

Stair lifts and adapted bathrooms may not seem selling points for your

house today but, as we live longer, they will become positive attractions

Accessibility is going to be a major factor in housing

“CHARMING family home in excellent location retaining a wealth of original features. Recently modified to include a state-of-the-art stair lift and fully remote bath chair.” Is this how property advertisements will read in the future?

Life expectancy is going through the roof and with it the need for people to take the appropriate steps to help them manage in their later years. According to the Department for Work and Pensions, a man aged 65 in 1950 could expect to live until he was 76. Today, a 65-year-old can expect to live until he is 85, and by 2050 he'll confidently be looking at reaching 89. For the fairer sex, the outlook is even more promising.

To date the focus has mainly been on squirrelling away enough money into savings and pensions to meet the cost of our improving longevity, but what about more practical considerations relating to the houses we live in and the help we will need in getting around them?

It may not be something many buyers currently consider, but there is a real need to look at how we manage in our homes as we become more elderly and how we might adapt them to suit our

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purposes in the years ahead. Indeed, the issue of whether or not properties are modified for elderly or infirm owners is beginning to gather momentum and agents are increasingly seeing it as a consideration in the sale. Ron Smith, chief executive of the Edinburgh Solicitors Property Centre, said: “We have had some debate and we believe it is now a market factor.” Smith does not

“General accessibility will become more important than the specific equipment”

Ron Smith

yet believe it is a deal breaker and feels that initially, “general accessibility will become more important than the specific bits of equipment that are in place.”

Given that an accessibility audit will form part of the Home Report that every seller will have to have in place when marketing a property after 1 December, there is no doubt that accessibility issues are becoming more im-

portant in the housing market and will continue to do so.

However, there remains a huge stigma about accessibility equipment such as stair lifts, despite the difference they can make to people's quality of life and the state-funded help that is available to install them.

According to Lisa Barry, a director at SSL Scotland, which specialises in access equipment and services, a residential stair lift can cost anything up to £7,500 to install. For many homeowners, it will not be necessary to fully fund the cost of such modifications and if an assessment by an occupational therapist deems the equipment necessary, then the local authority will meet 50 per cent of the cost. Thereafter a financial assessment of the homeowner will determine how much of the outstanding balance is met by the local authority and how much by the individual.

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of people looking to their local authority for help when it comes to seeking advice and improving accessibility in their home. “The numbers are going up,” commented Mary Stobie, an occupational therapist with Aberdeen City Council.

“Two or three years ago there were around 5,000 referrals to the department, but that has increased by 50 per cent.”

However, for those who wish to tackle the problem before they are forced to address it, it is possible to seek an assessment from an occupational therapist privately and get advice as to what might be required in the future.

Again this is something that is happening more frequently and Stobie suggested that the College of Occupational Therapists should be the first port of call for anyone looking for an independent assessment.

Looking into what is available in terms of both funding and equipment will become more important as people seek to maintain their independence and continue to enjoy living in their home as they grow older.

“We have to get around the stigma of it,” said Barry. “We have installed a stair lift for clients who still have Harleys and ride around Europe, but do not want to fall down the stairs.”

Planning for the future will always revolve around savings and pensions, but investigating some of the physical hurdles that lie along the way is also becoming more important as we continue to live longer.



Having a stair lift fitted enabled Jean Foreman to remain in her own home despite increasing frailty

CASE STUDY

Chance to stay in her home is priceless

HAVING lived happily in her semi-detached Glasgow home for over 40 years, moving was the last thing that Jean Foreman, in her late sixties, wanted to think about.

However, a triple heart bypass, arthritis, osteoporosis and a couple of painful stumbles told her something would have to change. “I had got to the stage where I sometimes had to crawl up the stairs and it was so depressing,” she said. “I thought about moving, but looking at another place just brought tears to my eyes.” After a visit from an occupational therapist, who assessed her situation, a stair lift was fitted to the house last summer. Bathing was also proving difficult and even with a bath chair, sitting down and getting back up was awkward. Instead there is now a walk-in shower, which has made life immeasurably more manageable. “My occupational therapist Carol has organised every single thing to make sure I'm all right” said Jean. Without these modifications, Jean said there was no way she would have been able to stay in her home.

Despite running close to five figures, the alterations to Miss Foreman's home have been carried out and paid for by the local authority, leaving her only to fund an administration fee of £50. Even having the work done was not problematic, with the stair lift taking just a day to install. Happily able to remain in her home, she simply added: “That is the most important thing to me.”