

# Hastings Local Plan – Policy DM4 g) Provision of Lifts Evidence Report

February 2014

## 1.0 The Issue

- 1.1 The absence of a lift in blocks of flats and apartments can severely limit the people that can occupy them. This applies not only to wheelchair users but the need to climb several sets of stairs can also prove daunting to other people with less restricted mobility. Flats and apartments are a useful source of accommodation for first time buyers including families with young children. However the need to climb two or more flights of stairs with children, buggies etc would be a major deterrent to them. Even able bodied people will struggle when faced with carrying heavy shopping bags up two or more flights of stairs. It can therefore be seen that the absence of a lift will severely limit the range of people that can occupy the upper floors of flats and apartments, limiting the choice of housing available to them. In a hilly town like Hastings it is important that additional constraints are not put on people's ability to access residential buildings.
- 1.2 Objectors to the policy argue that the provision of lifts will drive up the cost of properties pushing them out of the reach of purchasers, particularly first time buyers. On affordable developments, it is claimed, the service charges will only be affordable to those on housing benefit. At 2013 prices the cost of a basic lift is £21000 to £25000 for a two storey building with an additional £2500 per floor above that. Therefore for a small development of 9 flats on three floors, the cost per dwelling unit would be about £2700 to £3100 per unit. This is not a large amount relative to today's house prices. There would also be benefits to developers in that the dwelling units could be marketed to a far wider cross-section of the population. The service charge is an additional cost but in the private sector this is off-set by the generally lower cost of apartments and therefore lower mortgage payments. It is a very sweeping statement to suggest that in the affordable sector only those on benefits can afford service charges. Much depends on income and other out-goings.
- 1.3 The choice is therefore whether access to apartments in developments of 3 storeys and above should be restricted to a limited section of the population or whether, at a small additional cost, they should be made accessible to all. The Borough Council believes that, in the interests of creating a cohesive community in Hastings, the latter is the right way forward.

## 2.0 Policy Background

- 2.1 The adopted Hastings Local Plan 2004 contains a saved policy CN1, which requires suitable access for people with restricted mobility to buildings to which the public have access. On the basis of this policy the Borough Council has for a number of years encouraged developers to provide lifts in apartment blocks with some success. In determining an appeal in respect of flats and houses at Bodiam Drive, St Leonards-on-Sea (planning application reference HS/FA/07/00157) the Inspector concluded that the lack of lift provision would be contrary to the provision of the policy but noted that the site was on a particularly steep hill and was not a suitable location for persons with restricted mobility. He allowed the appeal as an exception to the adopted policy. This decision did not challenge the policy and would not preclude the Borough Council from seeking lift provision in other locations.

2.2 In a further appeal decision in 2008 in Victoria Avenue, Hastings, (planning application reference HS/FA/06/00663) the Inspector noted the requirements of policy CN1 for disabled access and agreed that it was right to widen this for access for all, which was in accordance with the objectives of then *PPS 3 Housing*. However the Inspector noted that Design and Access Statements did not extend to internal aspects of individual buildings and concluded that development in the manner proposed would not conflict with the objectives of policy CN1, read in conjunction with this latest government guidance.

2.3 In a third appeal decision in respect of a refusal of student accommodation over 4 floors without lift provision at Western Road, St Leonards-on-Sea, (planning application reference HS/FA/09/00429) the Inspector had regard to this previous decision but took the view that it was appropriate for the planning authority to consider internal access arrangements. He dismissed the appeal on the basis that, having considered all other issues including viability, the proposed development without lift provision, would have an inadequate standard of access for residents and visitors with restricted mobility in conflict with the objectives of Policy CN1.

2.4 The provision of lifts is an issue that Councillors feel particularly strongly about and in 2008 the Council passed a motion to incorporate a specific policy on lift provision in its revised Local Plan when prepared, rather than relying on a more general access policy. The *Development Management Plan Revised Proposed Submission Version* therefore contains the following policy:-

**Policy DM 4 – General access**

**Attention must be paid, not only to the access onto the site, but also to access within all parts of any resultant development. Development schemes should include:**

**g) The installation of a powered lift system to all floors, for any new buildings (except a single dwelling house) of three storeys or more. The lifts should be designed to allow for their use by disabled people and particularly those who use wheelchairs.**

### **3.0 Policy Support**

3.1 The policy supports a number of the objectives of the *Hastings Planning Strategy*, in particular Objective 2 “ensure everybody has the opportunity to live in a decent home, which they can afford in a community in which they want to live” and Objective 2c “ensuring an appropriate mix of housing is provided in terms of tenure, price, type, size and location, having regard to the accommodation needs of the town.”

3.2 There is also support for the policy in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). One of the core land use planning principles in paragraph 17 of the Framework that should underpin plan making, is “always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.” A good standard of amenity for all should include the provision of a lift where required. Paragraph 50 requires local planning authorities to “plan for a mix of housing based on future demographic trends, market trends and the needs of different groups in the community (such as but not limited to, families with children, older people, people with disabilities,

*service families and people wishing to build their own homes).*” The expected rise in the number of elderly people (there is a direct correlation between age and disability) and single parent families, points to a need for apartments and flats to be readily accessible to these groups.

3.3 There is also some support for the policy in Part M of the Building Regulations. For buildings containing flats, the objective of Part M in paragraphs 9.1 and 9.2 is to *“make reasonable provision for disabled people to visit occupants who live on any storey.”* It goes on to say that *“the most suitable means of access for disabled people from one storey to another is a passenger lift”*. Whilst falling short of a specific requirement for a lift, it is quite clear what Part M considers to be the most appropriate solution.

3.4 Finally it is worth noting that in August 2013 the Government consulted on a *Housing Standards Review*. The consultation ended in October 2013 but the Government has not yet announced its decision on the Review, which included consideration of access within residential buildings, particularly for disabled people. An Independent Industry Working Group has at the same time developed a set of illustrative Technical Standards, which sit alongside the consultation.

3.5 The Working Party has identified three distinct performance levels that provide increasing benefits in terms of accessibility. Baseline level 1 has broadly the same requirements as Part M of the Building Regulations, which is discussed above. Level 2 represents an intermediate accessible housing standard as an alternative to the Lifetime Homes Standard, which is the most commonly used standard at the present time. Level 3 represents the highest tier providing very good accessibility for most people, including the majority of wheelchair users. Both levels 2 and 3 require lift access to any home located above or below the ground or entrance floor, a more onerous requirement than in the Council’s policy. In the consultation the Government recognised that higher standards than Part M of the Building Regulations may be justified and sought views on this. In the absence of a decision on the Review, the Borough Council considers that its policy on lift provision represents a reasonable balance between accessibility for all and the additional costs associated with the provision of lifts.

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## References

Housing Standards Review – Consultation. Department of Communities and Local Government - August 2013

Housing Standards Review – Illustrative Technical Standards Developed by the Working Party. Department of Communities and Local Government - August 2013

Planning application appeal decisions available on the Hastings Borough Council website at <http://publicaccess.hastings.gov.uk/online-applications/>