often see excuses for a lack of accessibility because they are bringing in security or antisocial behaviour, but that is not really an excuse. I wanted to add into these points around egress. We talk a lot of about access getting in, but also the getting out is important as well. There is a British Standard [BS 992:2020 Fire safety in the design, management and use of rail infrastructure. Code of practice] that applies to rail infrastructure around self-evacuation. I would like to see that implemented everywhere. Not relying on refuges. If you are building something new or refurbishing, you are spending millions of pounds. There should be no excuse for having to then design in a refuge. We should always be looking as far as possible to self-evacuate everybody. There should be no reliance on fire services. Any lifts being put in should be fire-evacuation lifts. I know it is more money, but it is equality.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thanks very much, that is really important.

**Laura Vicinanza (Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Inclusion London):** I want to echo what has been said already. In addition to prioritising investment in step-free access to Tube stations we would also like to see an investment in zero-emission buses with accessibility features, such as those where we have a bigger access space, so that we make sure that more than one wheelchair user can get on the bus and conflict with buggies is avoided. This is often a big problem that is raised to us, so I wanted to say that. Infrastructure needs to be accessible for all disabled people. Bus stops need to be safe and accessible. We want to raise the fact that we need to hold the development of bus stops bypasses until there is meaningful engagement with DDPOs and deaf and disabled individuals, because that has not happened. This is a big problem.

Hallie was talking about training. We need to make sure that all staff receives disability equality training, delivered by deaf and disabled people and based on the social model of disability, rather than what is happening at the moment, which is an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) training, not delivered by disabled people and not based on the social model of disability. This is not equality; this is a tick-box exercise and it is a problem. Yes, adequate bus infrastructure with fully accessible changing places and toilets at Tube stations. The London Plan addresses this and says that large development proposals need to make sure that there is provision of accessible changing places and toilets. What about Tube stations? Are there any toilets there? Are they open? Can they be used by people with a wide variety of impairments? Is there signage for people to know where the toilets are? This needs to be improved.

The last point I want to make: the transport chapter [in the London Plan] states that 80 per cent of all journeys need to be made by active travel, which means walking, wheeling or cycling, which we agree with. However, there must be some recognition in that chapter that some people, because of their impairments, cannot unfortunately walk, wheel or cycle. We want to make sure that any policies that promotes active travel is based on the idea that some people with impairments cannot really use public transport. Otherwise, we still create disabling barriers for disabled people.

**Elly Baker AM:** Thank you very much, really important points there, Laura. Back to you, Chair.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** Thank you. Over to Assembly Member Berry.

**Siân Berry AM:** Excellent. Can I ask one follow-up question on the transport side of things?

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** Please.

**Siân Berry AM:** What Jane said about the hierarchy of road users was really interesting, that disabled pedestrians should be above pedestrians as a group, as a whole, as a separate category. Then the point that Laura just made, that there are disabled people who are dependent on their cars and the current hierarchy puts that at the bottom. Where shall we put disabled car-dependent people in that hierarchy and does that create problems for planning for road space? Jane, sorry that is a really tricky question: have you thought about where to put the disabled car drivers?

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** Instinctively, I would put them at the top with the disabled pedestrians. That is where I would put them, because it is a big issue for blue badge holders. In fact, in Hammersmith and Fulham, the Council created a cycle lane which meant there were far fewer parking opportunities on King Street. We negotiated with the Council the concept of a three-hour blue badge parking bay very close to the shopping centre. This is just about to be implemented, so we will see if that works. We had to come up with something, because blue badge holders were saying they could not park and it was too far to walk from the multi-storey car park to the shopping centre, so we will see if this works.

**Siân Berry AM:** That is really interesting. There was the conflict about the road space on the main road and then you negotiated a mitigation on the side road, essentially, for that. Thank you so much. Fara, I am wondering how to codify this without creating impossibilities.

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** Yes, I was going to add to that, you may have seen during COVID-19 or post-COVID-19 these low traffic neighbourhood zones with the planters.

**Siân Berry AM:** I am well aware of those, thank you.

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** One of the things we recommended when we did an equality impact of that was some of these restrictions were allowing emergency vehicles through. Some people are absolutely reliant on their car and so that was one thing that we requested; we were elevating them to the level of emergency services.

**Siân Berry AM:** Yes. That is where you have camera controls. That is helpful. It is one of those things where we have to be using the process right to get these mitigations and difficulties sorted at the beginning. Harriet?

**Harriet Bell:** Thank you. Just quickly to follow on from that point. There are also a lot of people who do not identify as disabled, who may have mobility impairments, who are reliant on cars as well. That is something that needs to be factored into this thinking.

**Siân Berry AM:** Yes, so people who do not necessarily have an official status as a disabled person, but nevertheless are car reliant. Yes, exactly that. Thank you so much for those answers. I will move on to my real

questions now. What I am trying to get to the bottom of here is recommendations we might make towards the next London Plan. You have all mentioned some useful areas. You have talked a lot about process. A different Assembly Member is going to ask you about that in a moment, so I am not asking for new policies around process right now. I was interested that a number of you brought up the fact that we need more policies around refurbishments not just new builds. I was wondering if potentially, Teri, to start, might give us some more detail about that.

The other question was about the demographics of this and whether we are going to need more accessible housing, more wheelchair accessible housing, more that meet the standards that have been set out in the future and whether the 10 per cent and 90 per cent target needs to be shifted so that maybe more of the homes that we are building now are wheelchair accessible. Teri, any recommendations for new policies?

**Dr Teri Okoro (Founder and Director, TOCA Architects):** Yes, there are two points. I have been in the housing business long enough to remember the time of Lifetime Homes when you were designing everything so that people did not have to move later in life. That is the M4(2) category [accessible and adaptable dwellings the in Building Regulations Approved Document M– Access to and use of buildings]. If that could be the minimum standard, where we future-proof everything new that we build. It means slightly more space at the beginning. The other issue is to do with refurbishments. We know most properties already exist. People are usually extending and altering, why can we not require greater accessibility in those designs, so that we are dealing with the existing stock at the same time. It means that if people think about it at the outset, it is designed differently. If you create an extension, can people come into it without steps? It is things like that; it is addressing the new as well as the existing.

**Siân Berry AM:** Should we be increasing the ten per cent as well?

**Dr Teri Okoro (Founder and Director, TOCA Architects):** The ten per cent could be increased, but we hear that sometimes they cannot find residents to purchase it. Certainly, in social housing it is never a fact that you cannot find residents for those, because there is always a waiting list. If we are creating more which are future-proofed, so that they could be altered to cater for people with impairments at a later stage then we are doing more than the ten per cent, because we are doing ten per cent at the Three Category and then we are doing more at the Two Category and doing less of the visibility. Those ones you cannot really upgrade at a later date, because it is just the toilet which is the accessible thing.

**Siân Berry AM:** Thank you. Who else would like to join in with policy bids?

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** I would absolutely advocate going above the ten per cent. Even in London there is a real lack of housing for wheelchair users. We have so many anecdotal stories from people saying they are stuck in nursing homes or inappropriate homes or young people not able to move out, because they just cannot find the places. The rental sector is a real challenge. I do not know if there is something within the London Plan that you can advocate to support the rental sector. I, myself, had a team member who was forced out of London, because she could not find a home. She was in a Lifetime Home standards rental property, but then she needed to move because the landlord put the price up and she could not find anything, so we have lost her out of London.

We have done some research with Habinteg around the cost of building an M4(3) [wheelchair user dwellings the in Building Regulations Approved Document M– Access to and use of buildings]. home. It is not a lot of



money. Our data was showing something like £22,000 - £25,000. If you build these homes, they are larger homes; they have better lighting in them. They are great whether you are a wheelchair user or not. You are not going to lose anything by advocating for greater standards. The baseline will be coming for M4(2). We know that, it is just a question of when. Let us know focus on the wheelchair accessible standard and how we can implement that. London, you could be leading nationally. You already are in some aspects, but why not go further.

**Siân Berry AM:** In terms of the amount by which we should increase that target then, are you basically saying 100 per cent ultimately? As an interim step, what would you suggest?

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** Incrementally if we went for 15 per cent. That would be a good start. Then really key to all of this recommendation is your data. As people have mentioned, how many of these accessible homes are being built and critically how many are being used by the end user? We would really appreciate having that knowledge base. That could inform the next review of the London Plan.

**Siân Berry AM:** Great, thank you. Jane?

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** You might want to revisit this whole subject. At the moment, wheelchair units are distributed across all tenures. I am talking about market tenures, where they are a scandal. Developers have to include wheelchair units for sale. Their normal practice is to sell properties off plan. No self-respecting wheelchair user would ever buy a property off plan, because they cannot visit it. My experience, from listening to wheelchair users, they want to visit the property before they are going to put down their hard-earned money, but most wheelchair users cannot even afford them. The idea that developers must have a range might need to be revisited. I would like the Mayor of London to investigate who is living in these wheelchair units. If no wheelchair users are buying the market ones, because they cannot afford it, what is the point?

Perhaps we should make a shift to wheelchair units, including the number of wheelchair units in social housing, which is affordable. However, that is quite a big shift in policy and we probably need evidence and we need to look into it. In Hammersmith and Fulham, we have a project where I am determined that the market wheelchair units available for sale should be sold to wheelchair users. My group have negotiated that instead of allowing the Council, who is the developer, to use the off-plan period as part of the target, they do it after the building is completed, when people can visit for six months. At the end of six months, they will reconsider whether to extend it for a second six months or not. This had an impact on viability, so it had to be discussed. At least we are talking about it, which is the important thing. Thank you.

**Siân Berry AM:** That is really helpful. Obviously, we will have the Deputy Mayor and the team responsible for the next London Plan in. They can be quite creative about these kinds of bits of guidance and conditions. You are suggesting, Jane, potentially as well that if a home cannot be afforded and therefore is not being sold then potentially that could be converted to a different tenure instead of just not built; is that correct?

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** That is what happens.

**Siân Berry AM:** They are not built currently if they cannot be sold?

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** Yes, the Mayor is not getting his 10 per cent wheelchair housing.

**Siân Berry AM:** Yes. If, instead of that, they could be converted to an affordable tenure, in the event they are not sold, that would give a strong incentive to the market provider to sell them, to market them harder.

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** You would have to make that watertight.

**Siân Berry AM:** We will talk to the Deputy Mayor about that anyway. I had one more question about something that was raised earlier to do with home people find their homes. What information is there on things like Rightmove or the councils' allocations policies about what is available at different levels of accessibility of existing stock, particularly for renters? Does anybody have anything they want to recommend about that? It is not necessary a London Plan policy, but it is something that I wanted to follow up and ask what you would like us to recommend.

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** Rightmove is trying to add more features on their search facilities. However, as far as I am aware we at Habinteg have tried to get this off the ground, in terms of council available stock; there is nothing formally out there. I do believe it is a question of bringing together the right people. It could be a lack of data and a lack of resources at council level to make that happen but it is key in all of this.

**Siân Berry AM:** In my notes, you said to add it into the stock condition surveys.

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** Yes. Absolutely, yes. Even for us at Habinteg, we have acquired stock that was built 20, 30, 40 years ago. We do not know what standard that was built to, so for us to go back in and do that is critical. Even for us to then have those conversations with the councils as well is critical. Sometimes you will have a home which is accessible but is on a steep hill. Those things are critical for people to know if they are going to assess a home.

**Hallie Banish (Campaigns and Communications Manager, Ruils):** I wanted to make the point as a local deaf and disabled people's organisation, a lot of time our members are local people who are struggling to find homes will come to us directly, because there is no other external support. Finding a home that is accessible is not just about finding the property. It is going to view the home. They might need somebody to be an advocate or support for them to understand, whether they are buying a home or to bridge the gap between the social housing provider and themselves. I also wanted to make the point that we have supported quite a few people recently who have become disabled and the home that they are living in is no longer accessible to them. So, they are going through the process of finding a new home and these homes do not exist.

We support a student recently who graduated from university and became a wheelchair user in university and was accessing halls and then came out of university and had nowhere to go and had to apply through the homelessness process. There are real issues. A lot of them are nuanced; not everyone's experience is the same and not every home will work for everyone. Even if there is an accessible home, we often take people to see these homes and they are like, "This will not work, for these reasons". Additionally, we have had people trapped in their homes, because they have become disabled, and they do not have a ramp and that ramp is not being retrofitted by the social housing provider and they have to go through the disabled facilities grant process.

For one person we have recently been supporting, she has been trapped in her home for two years, because of this process. She recently had to crowd fund to raise the money. On a £30,000 income for that household, they were expected to pay £9,000 to get their house retrofitted. There are real problems within the policy and also within the support structures that are meant to help people get into the accessible homes. Thank you.

**Siân Berry AM:** Thank you. That is all my questions for now.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** Thank you, Assembly Member Berry. Over to Assembly Member Best.

**Emma Best AM:** Thank you. Everyone has picked up on this as we have gone along, the inclusivity in the round. This conversation is very much around disabilities, but when things are inclusive, they are inclusive for everyone. That is something that is a really important point that a lot of you have been making. I cannot think of any example where something is worse because it has been made more inclusive, be they pavements, roads, the transport network, or homes. Those are really good points coming through. I wonder if I could circle back to transport a little bit before the next questions. Specifically in relation to a couple of areas in the London Plan, firstly in relation to car parking on sites and the breakdowns of disabled bays or spaces per development and the breakdown of that between Central, Inner and Outer London and whether any of the Panel want to speak to whether they think those are the right breakdowns or we should be seeing any change in that in future London Plans?

**Harriet Bell:** It is a false situation, because we recognise that if you need to use a car because of your impairments you need to use a car wherever you are. It is a barrier if you have a limit on the number of people who can be in any one place at any one time. As a consequence of that, I am uncomfortable with it as a process. As a person who is very reliant on car use myself, my condition is variable, there are times when I am absolutely reliant on the car. It seems to me an artificially imposed constraint that is a barrier in and of itself.

**Emma Best AM:** Thanks, Harriet.

**Dr Teri Okoro (Founder and Director, TOCA Architects):** Yes. I wanted to mention the British Standard 8300 [Design of an accessible and inclusive built environment] which has some spaces for parking for disabled and accessible parking. Obviously that proportion relates to what is there; if it is five per cent of five that is different from five per cent of 100. We need to mix at the overall quantity which we align. It is greater the further out you go, because quite often the transport links are not quite so close as the inner boroughs. In the inner boroughs there are those who still need the use of their car. I mentioned before the car-free developments are not always best. Each development probably needs to be reviewed on its own basis with some variants agreed. There has to be something within the [London] Plan to allow for those specific situations. Otherwise, if you read in accordance with the Plan then certain people are excluded.

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** Yes, I absolutely advocate the five per cent. Something else that is sometimes missed, for example at station car parks is, yes, five per cent and, as Teri said, we do not know what that is of the total number, but making sure it is accessible, not just in terms of the EV charging, because there is a strong move towards electric cars. Making sure there are EV charging points. In the standard bays as well to make sure that those EV charging points are accessible as well. If staff are also using those bays, if any of them, as a reasonable adjustment, has asked for an accessible bay that should be on top of the five per cent as well. Generally, the points that we made before

around making sure that it is close enough. If it is a housing development, making sure it is within, ideally, 50 m, and close enough for people to use. That is in terms of getting from the car back to their home as well.

**Emma Best AM:** If we focus as well on the residential limits, in a future London Plan should they be done away with, with perhaps boroughs able to determine what is appropriate and what is not? Should they be raised in the London Plan, more in terms of residential? Harriet, you wanted to add something to the previous question.

**Harriet Bell:** Yes, I wanted to quickly come back on the station parking and areas where there are transport hubs. This is what I meant about the absolute numbers. If you do not get to a place by 8.00am in the morning you have no hope of parking there. Even with five per cent, I have concerns about that being sufficient and perhaps we should be looking at being more generous in those locations.

**Emma Best AM:** Not building over all the station car parks in London would be a good idea as well. Thanks. On the residential point, does anyone have anything? Yes, thanks.

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** If we are building wheelchair accessible homes then really there should be some parking within close enough distance for people to use it.

**Emma Best AM:** At the moment there will always be disabled bays, be it Central, Inner and Outer, but the number of bays are obviously restricted through the numbers on the London Plan. We touched on floating bus stops. It is important to note that TfL have released their evidence. I do not know if anybody here sat on those forums. I have heard some feedback about that and it is not great. Going forward, what would the Panel like to see in terms of the built environment and floating bus stops?

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** We have had feedback from disabled people ourselves in terms of equality impact, that they are not safe for people to use. There is a real risk of collision. There is a real risk in terms of people who are blind or visually impaired being able to navigate those spaces as well. It is not something we would advocate.

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** I would endorse that. What I think we need is TfL to have an action group to look at it. At the moment, the national guidance did not think about blind and visually impaired people, I am quite sure of that. I do not think TfL did either, because they were following the national guidance. What we really need now is for us to get together and talk about the issues. It is not going to be easy, but we have to talk about it and come up with a better way of doing it and mitigations. It affects a lot of people. It is partly because people were very worried about cyclists. The problem with cyclists is they were getting killed by lorries in central London and we are having to pay the price for it. TfL and the Government are very keen to make cycling safer for cyclists at the expense of pedestrians. We need to talk about it.

**Emma Best AM:** Thanks. It is a good time to introduce that point about inclusivity to all. I can tell you, with small children that love the bus, they do not understand that when the bus comes, you do not just run straight on it. It is one of those things again, for everyone. I was going to ask, in terms of looking ahead to the next iteration of the London Plan has anyone on the panel been involved or engaged with the review process or discussions related to the built environment? Have you been involved, Harriet?

**Harriet Bell:** I participated in the Planning for London Programme, if that is what you mean.

**Emma Best AM:** Yes. Were they worthwhile discussions?

**Harriet Bell:** Yes. I have participated in three separate sessions, including one on inclusive design yesterday. I was disappointed, I have to say, by the level of attendance at the inclusive design one yesterday. It was very discouraging in terms of what people feel is valuable, compared with the numbers that are there this morning, from which appears to be a separate event as part of the programme. I attended two separate strategic ones last year and they were not specifically on inclusive design and access. I felt that it would have been helpful to have included inclusive design and access as an agenda item on every session. That would have been really helpful.

**Emma Best AM:** Just to confirm, Harriet, when you say it was disappointing in terms of attendance, was that from stakeholders, developers, GLA officers?

**Harriet Bell:** There were a good number of GLA officers there and I felt there was full commitment to the process. However, I understand that about 40 people had signed up and did not turn up. That is indicative of the level of commitment from other should-be-interested parties as well as stakeholders. It is disproportionately high.

**Emma Best AM:** Thank you.

**Laura Vicinanza (Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Inclusion London):** I was at the event yesterday as well and I share the same concerns. I have not seen many equality groups there. It is not because the equality groups did not want to be there. It is because they were not being contacted; there has not been proactive engagement. The people in the Planning for London Programme really need to reach out properly to different equality groups, which is not just disabled people. There are many infrastructure organisations in London like the LGBT+ Consortium, the Ubele Initiative, the Women's Resource Centre. There are so many infrastructure organisations that could have been there, but I do not think they even knew that these events were even going on.

I really want to stress, though, that consultation is not co-production and so these events are good, but we need to come to a point when we realise that we need to go to communities and understand what people's needs are and not expect people to provide feedback on a predetermined set of questions or topics. We need to come with a blank sheet of paper, almost, and ask what the needs are and together work on solutions. Sometimes we do not feel that that is happening and so we would actually like to see co-production happening. Inclusion London is also a member of the London Housing Panel, which is also an initiative, part of the Planning for London Programme. Through that, we and many other DDPOs are trying to make sure that accessibility is a key priority of the next London Plan. We want to see more accessible homes being built anyway.

**Emma Best AM:** Thanks. I guess, when you say "co-production" as well, make sure co-production actually is that. I know there are a few TfL examples when people thought that they were co-producing something that turned out quite differently.

Just building on that, then, it is great that you two were at the forum yesterday. Are there any other mechanisms that anyone else on the panel wants to contribute of engagement forums that would be helpful ahead of the next London Plan?

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** I have to say I did not attend any of the groups because I was sure how accessible it would be for me as a deaf person. I probably should have asked if they would provide a palantypist, but they did not make it that welcoming for someone like me. I am sorry about that.

Co-production. What works when I have a co-production event is to invite the disabled residents to see where the barriers are that they face and then, only after they have done that, allow officers to join the discussion. That starts the process. That changes the dynamic.

The other thing that is quite good is to have co-chairs. I was at a meeting last week. It was very interesting. We were talking to TfL about staggered crossings because some of my blind members find it very difficult to use staggered crossings. The TfL officers were saying, "We're very inclusive", blah, blah, blah. My co-chair, who is an assistant director for the Environment Department, said, "You are not really being inclusive because blind people can't actually use these crossings". That is a really good example of another co-chair pushing back against other organisations. You need both.

**Emma Best AM:** Great. Thanks, Jane.

**Jane Wilmot OBE (Chair, Hammersmith and Fulham Inclusive Design Review Panel):** I was just going to say the outcome of that was that TfL agreed to look at the issue again, for the first time ever.

**Emma Best AM:** Good. Happy ending. Hopefully.

**Laura Vicinanza (Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Inclusion London):** I do not know if you are aware, but the Mayor of London set up a DDPO Forum, which is an engagement forum that meets every three months and is made up of a wide variety of DDPOs in London. That was supposed to ensure that there is meaningful engagement with deaf and disabled people around everything. That forum should be used to ensure there is strategic engagement and, for example, it does not always work like that. Events like that yesterday may be channelled through the DDPO forum, which would have been welcome.

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** Could I just say, if you are thinking of any engagement events, reimburse members who do attend. It could be a nominal amount. There are various ways and means of doing it, but disabled people are over-consulted if you look at any one time at how many different consultations are out there. They have jobs; they have other commitments as well.

**Emma Best AM:** Thanks, Fara. Are there any other recommendations or priorities that you on the panel would like to see in the next London Plan and perhaps as well if there is anything in particular you think must be retained as well? Yes, Teri?

**Dr Teri Okoro (Founder and Director, TOCA Architects):** We need to have more examples of good practice. We also need to have signposting of good practice publications. In addition, we need to reinforce the process - and Jane about how it is good at the beginning but not always at the end - so that it is properly

enforced all the way through and the good intentions at the start - or at least what is stated - is carried through to the end. There has to be some process in there or something to steer its implementation to ensure that we get the outcome that we want.

**Laura Vicinanza (Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Inclusion London):** Can I make a few comments on housing and we could improve policies in the London Plan?

There should be a focus on retrofitting the existing housing stock. We should make sure that the accessible housing target does not apply just to newbuild homes but also to extensions and to acquisitions. The current Mayor has the Right to Buy Back scheme and the new Council Homes Acquisition Programme (CHAP) is giving money to local authorities to buy back properties from the private-rented sector and to convert them into social-rented homes. Could we make sure these homes are accessible, maybe requiring as a funding condition that local authorities conduct an accessibility assessment of these homes when they are being acquired and retrofit them to the highest accessibility standard?

Also, people were mentioning this earlier. There is a difference between fully wheelchair-accessible homes and wheelchair-adaptable homes. A wheelchair-adaptable home is not readily usable for a wheelchair user to move in. The kitchen and the bathroom cannot be used unless they are adapted. That means people have to apply through the Disabled Facilities Grant and local authorities spend lots of money, which is not really cost-effective, to adapt newbuild homes that could be made fully wheelchair accessible.

We want to see targets being introduced for M4(3)A and M4(3)B because we really want to monitor to what extent wheelchair user homes that are being built are actually fully accessible or adaptable. We are concerned that developers are more likely to build wheelchair-adaptable because it saves them money and is not really cost-effective for the public purse either, and not good for disabled people.

Affordability was mentioned. We want to see, of course, accessibility across different tenures but more accessible social housing. The GLA should really monitor, when it monitors affordable housing starts and completions by type, how many of these are accessible. We do not know that or to what extent these accessible homes that are being built are affordable. Again, we do not know that. The ten per cent applies across all tenures. Maybe a larger proportion of accessible homes should be in social housing. I would not be able to tell you what percentage.

That is where data comes in. We have analysed the London Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) from 2017 and there is a scarcity of data around people with protected characteristics more generally: LGBTQ+ people, ethnic minority communities and disabled people. We need to make sure that the GLA captures the identified unmet housing need. We want to know what the current situation is in London. How many new or not-new homes do we need that are accessible? For example, the Mayor of London said 66,000 homes are needed every year and of these a certain proportion needs to be genuinely affordable. Why can we not know how many are needed every year that are accessible? This is key, important information. However, if we do not have this information, how are we expecting even local authorities to plan and deliver the right kind of housing? We are quite sceptical.

**Emma Best AM:** I guess the Chair will say this, but anything that you feel has been missed today, obviously, you can send in to us. Harriet?

**Harriet Bell:** Thank you. I would very much like to see something that speaks to intersectionality and also looks at scenarios so that the London Plan considers the lives of disabled people in the whole so that we are

not just existing in terms of a policy on housing or a policy on transport but how we move across those policies. Perhaps looking at different personas or scenarios in order to try to achieve that is not going to be complete, but it is a more qualitative set of testing measures that are needed for that. That is quite absent from the Plan at present.

**Emma Best AM:** Thank you. I will just say again. If you did want to let us know anything else, then do.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** Thank you. We will move on to, finally, Assembly Member Fortune for this section.

**Peter Fortune AM (Deputy Chairman):** Thank you. One of the advantages - or disadvantages, possibly - of having the final set of questions is that a lot of what you were going to ask has been answered, especially by such an informed panel, but I want to touch on some specifics just so that we have it on the record.

We have talked about consultation and what effective consultation looks like. Are there any further suggestions for how local authorities or any kind of planning authority can better consult so that we have more useful information coming into the process?

**Hallie Banish (Campaigns and Communications Manager, Ruils):** Yes. I would just like to point out that most boroughs across London have a DDPO in them, either there representing just that borough or, in my case, Ruils works across four boroughs in south west London. There are multiple ways that you can engage with a DDPO in order to, one, reach the local disabled people but, two, meaningfully engage with them. One example is in [the London borough of] Richmond. We have two user-led forums. These are forums that are -- disabled service users. They come together. They are the ones who are saying, "These are the local issues", and then they work with the local authority, bus companies and other statutory bodies to make recommendations. A lot of these groups and DDPOs are already doing work on the ground.

My recommendation is to build relationships with DDPOs from a local authority perspective, so local authorities valuing DDPOs that are doing a lot of work already in the borough and valuing the perspectives of local disabled people. We see a lot of great engagement with our transport and mobility forum because there is a particular area of interest in Richmond borough to engage with the local rail companies, but we see less engagement on other issues. Rather than cherry-picking specific issues, say, "Across the board, we want to involve the local organisation that is doing this work in our planning and any adjustment of policy". That is one recommendation.

The other recommendation is that there is quite an untapped power in the network of DDPOs. We are all working in different areas but a lot of us are experiencing the same issues. Our members and our users are experiencing the same issues. Inclusion London already does this by bringing us together but there is more work that needs to be done to encourage local DDPOs to come together and attend events like the one that happened yesterday, providing proper remuneration for expertise, skills and professional opinion. Yes, those are two areas.

**Peter Fortune AM (Deputy Chairman):** What is interesting is that it builds on something you said earlier, which was about planning your day. Harriet, you touched on this as well. If I am going somewhere, I will go on Network Rail, I will see how late the train is, I will see which Tube lines are closed and then I will negotiate my way through, but the rest of it I can deal with day-to-day. I had a quick look just for my area. I had a look at a supermarket, a cinema, a restaurant and a theatre to look at what information there was about accessibility. It



is not easy; you scroll down, you find it somewhere at the bottom and you get some generic points, "There is wheelchair access". All right. To what?

You know like they have the Scores on the Doors stickers for restaurants that say what their health score is. Is there any kind of accessibility benchmark or [British Standards Institute (BSI)] Kitemark of good quality that businesses can use so that you can plan your day better? You can say, "It is not just getting on the train, but is there access to a loo? Can I get in somewhere?"

**Harriet Bell:** Yes and no. It is becoming quite a crowded area and it is one that is being driven by people who have wanted exactly that. It is one where there is not consistency of information. What I tend to do is, if I am going to a place, I will look at a number of websites where people have put up information having experienced it themselves. Euan's Guide is perhaps one of the better-known ones and AccessAble is another one. There is an app, the name of which I cannot remember. It is to do with wheels [On Wheels]. You tend to look at the composite, but actually having something more formal would be immensely helpful.

I am always banging on about the importance of preview information to people. In the planning authority I work in at the moment, I am trying to get conditions that relate to planning applications that require an access management plan that includes specific mention of preview information, which is exactly what you are describing. It is information about what assistive technology they might have, what the parking looks like, photographs for people who would find that useful. If you want a good example, St Paul's Cathedral has pretty good information for visitors. Make sure that it is provided in a range of formats as well so that it is not just visual information but there are options for people, too.

**Peter Fortune AM (Deputy Chairman):** Thank you. That is useful. Did you say it was Euan's Guide? OK. In terms of best practice - and, Teri, you touched on this as well in terms of consultation and about how you are connecting up groups - are there any great examples of best practice we can look at nationally and internationally that we can go away and research?

**Hallie Banish (Campaigns and Communications Manager, Ruils):** I just wanted to mention we were actually involved in a consultation last week at the Tower of London at the Royal Armouries. I thought it was excellently done. It was not co-production. It was strictly a consultation, bringing disabled people in to share their views on access to the White Tower.

However, I will say that best practice is doing a blank slate approach, bringing people in and saying, "Come. Have a look. How can we make this consultation more accessible for you?" Jane touched on that earlier. It needs to be accessible from the start of the actual consultation bit. Then allow people to come in and say, "Hey, this is my experience. These are my views. These are the disabling barriers that I see".

I will say that a lot of times disabled people are already utilising technology or accessible technology or other things and so they are able to provide solutions when they are not put into a box. When they are put into a box and the consultation says, "This is what we can do and this is how we are going to do it", it feels kind of pointless.

However, I will say that the Royal Armouries did an excellent job from start to finish. The access guide is also amazing at the Tower of London. I would definitely say, if you want an example of good practice, it was already really great, but we came in and we were able to make recommendations to make it better. Again, it was just listening and being really open to our perspective.

**Fara Muneer (Head of Business Development, Centre for Accessible Environments):** I just wanted to add that Disability Equality Scotland is a national body. I think it has funding from the Scottish Government. In all the local authorities in Scotland, it helps to set up Access Panels; it provides terms of reference and training. It is volunteer led and typically, those volunteers will be like an access panel and support auditing as well as new planning applications. That is definitely one worth looking at.

**Peter Fortune AM (Deputy Chairman):** The real challenge seems to be joining everything up. You have a planning authority that will meet certain standards for the building but then real life, as Harriet was talking about earlier, is you come out of your house and you go onto the street scene and then you are going to have to cross a road and then you are going to have to go on transport and then get into a shop and then get back and then get money to pay for things in the shops that you may or may not be able to get into. It is finding some standards or some agreed baseline principles. What is acceptable? How should businesses operate? How should planning operate?

Is there anything more - he opens the door on this one - that you suggest the Government should be doing around that planning process, especially, and the built environment. I know we have touched on it already quite a bit.

**Laura Vicinanza (Policy and Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Inclusion London):** The Government launched a consultation on raising accessibility standards in 2020. Last year it committed to raise accessibility standards. M4(3) is going to be the new default option for building new homes in England but has not been implemented. We would like to see those changes implemented because, if you delay the process more and more, more people are going to be living in unsuitable accommodation.

In addition, within that, there should be a proportion of wheelchair-accessible housing being mandated in because, unfortunately, it is really a postcode lottery and not all local authorities are actually building wheelchair-user homes.

**Peter Fortune AM (Deputy Chairman):** Thank you. I am very tight for time and so I will leave it there, Chair. Thank you.

**Sakina Sheikh AM (Chair):** I appreciate that, Assembly Member Fortune, and I know your questions did get squeezed because there is such rich expertise from the panel today. We are really grateful that you almost frontloaded a lot of what we wanted to tease out later on.

It has been incredibly informative. We had Lisa Fairmaner [Head of London Plan and Growth Strategy, GLA] in the audience and she heads up the London Plan and the development. Everything has been said today we hope - and we will ensure as much as we can from the Committee - is integrated into the next iteration of the London Plan and we will be pursuing that as a Committee going forward. The next part of the panel will have Jules Pipe [CBE], the Deputy Mayor [for Planning, Regeneration and Skills], alongside Lisa, hopefully being able to reflect back some of what you have brought to the table. Please feel free to stay in the public gallery and we would love to see whether you feel satisfied with the way that that is being responded to.

Also, as mentioned by Assembly Member Best, do follow up with the Committee and just stay in touch. We have been really grateful for your expertise and your knowledge today. We look forward to continuing working together and thank you once again.

