



ACCESSIBILITY IS THE KEY

WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE HOMES NEEDED FOR PRIVATE RENT

Wheelchair users are underserved in the UK
private housing market

November 2018

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November 2018

For too long the UK housing market has not provided enough quality wheelchair accessible homes. Abode Impact has set out to change this, and is launching an investment fund dedicated to providing wheelchair accessible homes for private rent.

In order to evidence our business and social case for the provision of this type of housing, we needed to gather data on the housing characteristics and needs of wheelchair user households. In particular we required data on experience of the Private Rented Sector (PRS).

We conducted a survey of 448 wheelchair user households across the UK. The headline findings were that 80% of respondents are currently living in a home that does not fully meet their needs as a wheelchair user, and over 90% experienced barriers to accessing the PRS.

Against this backdrop, we have evidence that there is a market for wheelchair users who would like to rent homes with accessible features. 86% of the survey responses came from people who are working age. Though just 18% of respondents live in the PRS, 50% of respondents were actively seeking to enter the PRS. We know that the greatest demand (62%) is for one-and two-bed homes, and that the most important factor when choosing a home was accessibility (67%). This evidence supports Abode Impact's business case for the provision of accessible homes. We hope it will also play a wider role in shaping the UK's housing market.

Existing research has set the scene and provided a stable base on which to build. We know from available data that a large number of disabled people could benefit from a wider choice of accessible homes in the UK.

We would never have got this far without the valuable research commissioned by other thought leaders in the disability and human rights space. For example the Equalities and Human Rights Commission's review into disability inequality in Great Britain (2018) highlighted a number of important recommendations, such as the need for more accessible homes, improved installation of home adaptations and support for disabled people to live independently.

Similarly, the Habinteg, Papworth Trust and LSE publication *The Hidden Housing Market: A new perspective on the market case for accessible homes* (2016) has been crucial in evidencing the potential market for accessible homes and subsequent benefits for society. Ultimately, their research shows the accessibility of new homes must be a priority for the benefit of society and has a key role to play in future-proofing housing investment.

Finally, Aspire, the spinal-cord injury charity, interviewed 40 of their clients to demonstrate the detrimental impact that living in un-adapted homes can have on the mental, physical and financial wellbeing of people with spinal-cord injuries. I urge you all to read Aspire's report *Examining lives in Adapted and Unadapted Homes (2016)*, in particular to truly understand the extent to which accessible homes can change lives.

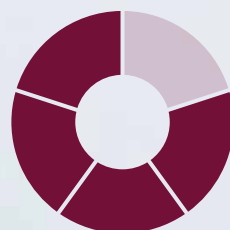
At Abode Impact, we are proud to have contributed much-needed data and evidence on the need for accessible housing in the PRS. We are now using this research in practice, working alongside stakeholders such as investors, housing developers, charities and policy-makers to create substantive and long-lasting changes that will create a better future for wheelchair users who would like to rent a home.



ELEANOR BOWDEN
FOUNDER | ABODE IMPACT

KEY

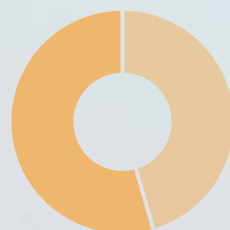
FINDINGS



4 in 5 live in a home which does not fully meet their needs as a wheelchair user.



91% of households experienced barriers to accessing the PRS.



62% of these had experienced barriers due to a lack of accessible properties.

"I cannot access my daughters' room to tuck them in at night."

Survey Respondent

"The rental agency withdrew the offer when I turned up in a wheelchair."

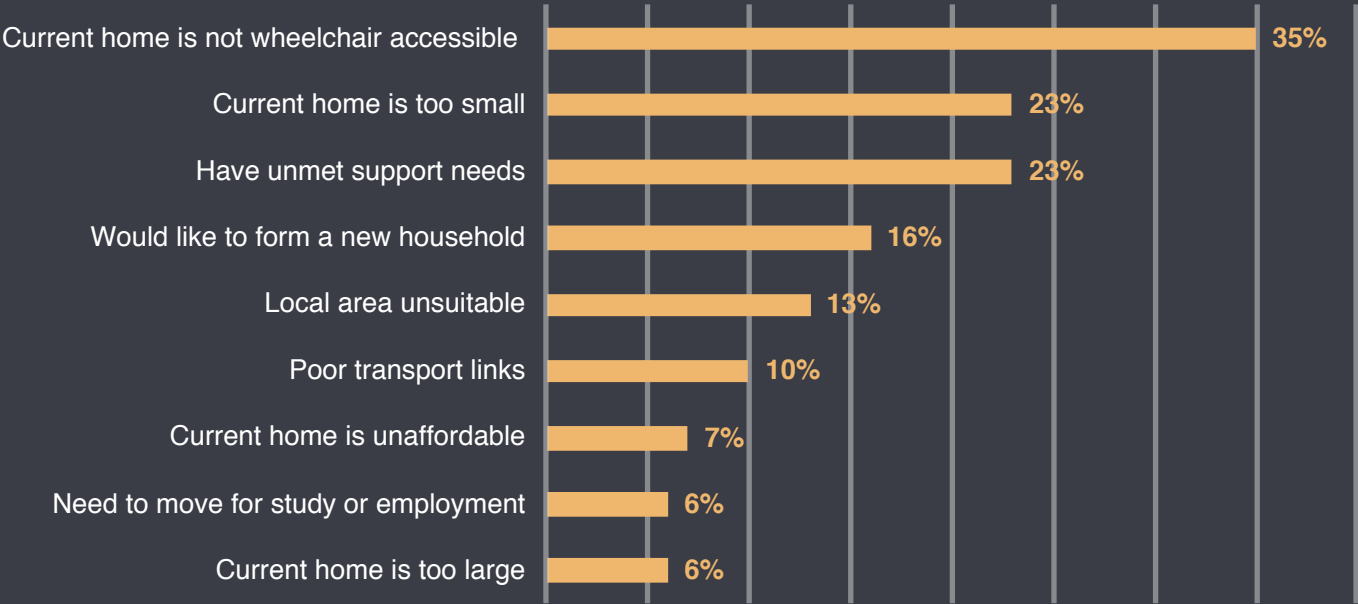
Survey Respondent

"Unable to even get wheelchair through the door. Never mind once inside."

Survey Respondent

63%

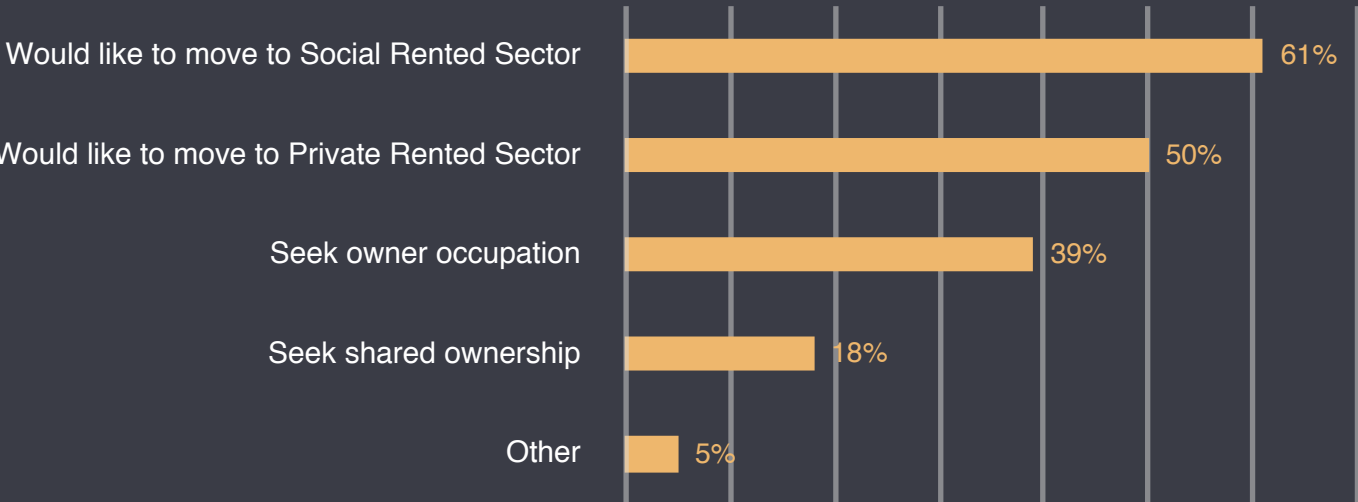
of respondents would like to move home in the next 3-5 years because...



“I cannot leave the house on my own, the wheelchair has to be carried down many steps...and then I have to be taken down.”

Survey Respondent

Preferred tenure

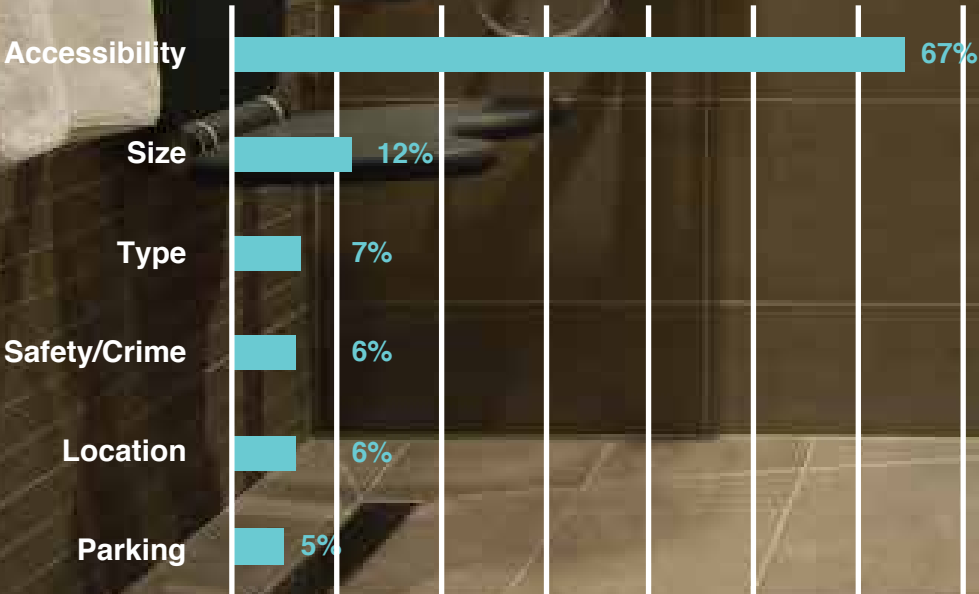


MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR AFFECTING

CHOICE OF HOME:

Survey respondents were provided with a list of factors and asked ‘What are the most important issues which would affect your choice of home?’ Results show that the most important factor affecting choice of home is ‘Accessibility’ followed by ‘Size of property’, ‘Type of property’, ‘Safety/crime’, ‘Location’ and ‘Parking’.

Those of least importance (from this list) were ‘Education’, ‘Employment’, ‘The local area’, ‘Retail/leisure’, ‘Transport links’ and ‘Garden’.

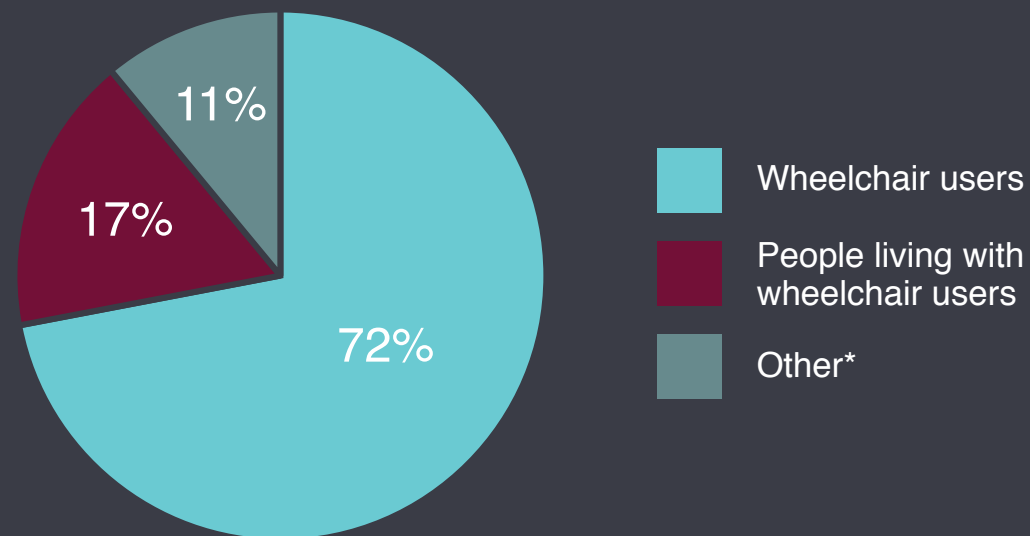


ABOUT THE STUDY

Objectives

To establish the specific needs and characteristics of wheelchair user households who wish to rent an accessible home, specifically in the PRS.

Respondents



*The total number of respondents were 506, however 58 (11%) were discounted as they were neither wheelchair users nor members of wheelchair user households.

448

WHEELCHAIR USER HOUSEHOLDS WERE SURVEYED

There are a total of 27.2m households in the UK (Office of National Statistics, 2017). 3.6% of the total contain a wheelchair user (979,560 people) (Chartered Institute of Housing, 2018) (English Housing Survey 2014-15). The 448 respondents who took part in the study represent a statistically valid response rate over all, confirming a confidence level of 95% for the research.

Online Survey

The key element in approach was an online survey of wheelchair users which opened on the 4 April 2018 and ran until 21 May 2018. As an incentive to complete the survey, respondents were given the opportunity to be entered into a prize draw to win £200 in John Lewis vouchers.

The survey was published online via SurveyMonkey and promoted by Abode Impact through its network and social media, mainly Facebook and Twitter. Abode Impact's social media campaign attracted 87% of respondents, aided by a successful Facebook advertising campaign.

A number of questions were left as multiple choice where deemed appropriate. For these questions, percentages given relate to the proportion of respondents who selected that choice compared to the total number of respondents, not the total of responses.

Social Housing Providers

There were a number of research questions relating to tenancy management which wheelchair users and their families would have been unable to answer. In order to provide information in these areas North Star consulted with a number of social housing providers who provide wheelchair accessible accommodation.

RESPONDENT

PROFILE

86%

of respondents were of working age and fairly evenly distributed between the age range of

25-64 years.

Current Tenure

Social Rented Sector

36%

Owner Occupiers

31%

PRS

18%

Living with family

15%

Homeless

1%

Number of people in the household

Of those respondents who need or want to move in the next three to five years, the most common number of people in their household were two persons, followed by one person, four persons and five or more persons.



41%



29%

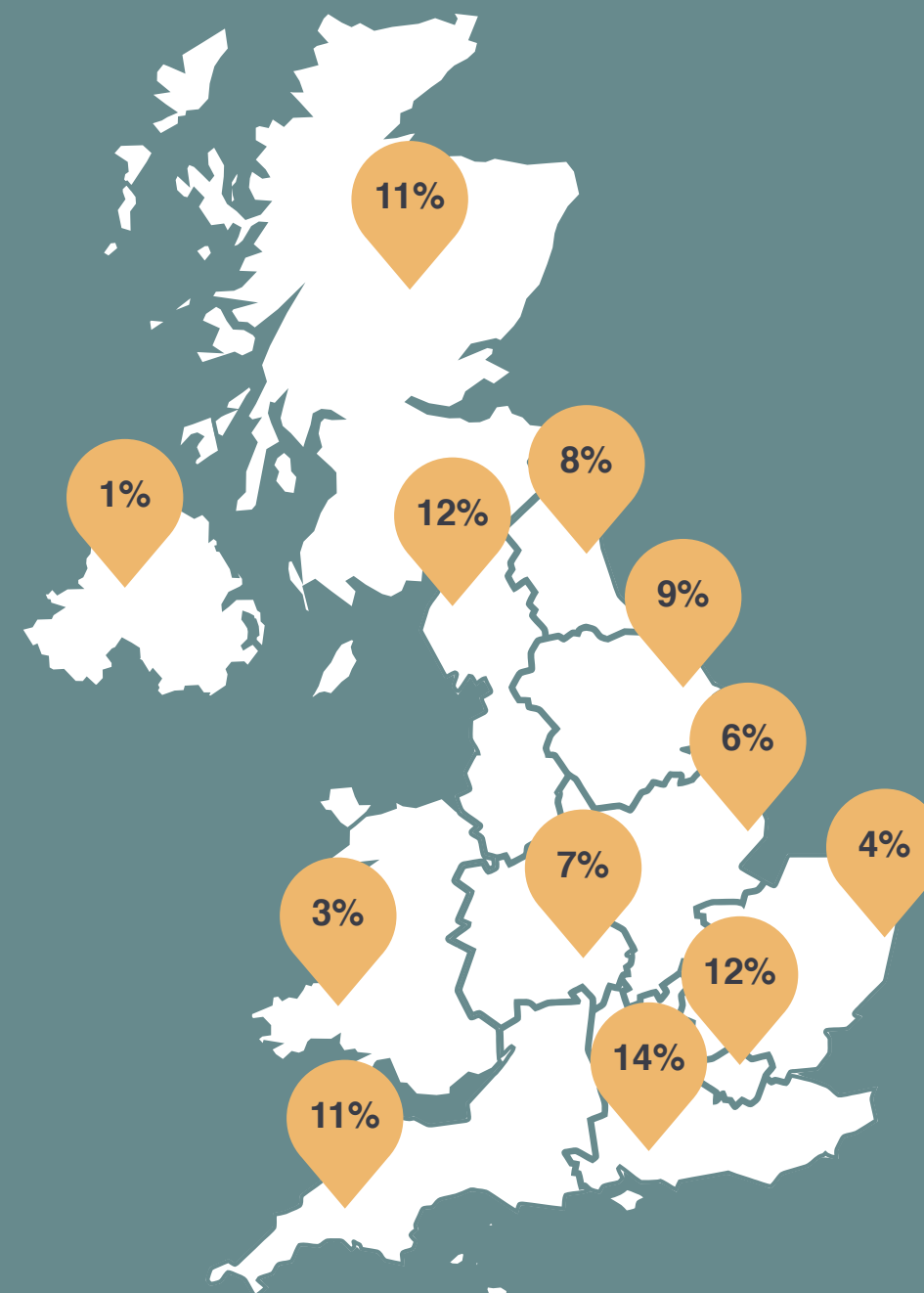


9%



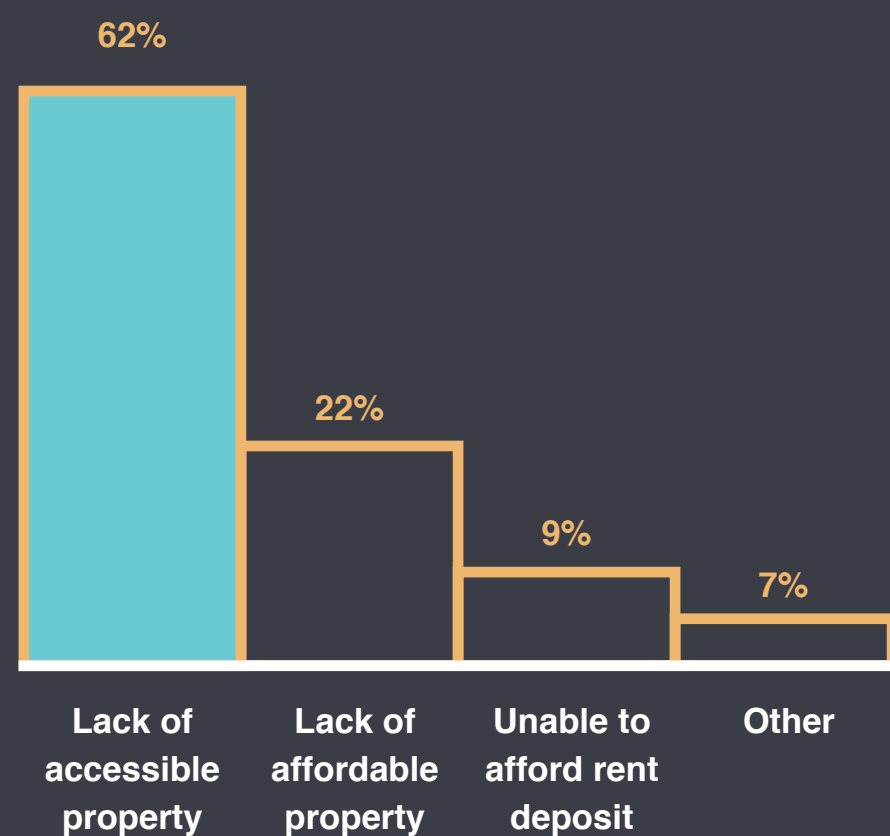
6%

Current location of surveyed respondents



91% of respondents experienced various barriers to accessing the PRS

Of those who had experienced problems in accessing the PRS the reasons were:



"Rental agencies turning down a wheelchair user because they'll ruin the new carpets."

Survey Respondent

"Estate agents and rental agencies not understanding my access needs."

Survey Respondent

"Landlords not aware that they can apply for a grant to have a property adapted."

Survey Respondent

"Restrictive application schemes."

Survey Respondent

"Even inaccessible estate agents."

Survey Respondent

"Lack of parking / accessible parking for properties."

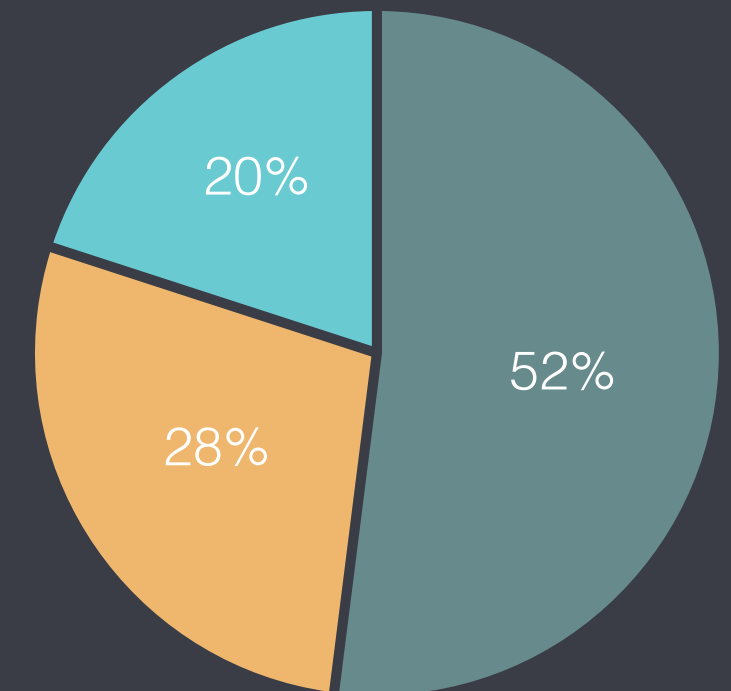
Survey Respondent



80% are currently living in a home that does not fully meet their needs as a wheelchair user

Suitability of current accommodation

- Fully meets their needs ■
- Somewhat meets their needs ■
- Does not meet their needs ■



Some of the comments below demonstrate the impact of a home which does not meet the needs of the wheelchair user.

"The house is not adapted; my daughter does not use a wheelchair in the house but crawls or stick walks." [Survey Respondent](#)

"I am unable to properly use many facilities as can't get close enough." [Survey Respondent](#)

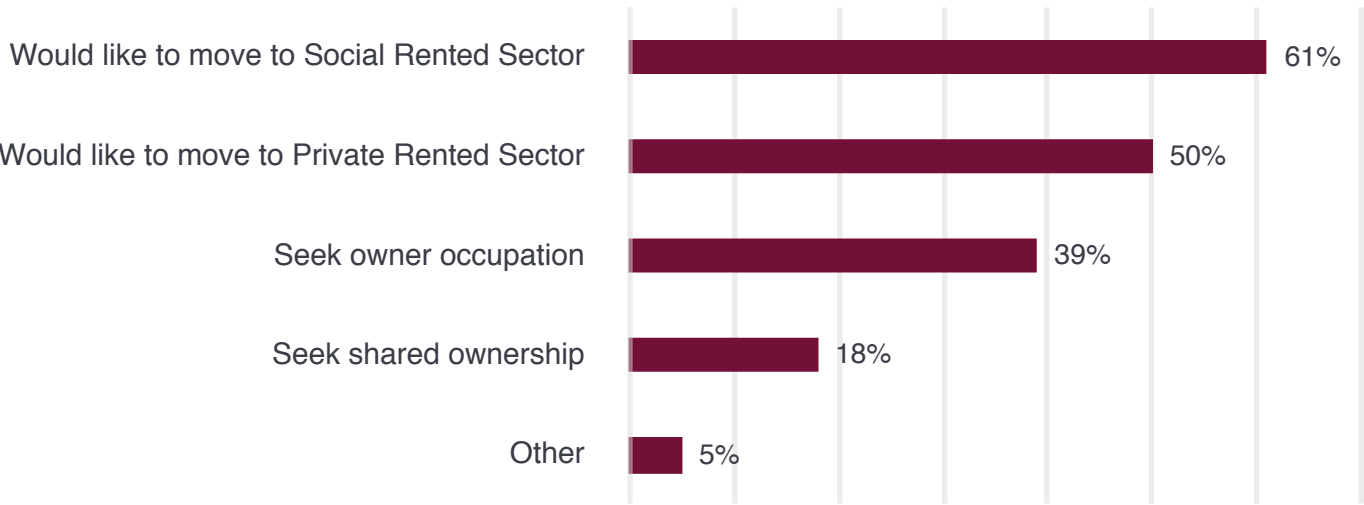
"My home has three storeys – I get stuck for long periods on the middle floor."

[Survey Respondent](#)

"They cannot extend the upstairs to allow me to access to the toilet, so I have no option but to use a bedpan." [Survey Respondent](#)

Preferred tenure

Of those households who need or want to move, the vast majority wish to move to accommodation in the Social Rented Sector, while 50% prefer the Private Rented Sector. Further analysis of the 'Other' 5% show that respondents in this group mainly preferred owner occupation.



"It's an attic flat with no lift and I cannot fit my wheelchair indoors so have to be dragged everywhere."
Survey Respondent

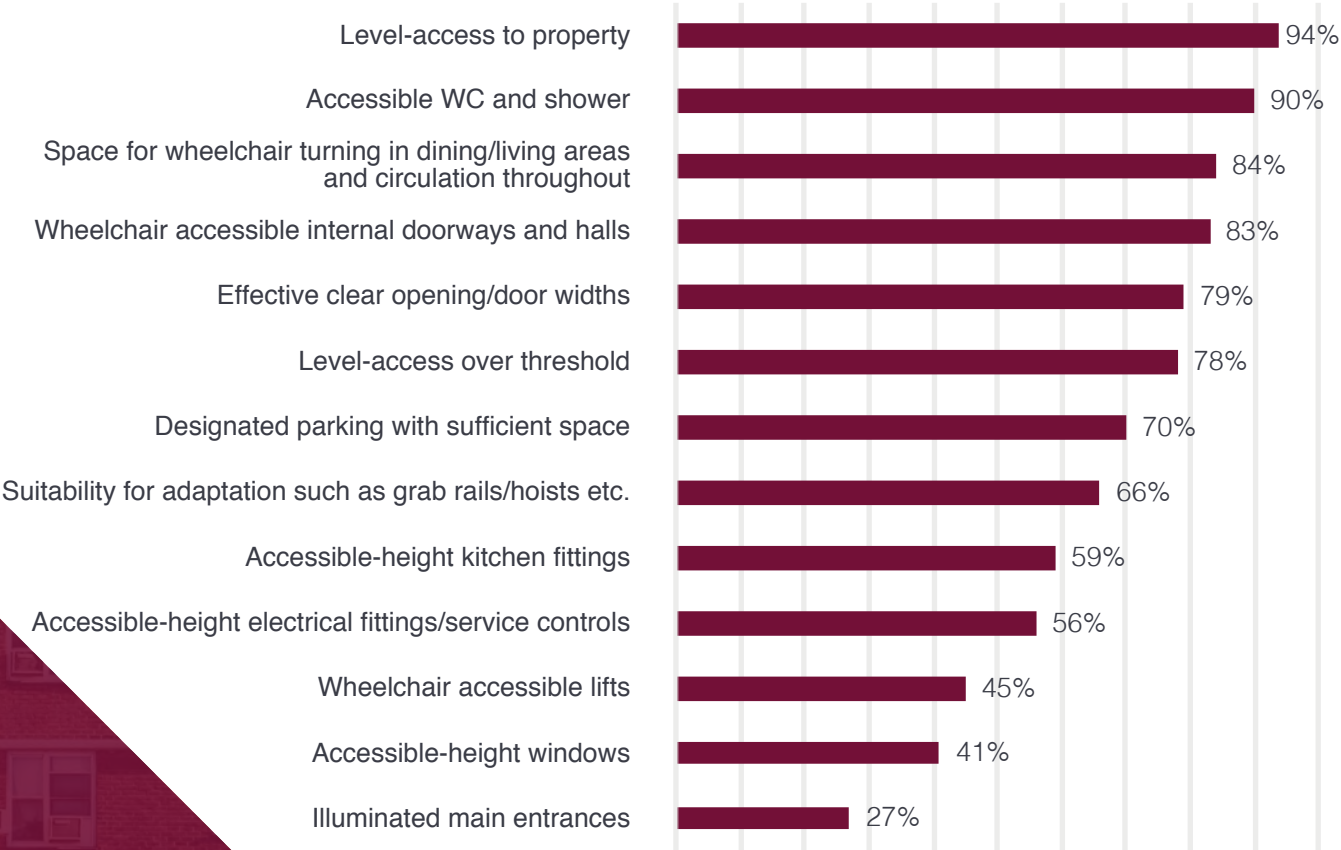
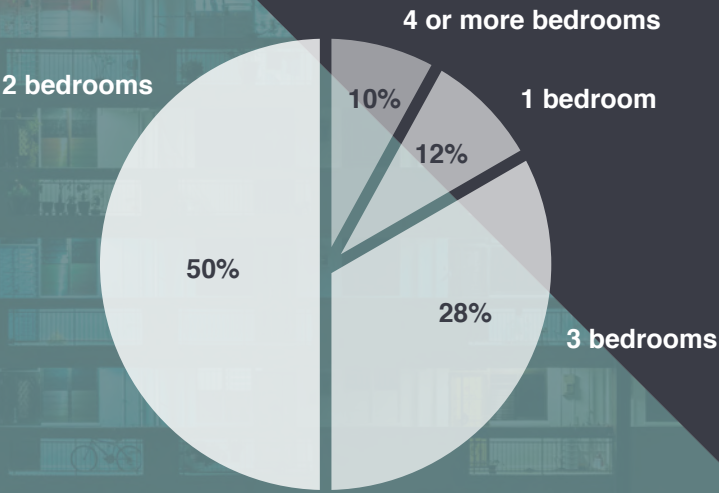
"I cannot access the back garden due to a step."
Survey Respondent

"Insufficient space in bathroom, shower has a big step to get in"
Survey Respondent

Most important
accessibility features

Number of bedrooms required

As anticipated, when these results were compared to the number of people in a household, there is a desire to seek the same number or more bedrooms.



Management of wheelchair

accessible homes and tenancies

A number of areas were identified which relate to the management of wheelchair accommodation and tenancies, which would be most effectively answered by current social housing providers rather than survey respondents.

- Do wheelchair user properties have higher maintenance costs than non-wheelchair user properties?
- Are there any benefits of letting to this client group?
- Are there any disadvantages of letting to this client group?
- Are there any differences between this and other client groups in terms of payment of rent and rent arrears?

In order to answer these questions North Star Research and Consulting conducted short telephone interviews with a sample of specialist wheelchair accommodation providers. Abode Impact wanted to gain more detailed understanding of the constraints, barriers and additional costs associated with the provision of wheelchair accessible housing.

Housing Association/stock holding Council consultees who provide both wheelchair and non-wheelchair accessible accommodation felt that much of the information relating to this client group was anecdotal and that specific information on wheelchair user households or on households requiring adaptations is not generally held.



General Costs

However, consultees felt that there are no discernible differences in maintenance costs, tenancy management costs and levels of rent arrears between this client group and mainstream tenancies.

Each household is different and providers felt that there are those who do and do not adhere to tenancy conditions regardless of the client group. Consultees noted that while a household may require a wheelchair accessible home it is likely that the majority of people in the household do not require these facilities and issues which affect any family will and can also affect a wheelchair user household.

Tenant Turnover

All consultees agreed, however, that once a wheelchair user household found a home suited to their needs their tenancies tended to be longer than the average, and that there was little turnover in adapted purpose-built stock.

Repair and Maintenance

One Housing Association indicated that providers may find that they have to be 'smarter' and more responsive in relation to repairs particularly where these relate to accessibility. Those housing providers which were in control of their own reactive maintenance services said that they prioritised this client group and had shorter responsive repairs targets than for other tenants. They had also developed a more sensitive approach to completing repairs whilst accommodating the needs of the tenant and their family.

While repair and maintenance costs were considered to be similar for all properties overall in terms of general wear and tear, one Housing Association indicated specific aids and adaptations can have higher repair, maintenance and replacement costs. Items such as automatic doors, lifts and other equipment which require repairs and servicing will add to overall costs of the provision of the accommodation. Where such items are provided a service charge specific to these items could be levied.

Severe shortage of accessible accommodation

Consultees agreed that there is a severe shortage of accessible accommodation in general, and specifically purpose-built accommodation and accommodation in the private sector. It was felt that many households with a wheelchair user were living in the Social Rented Sector who could afford homes in the private market if they were available and many would prefer to exercise the greater choice that this could offer them.

Purpose-built accommodation most cost-effective

Purpose-built accommodation was felt to be the most cost-effective way of providing more suitable accommodation, rather than retro fitting existing stock, whilst accepting that further adaptations may need to be made to meet the particular needs of each household.

Impartial advice needed

The issue of the need for good quality, impartial advice to households looking for and making decisions regarding accessible/adaptable accommodation was raised.

For example, Occupational Therapists working with landlords and tenants to provide support, suitability of particular properties and an understanding of the practicalities of and needs for adaptations were felt to be an important facilitator in aiding households in making decisions around moving. In particular, where there had not always been a wheelchair user in their household. The expertise and understanding of private estate and lettings agents in helping match wheelchair users with suitable properties was felt to be lacking, although agents were felt to be keen to help where possible and would welcome further support.

Minimum requirement

In terms of the minimum standards of accommodation for wheelchair users, consultees felt that purpose-built or retrofitted accommodation would need en-suite bathrooms, baths and level-access showers, level access to and around the property and accessible kitchens and bathrooms. However, location was felt to be a critical factor, with many households opting for less suitable accommodation which was closer to family and friends/support networks.



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