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Jacquell Runnalls (Dip COT, MSc) is a housing occupational therapist and accessible and inclusive environments specialist who oversees the design of inclusive, accessible and adaptable housing development from concept design through to post occupancy evaluation.

Jacquell works across public and private sectors with a range of stakeholders, including disabled and older people in their own homes, gaining a unique insight into the barriers created due to poor design and stigmatising aesthetics.

Jacquell worked with several Mayor of London projects including the first 2004 Supplementary Planning Guidance "Accessible London: achieving an inclusive environment" which introduced planning requirements for 90% Lifetime Homes and 10% wheelchair standard for all new homes, Wheelchair Accessible Housing Best Practice Guidance and the London Accessible Housing Register. She completed a Masters in Accessibility and Inclusive Design in 2011 (distinction) for which her dissertation considered Post

Occupancy Evaluation with residents of new build wheelchair housing. She has provided expertise to the Access group of the English Technical Housing Standards review leading to ADM Volume 1; co-authored the Wheelchair Housing Design Guide (Habinteg, 2018); authored the Inclusive Housing Design Guide (Habinteg, 2024). Jacquiel has also previously been invited to present on UK Housing Standards at a conference in Hong Kong and to give evidence to two parliamentary inquiries: 2018 'Housing for older people' and in 2024 'Disabled People in the Housing Sector'.

Jacquiel was previously the Royal College of Occupational Therapist's Specialist Section in Housing's UK lead on Accessible and Inclusive Housing and is currently a member of the British Standards B/559 committee (accessible and inclusive built environment) and the Access Association.

THE INCLUSIVE HOUSING DESIGN GUIDE

By: Jacquell Runnalls

Introduction

The [Inclusive Housing Design Guide](#) (IHDG) was commissioned by Habinteg with support from the Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE) and published by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

As the author I am extremely grateful for the support of my colleague and lead peer reviewer, Dr Marney Walker, also an experienced housing occupational therapist (OT). Marney encouraged me to share my learning gained from a career as a housing OT working with a diverse range of people of all ages and abilities in their own homes and communities, so seeing first-hand the barriers created by poor design and aesthetics. This is alongside overseeing the design and delivery of inclusive, accessible and adaptable, mixed-tenure housing developments (general needs and supported housing) from pre-planning to post occupancy evaluation (POE). Additional, invaluable peer review was undertaken by well-respected professionals from a range of backgrounds working in the field of inclusive design.

Learning from experience

The IHDG is based on documents I wrote as a specialist housing OT working with an inner London estate regeneration team. These were additionally informed by a wide range of good practice guidance and research, and my MSc in Accessibility and Inclusive Design dissertation which considered Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) of new build wheelchair housing; and as a member of the English Government's Technical Housing Standards Review Access group which led to the [2015 Building Regulations ADM Volume 1 for dwellings](#) (ADM), co-authoring [Habinteg's 2018 Wheelchair Housing Design Guide](#) and a working knowledge of applying ADM.

Occupational therapy and housing

The philosophy of OT is underpinned by a holistic, person-centred approach, with the key aim to enable people to live life in the way they wish.

My own experience has been additionally informed by working in adult social care and home adaptations, housing and homeless advice, allocations and lettings, and property services. This work involves advocating for disabled and older people; undertaking person-centred assessments of housing need; setting up and overseeing Accessible Housing Registers (AHR); assessing empty properties to determine accessibility/adaptability and undertaking viewings of property offers with disabled applicants. Where Housing OTs are employed across these areas it enables us to provide data for planners and developers to ensure housing development (general

and specialist) meets the evidenced need, including size and type of dwellings.

All these roles have involved overseeing the design and delivery of new housing development, working with a range of stakeholders including planners, building control, developers, housing providers, architects, designers, surveyors, engineers, design out crime officers, contractors and product manufacturers. My involvement starts from design concept right through to completion to ensure homes not only meet regulations but are functional, flexible, inclusive, and ultimately fit for purpose. I visit site regularly throughout, recommend robust, quality, easy to use, flexible and adaptable, non-clinical fixtures, fittings and finishes. This often includes explaining why designs and products may or may not meet end user requirements. After handover I attend viewings with prospective occupants and undertake later detailed POE, providing unique insights and learning to ensure practice is updated and mistakes are not repeated.

Apeksha Gohil explains the added, unique value Ots can bring to an inclusive design approach;

“their specialised knowledge of human functioning, disability, occupational performance, person-environment interaction which is supplemented by their skills in occupational analysis and environmental adaptations...areas of professional knowledge, skills and abilities that other professionals, such as designers, architect, and builders lack.”

Experience has shown that employing Housing OTs not only avoids disruptive retrofitting but provides significant savings and further far-reaching benefits. Case studies from my practice are in the IDHG and my Housing OT colleague in Richmond and Wandsworth is currently evidencing the cost savings to home adaptations budgets that our roles in overseeing new build homes provide. Approximate estimates indicate £2million (without considering wider benefits to the public purse). It is therefore essential that appropriate expertise is employed through all RIBA stages for new housing development, as supported in the [Inclusive Design Overlay to the RIBA Plan of Work](#)

Regulatory background

New English building regulations were introduced in 2015 - Part M: Access to and use of Buildings, Volume 1: Dwellings. It contains three categories, - M4(1) Category 1: Visitable, M4(2) Category 2; Accessible and adaptable, and M4(3) Category 3: wheelchair dwellings. Both M4(2) and M4(3) are optional unless required by the local planning authority (LPA) or through developer choice. Some LPAs acknowledge the need for the optional categories. For example London requires 90% M4(2) and 10% M4(3).

10 years since these regulations were introduced, I still consistently come up against a lack of understanding and misconceptions including thinking M4(2) and M4(3) are aspirational as opposed to minimal, misunderstanding key differences between the two and

when and how to apply them. Unfortunately ADM lacks critical detail and explanation and are non-inclusive: only considering physical impairment and underpinned by dated anthropometric and demographic data.

Need for guidance

I was acutely aware of the need to address these issues by providing practical, user-friendly guidance which demonstrates the impact design decisions have for their occupants and how to design and deliver genuinely accessible, adaptable, inclusive, and sustainable housing to enable people to live fulfilled lives. To communicate these issues detailed technical information is therefore needed that includes supporting plan, elevation and fully furnished drawings and images based on my working knowledge, alongside user insights. I also wanted to provide additional considerations to outside space and how housing development connects with its surrounding neighbourhood. Again, these aspects are not considered in ADM but can impact on whether a person is able to get out of their home or not.

Overview

The IHDG sets out the principles of Inclusive Design, OT and the housing and regulatory, planning and associated guidance which underpins the guide. There are three main standalone sections: Part One: Strategic Site Housing, connectivity and outside space, Part Two: Accessible and adaptable housing (for all general housing) and Part Three: Wheelchair housing (not only applicable to wheelchair

users but where people may require more space). Two appendices at the end build on my Site Briefs by providing a wide range of good practice resources (important to keep up to date) and wheelchair space standards (absolute minimum but a guide for planners/developers).

Aims and intentions

It was important to demonstrate how inclusive design can be delivered at minimal or no additional cost and embed design considerations that not only consider physical impairment but a much broader range of people, including those with sensory and cognitive impairments, neurodivergent people and to generally promote health and wellbeing. Simple but critical considerations include visual contrast, reducing glare and shadows, lighting which provides choice and control, acoustics/noise and access to biophilia such as greenery and views out.

An outdated perception persists that an accessible and adaptable home means one which is expensive, time-consuming to design and build, and clinical in appearance. I was therefore keen to demonstrate how inclusive, non-stigmatising, aesthetically pleasing, quality/robust fixtures, fittings and finishes can be provided at no or minimal extra cost. The significant benefits for both occupants and developers are surely a missed marketing opportunity. Sadly, I still find myself asking those specifying if they would accept a certain feature or product in their own home to which they reply 'No!'. So why is it acceptable for anyone else? Those of us who work in the

field are also aware of the extensive research evidencing need and demonstrating the financial and societal benefits, so why is this still not filtering through?

One of the key intentions of the guide was to provide the rationale for exceeding minimum requirements of ADM, address the missing detail, and lack of understanding and insight relating to aspects such as minimal spatial requirements, including how people move and use spaces inside and outside their home, and to demonstrate why certain layouts or features do not work in practice. Drawings therefore show a range of life-sized people (thank you to Carly Dickson, architect and illustrator), stacks and pipework, using dark blue shading on drawings to indicate the minimum (ADM) and light blue shading for recommended (good practice), such as access zones, turning circles.

It was also critical to show how to achieve good practice in relation to other major barriers to physical access, such as negotiating heavy doors (security/fire) and accessible door thresholds. These require careful design and attention to detail on site, yet I had to provide specifications and photos of installed level and zero thresholds from my own practice to the architects producing the drawings who said they could not be achieved. This further highlighted the need for not only technical guidance and drawings but User Insights and Case Studies (based on 'Notes' in my site briefs) to show why attention to detail matters, how certain features impacts peoples' lives, and that I am not just asking for the sake of it! Since publication feedback on these aspects has been extremely positive.

Finally, whilst basic references are made to culture and faith, they were not considered in detail nor other aspects such as gender, sexual orientation. We were unable to consider emergency egress and management and maintenance, but I am aware that these are critical in ensuring housing development is inclusive and does not discriminate. Otherwise, I hope readers are encouraged to read the IHDG.

Publication notes

Unfortunately some international books were inferior black and white copies so please ensure yours is in colour. As readers have also highlighted, the E-book does not replicate the IHDG's layout, use of colour, ordering or image sizing and placement. I have consistently requested a PDF be made available and Habinteg hope one will be available to purchase soon.

Jacqueline Runnalls, 31st July 2025

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