

# Housing Standards – Minor Alterations to the London Plan Consultation Draft

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Every eight hours, someone in the UK is paralysed by Spinal Cord Injury (SCI). Paralysis is permanent and there is currently no cure. Aspire is a national disability charity that provides practical help to people with SCI to enable them to live independently.

As part of our flagship Housing programme, Aspire has 46 wheelchair accessible properties across the country providing temporary housing to people with Spinal Cord Injury whilst their long-term housing solution is arranged. Our houses have fully inclusive features so that people who have sustained this life-changing injury can regain confidence and get on with their lives whilst their own property is adapted or they find an alternative accessible property.

Aspire also provides advice and guidance on housing issues as it is quite often the first barrier that people face on discharge from hospital to independent living. Twenty percent of people with Spinal Cord Injury are discharged to nursing homes.<sup>1</sup> This is often against their will due to the lack of available wheelchair accessible housing in their areas.

Aspire welcomes this opportunity to offer our expertise through this response to the *Housing Standards – Minor Alterations to the London Plan Consultation Draft* paper.

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3.48 Aspire agrees with the amendment to require 90% of London's future housing to be built to Building regulation requirement 'M4 (2): Accessible and adaptable dwellings' and for 10% to be built to 'M4 (3): Wheelchair user dwelling. We believe that this mirrors the current requirement which was first set out in the London Plan 2004.<sup>2</sup>

We believe that this should be the standard set by local authorities throughout the country; especially given the demographic changes identified in paragraph 3.50.

There is still progress to make as the Mayor needs to ensure that the latter 10% requirement is actually realised. Between 2008 and 2011, only 8% of new were built to wheelchair accessible standard.<sup>3</sup> This cannot be right, especially in the affordable and social sector where data from our research in 2014 revealed that there are over 2,600 wheelchair users in

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<sup>1</sup> Aspire, 2012. *UK Spinal Cord Injury Discharge Data*.

<sup>2</sup> Mayor of London, 2004. *The London Plan: Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London, Policy 3A.5 – Housing Choice*.

<sup>3</sup> Mayor of London, 2011. *A Revised London Housing Strategy*.

urgent need of housing in London.<sup>4</sup> We look forward to working with the Mayor to ensure that these standards are delivered as prescribed.

- 3.48A Aspire is concerned with the general approach to viability. Developers often hide behind the issue of viability to justify not delivering homes suitable for our population. We believe firstly that viability needs to take into account the wider benefits of having accessible homes and step-free access to homes above the ground floor. That is that such properties will reduce strain on care and temporary housing services as more stock that disabled people and elderly people can live in will inevitably mean that this group have more housing options available to them to live in. Secondly the assessments should be open and transparent so that developers can be challenged and suggestions can be made to them for alternatives.

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<sup>4</sup> Aspire, 2014. *Wheelchair Accessible Housing – Waiting for appropriate housing in England*.