FROM INTEGRATION TO UNIVERSAL DESIGN:
THE HABINTEG STORY

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Mission Statement
Universal Housing Solutions for the whole community
We will provide high quality homes and services to suit the needs of our customers,
By:
Building accessible, adaptable and affordable housing;
Working with strategic partners to deliver innovative solutions;
Campaigning for universal, inclusive design and accessible housing

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FOREWORD
Habinteg has a remarkable history and is now established as the leading national provider of accessible, inclusive, housing.

Our history and values give us a solid base on which to build.

This book has been produced to mark our first thirty years, illustrating our pioneering work. But we also know much still needs to be done in the housing field.

We are looking confidently ahead to the future. This future, we believe, lies in universal design and services. This is an exciting progression from today’s high standards in accessible housing.

We will achieve universal housing through careful design, new technology and construction and innovative management.

Our history, reflected in this book, shows what can be achieved. This history challenges us to take our next step – truly universal housing.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Chairman and the Board would like to thank Professor Malpass for producing this concise and measured history of Habinteg Housing association and its achievements
INTRODUCTION

Habinteg is a modestly sized housing association with a big ambition. But unlike other associations where ambition is associated with size and rates of growth, Habinteg’s aim is no less than to change the way society is organised. At the heart of its philosophy is the idea that people with impairments are disabled by a society which is organised in a way that denies them the right and opportunity to participate in the sort of everyday activities that other people take for granted. This connects with and encompasses a very wide set of issues and debates, about employment, welfare benefits, styles of care provision and control over key life decisions. Within this wider arena Habinteg stands for the integration of residential environments in such a way that people with disabilities are enabled to live independently within an ordinary setting, not shut away in institutions nor segregated in special housing schemes. Its contribution over the years has been, first, to show that it is possible to design, build and manage accessible housing on mixed developments, and, second, to promote the ideas of integration and universal housing as principles that should underpin all new provision.

The aim of this book is to explain how the Habinteg philosophy was formulated and how the vision has been turned into reality over the thirty years since 1970. It is the story of the evolution of an idea as much as the growth of an organisation. That evolutionary process can be divided into three stages, showing a broadening scope, moving from a narrow focus on disabled people, through to an interest in the design of buildings in general. First, there was the idea of independent living for disabled people, closely followed by recognition of the need to marry independence with integration into the community. The third stage consists of a widening of perspective; first to embrace the notion of Lifetime Homes (homes that can be adapted to meet changing needs) and then universal design (a broader commitment to flexible architecture). From its very first scheme Habinteg recognised that disabled people living independently could actually be more isolated than in an institution if they had no physical access to homes and other buildings in their neighbourhood, hence the emphasis on integration and accessibility. In this context independence has to mean more than living alone, in one’s own home; it means being in control of one’s life, managing everyday decisions about expenditure and about where and how to live.

Habinteg is an unusual housing association, for although it is classified by the Housing Corporation as a general needs association, and the majority of its tenants are not disabled, it is nevertheless the case that disabled people are its raison d’être. And although the association has maintained an active building programme, and now owns over 2,000 dwellings, its central purpose has always been the promotion of ideas, rather than just the provision of housing. Back in 1970, when a group of people with an established interest in disability came together to form the association, things were very different: public attitudes were generally less accepting of disability and disabled people had fewer opportunities to work and to lead independent lives. Although many disabled people lived with their families in the
community, there was virtually no provision other than large residential institutions for those who needed special support or facilities. This was naturally a worry to many parents of disabled children looking to the future, and Habinteg is one of a number of organisations springing, at least in part, from parental concern about what was on offer within the welfare state.

The idea that even quite severely disabled people should be free to live independently was then scarcely credible. In particular, the vast bulk of existing housing was highly unsuitable for people in wheelchairs, and although the large amounts of new building that had taken place since the War were much better in many ways than dwellings from earlier periods, nothing had been done to make modern housing wheelchair user friendly. Government housing policy had concentrated on tackling the twin problems of the serious overall shortage of accommodation and the need to replace worn out ‘slum’ housing. In this context the needs of groups such as elderly and disabled people were overlooked, or delegated to voluntary housing associations. Associations specialising in elderly people had proliferated since the War, albeit on a small scale until the arrival of Anchor and Hanover in the 1960s, but there was less for people with disabilities. However, 1970 proved to be something of a turning point, with the creation of Habinteg and the John Grooms Housing Association (which specialises in provision for people with physical disabilities), and the passing of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons’ Act. This Act placed on local authorities statutory responsibilities for the provision of assistance with the adaptation of the homes of disabled people and the provision of additional facilities designed to secure ‘greater safety, comfort or convenience’. There was, of course, a long way to go in order to convince the general public and providers of new housing that disabled people could live in the community and that all new housing should be accessible to them.

The Habinteg story shows what can be achieved by a combination of skill and determination, but it also reveals what a slow and uphill struggle it has been. The purpose of this account is to trace the development of Habinteg, and to locate the Association in the wider context of the campaign to improve the position of disabled people in society. The next chapter looks at the issue of disability in general and changes in social attitudes, driven forward in large part by the emergence of a powerful lobby voicing the demands and needs of disabled people themselves. The following three chapters focus more directly on Habinteg and follow its development chronologically from its formation through to the present. The final chapter is forward looking, reflecting on past achievements and raising some questions about where the Association is, and should be, going in the first years of the new century.

Peter Malpass 2001
CHAPTER 1: HOUSING, DISABILITY AND SOCIETY

Disability comes in different forms, and different degrees of severity. Ideas about disability and the position of disabled people in society have changed considerably over time. One thing that has remained pretty consistent until the recent past has been the marginalisation of disabled people, in terms of their participation in activities that the majority of the population take for granted. In the past it was generally accepted that disabled people could not live independently, earn their own living alongside non-disabled people or make choices about their lives. In this sense they were denied full citizenship rights. But in more recent times, broadly co-incident with the period since the foundation of Habinteg, public attitudes have begun to change, the legislative framework has strengthened the rights of disabled people and, above all, disabled people themselves have begun to voice their demands much more articulately and effectively than ever before. This has led to a lively debate about the nature of disability and to the questioning of previously taken for granted perspectives. In order to understand the history of Habinteg it is necessary to locate it in the context of these wider changes and to appreciate that the Association has been part of a discourse that has involved many other actors and institutions.

Models of Disability

Traditionally disabled people have been seen as hapless victims of tragic and random circumstances, placing the individual outside the range of normal variation, and to a greater or lesser extent outside society. This has been described as the personal tragedy theory of disability, placing the focus on the individual, and identifying disability as a condition of the individual. An aspect of this individual model of disability was the medicalisation of the situation. Although it has to be acknowledged that advances in medical knowledge and skill have enabled more disabled people to live longer and more active lives, criticism of the conventional approach to disability argued that to try to treat it medically tended to hand power and control to medical professionals, and led to the housing of disabled people in medical establishments. In addition disabled people were generally excluded from the labour market, and therefore forced into dependence on family, charity or state welfare support, although some were able to pursue successful careers and others earned a living in segregated workshops.

The key feature of the individual model of disability is the focus on special provision for disabled people. A quite different approach derives from the social model of disability, which was originally formulated by Vic Finkelstein and developed by Michael Oliver and others in the 1980s, drawing on campaigning work by organisations run by and for disabled people. The social model locates the problem of disability firmly in society:

It is not individual limitations, of whatever kind, which are the cause of the problem but society’s failure to provide the appropriate services and
adequately ensure the needs of disabled people are fully taken into account in its social organisation (Oliver, 1996: 32).

According to this view, it is necessary to make a distinction between impairment, which is about the individual, and disability, which is something imposed by society on top of impairment. Society can be organised so as to be open or closed to participation by people with impairments, and in practice the dominant mode is closed and disabling. In 1976 a document called The Fundamental Principles of Disability, produced by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, set out the aim of seeking 'the necessary financial...and other help required from the state to enable us to gain the maximum possible independence in daily living activities, to achieve mobility, undertake productive work and to live where and how we choose with full control over our lives' (quoted in Oliver, 1996: 25). This emphasis on independence, mobility and choice is shared by the Habinteg philosophy, and shows that from the start the association's approach was based upon ideas very close to those that later became formulated as the social model of disability. In terms of the actions implied by the social model, the focus is completely different from the individual model, with the emphasis being placed on wider environmental measures. Rather than making special provision for disabled people the social model suggests that barriers to mobility should be removed so that they have meaningful access to the same facilities and opportunities as everyone else.

Policy Developments

Habinteg has developed over the last thirty years in a period of rapid and profound change in social policy. Some of these changes have been of undoubted benefit to disabled people, but others have worked in the opposite direction. It is ironic that in the aftermath of the Second World War when the development of the welfare state was built on ideas of universalism and inclusiveness the needs of elderly and physically disabled people were generally neglected. The development of social policy in the late 1940s is sometimes seen as part of the post-war settlement between capital and labour - and thus it is not surprising that the needs of groups excluded from the labour market were given only marginal attention. Such an interpretation would be consistent with the notion of disabled people being denied full citizenship rights. While Section 29 of the National Assistance Act, 1948, empowered local welfare authorities to develop domiciliary services for people with various impairments there was no duty to do so (except in relation to blind people), and so in practice very little was achieved. Moreover, although the Act referred to the specific needs of younger physically disabled people, most local authorities continued to provide for them within residential homes for elderly people.

Since the mid-1970s the welfare state has come under increasing pressure to change, first because of economic crises and then a more ideologically driven desire to cut public expenditure. More recently, although the rhetoric has shifted to new ground, the pace of change has certainly not slackened. Two policy developments that have had a big impact on Habinteg are the emergence of community care and the growing emphasis on housing associations as the main providers of social rented housing. Both can be traced back to the 1960s. Community care has become almost
universally accepted as a desirable objective and as such it occupies a central place in social policy. Over the years there has been much debate about what community care actually means but there is agreement that it means care outside large, closed institutions, and that it implies integration rather than segregation. As such it is clearly allied to the Habinteg approach, and in this sense then the Association has been working with the grain of public policy.

The development of policy during the period of Conservative government from 1979-97 is a long and complex story, but the emphasis continued to be on the closure of long stay hospitals, while another key element has been the theme of service user empowerment. In 1987 the government appointed Sir Roy Griffiths (a supermarket executive) to review community care policy and to produce new recommendations. The Griffiths Report (1988) pointed to the history of lack of co-ordination of local authority departments, the NHS and the Department of Social Security. It proposed that local authority social services departments should play the lead role in future, but in the context of a ‘mixed economy’ approach embracing public, private and voluntary sector providers. Although the Report was criticised for its apparent failure to recognise the importance of housing in the successful implementation of a community care policy, it clearly implied a greater role for voluntary sector service providers such as Habinteg. In due course, the NHS and Community Care Act, 1990, brought in a series of reforms designed partly to empower service users by giving them a voice in the production of the new care assessments. However, the funding of care continued to be characterised by great complexity, and this has now led to the proposals contained in the 1998 document, Supporting People, due to come into effect in 2003. At the centre of the new policy is the separation of Housing Benefit (which is intended to cover housing costs only) from the funding of care packages. Implicit in the new system will be greater independence for service users, who, in principle, will be able to exercise more choice and control in relation to both housing and care providers.

Most disabled people, of course, have always lived in the community, usually with their families of birth or marriage, and a landmark in the development of policy towards disabled people was the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act, 1970. This Act made local authorities responsible for discovering the numbers of disabled people living in each district, and required them to offer a range of services. The Act was promoted by Alf Morris, MP, a good friend to Habinteg, whilst there has been debate on how effectively the Act was implemented, it was at least a start and a genuine attempt to move forward. As far as housing was concerned, the Act required local authorities to ‘have regard to the special needs of chronically sick or disabled persons’ when discharging their duties under the Housing Act, 1957. Nothing in the Act required private builders (or housing associations) to take the needs of disabled people into account in any way. Further legislation, the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act, 1986, and the more recent Disability Discrimination Act, 1995, made further progress, although this too has been criticised and seen as reinforcing the view of those who point to the lack of real commitment towards disabled people. However, the charge that the Act lacked teeth was countered by the establishment of the Disability Rights Commission, in
April 2000. (This important new body is chaired by Bert Massie, a Habinteg tenant and Board member.)

Turning briefly to the growth of housing associations; in the 1960s there was a burgeoning of activity as new associations were set up to tackle a range of housing needs. The churches were involved in promoting new associations, but other significant sources of financial assistance in the second half of the decade were the Greater London Council and Shelter. The Housing Act, 1974, introduced Housing Association Grant (HAG), and expanded the role of the Housing Corporation as the regulator of associations. This put housing associations onto a much more secure financial basis, and brought them towards the centre of housing policy. For the first time they were freed from the besetting problem of how to raise sufficient capital while still charging rents that were affordable by people on low incomes. Output by associations rose quite rapidly after 1974, but after 1979 the change of government led to a generally downward trend throughout much of the 1980s. Initially the Conservatives placed greatest emphasis on the growth of home ownership, mainly via the sale of council houses, and housing associations suffered from being bracketed together with the public sector.

However, towards the end of the decade there were important policy changes. Top priority remained the further expansion of home ownership, but a more thought-out strategy for rented housing was put in place, in recognition of the continuing need for a substantial supply of affordable rented housing. In this context housing associations really came to the fore, as local authorities were finally forced to stop building new houses. The volume of funding for new investment by associations was greatly increased, and they were encouraged to raise private finance to stretch available funding across more dwellings. Over the next few years the level of grant fell from over 80 per cent of approved capital expenditure to an overall figure of 54 per cent, requiring associations to borrow large amounts of private finance, and to raise rents in order to meet interest charges. After a peak in 1992-93 the government began to cut the total amount of public expenditure going into support investment by housing associations, and the number of new homes fell by more than 50 per cent by 1999-2000. Nevertheless, the success of associations in raising £14 billion from private lenders between 1989 and 1998 secured their position as major players in the provision of social housing.

As a housing association with a continuing development programme, Habinteg has played its part in making a success of private finance and other policy initiatives in recent years. It has undoubtedly benefited from the changes in social policy described above, and has contributed to making a success of new ways of providing for disabled people. But the Association should also be seen as an active member of the disability movement, involved in helping to bring about policy changes and shifts in public understanding of disability.
CHAPTER 2: TURNING VISION INTO REALITY

The origins of Habinteg lie firmly embedded within the Spastics Society (now known as Scope), which was set up in 1952 to provide services for people with cerebral palsy, many of whom were wheelchair users living in institutions of various kinds. The Society rapidly became a highly successful fund raiser, mainly via a football pools scheme based in Bristol. Its resources went into providing a variety of services, including special schools and residential establishments in different parts of the country, often in rural locations. There were also industrial projects providing employment for disabled people, with hostels associated with them. But from the point of view of parents of children with cerebral palsy there was nothing to ease their natural anxiety about what would happen to their offspring when they became adults, and later when they themselves were no longer around to provide care and support. In a situation where the inadequacies of institutional provision were becoming much better known, and were increasingly under attack, it was necessary to look for some alternative. This issue was under discussion within the Spastics Society, and sometime in 1969, the Assistant Director (Services), Derek Lancaster-Gaye, perceiving the advantages of providing housing for disabled people in the community, conceived the idea of setting up a housing association as a means to this end. There was some scepticism about the proposal and it was not immediately accepted. Lancaster-Gaye recalls that among the sceptics was the chair of the Services Committee, Alex Moira, who said in committee that he did not think it would work but that they should go ahead anyway. In order to gain support for the idea of a housing association Lancaster-Gaye decided to work up a demonstration project. Having been responsible for service development at the Society for ten years he had many contacts around the country, and in this way he was able to identify a possible site in Manchester. Another piece of preparatory work was a visit made by Lancaster-Gaye and Moira to Professor Sven-Olov Brattgard, a specialist in disability research at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Brattgard was himself a wheelchair user who was concerned with a wide range of design issues, not just housing. He had started an organisation, Fokus, which was to some extent the inspiration for Habinteg. The Fokus concept consists of 10-15 apartments for disabled people, dispersed throughout standard blocks of flats, each of the special units being connected to a support centre which is staffed 24 hours a day to provide personal support when required (Ratzka, 1990: 13-14).

The name Habinteg continues to arouse curiosity, but its origins are quite clear: it emerged on a train journey to Manchester, during a discussion between Lancaster-Gaye and the architect of the Manchester scheme, David Wager. Playing around with various possibilities they came up with the Latin phrase *habitus integrans*, meaning integrated housing. It is important to be clear that Habinteg was always about more than simply providing appropriate housing for disabled people in the community; it was understood from the start that the objective was the integration of housing for disabled and non-disabled people within each development scheme. A second key feature of the Habinteg philosophy was promotion of the integrated living idea as something that others could and should adopt. Local authorities and some housing associations had built accommodation for wheelchair users, but these had generally
been built together in identifiable groups, and with no intention of making surrounding dwellings accessible to the wheelchair users. Thus the distinctive contribution made by Habinteg was to argue that dwellings for disabled people should not be readily distinguishable from other housing, and that houses lived in by non-disabled people should be accessible to their disabled neighbours.

There has always been an evangelising, campaigning aspect to the work of the Association, marking it out from other organisations. Typically housing associations have been formed by groups of people coming together and motivated by a desire to tackle some perceived need within a particular locality. However, Habinteg was different: first, the housing need that it was addressing was not local but national, and second, its aim was to go beyond provision of accommodation and to demonstrate models of a particular design philosophy and to urge others to adopt the same approach. This helps to explain an apparent paradox at the heart of the Association: from the start Habinteg set out to build across the whole country, but growth for its own sake has never been a priority.

Habinteg was registered with the Registrar of Friendly Societies as an Industrial and Provident Society with charitable rules in February 1970. As such it was necessary to have a committee of at least seven people, and these seem to have been assembled largely by Derek Lancaster-Gaye from people associated with the Spastics Society. The first meeting of the management committee was held on 10 April 1970, at the central London offices of the Spastics Society. Present at the meeting were four members of the Committee, Alex Moira, Derek Lancaster-Gaye, Peter Rigby and Sir Leslie Thomas. Moira, an architect by profession, had been one of the founders of the Society and was at that time a vice chairman; he became the first chair of Habinteg, a post he retained until 1988. As already mentioned, Lancaster-Gaye was a Society employee, and Habinteg's first honorary secretary; Thomas was treasurer of a Spastics Society college in Tonbridge Wells, and became Habinteg's first treasurer. Peter Rigby was a member of the Executive Council of the Society, and at that time Conservative leader of Haringey Council in London; he was also, as mayor of Hornsey in the early 1960s, the founder of the Hornsey Centre for Handicapped Children. Other members of the committee were Herbert Palmer, chairman of Glaxo and vice chair of the Spastics Society, Clifford Hilditch, Director of Social Services in Manchester, and also a member of a Spastics Society committee, and finally Dr A Pigott, a Manchester GP. All except Dr Pigott, then, had close links with the Society, and this continued to be the pattern for several years. Indeed, Habinteg's links to the Society were so close that Lancaster-Gaye says he used to refer to it as the Spastics Society's housing arm - this was at least an effective way of securing co-operation from people who were already used to working with the Society.

The three key people at this stage were Alex Moira, Peter Rigby and Derek Lancaster-Gaye. Moira, as chairman from the start, brought to the Association both his skill as a designer and his experience of setting up and running the Spastics Society. For nearly twenty years he was the guiding hand behind the development of the Association. Rigby had valuable political connections, and the power of his position which meant that the Association was able to procure and develop its first
site. Lancaster-Gaye, however, seems to have provided both the network of contacts from which the Committee was formed and from which key partners and consultants were drawn; he also provided the major input of time and effort needed to make things happen.

Initially the close links to the Spastics Society provided an invaluable lifeline. The Association had no income - the first dwellings were not occupied and generating rents until the middle of 1973 - and so it relied heavily on support from the Society and its sympathisers. Staffing inputs came from within the Society, and the first identified employee, Kathie Williams, had previously been Lancaster-Gaye’s personal assistant. She became Habinteg’s Administrative Officer, and over the next five years she carried day to day responsibility for much of the development of the Association. At the end of 1971 the Association moved to its own offices in Duke’s Mews, just off Oxford Street in central London. These offices belonged to the structural engineers Pell Frischman, who were closely associated with the Society, and who provided quantity surveying services to Habinteg for a number of years. The Society provided the bulk of the start-up and early running costs of the Association, in the form of a grant of £58,000.

Habinteg was founded in the period before the introduction of generous capital grants for housing association schemes, and before the emergence of the Housing Corporation as the main funder of their work. It was also before the introduction of mandatory rent allowances (the forerunner of Housing Benefit), and thus there were questions about rents and the capacity of tenants to pay the rents generated by new building. How, then, could the Association hope to establish an active building programme? The besetting problem that had held back the growth of housing associations throughout most of the twentieth century was the difficulty of raising sufficient capital, but during the 1960s a number of local authorities, mainly in London, had become much more receptive to approaches by associations seeking loans. For the first time it had become possible to expect to raise up to one hundred per cent of necessary loan finance from local authorities. From the outset, therefore, the Association, mainly in the person of Derek Lancaster-Gaye, was in active discussion with a number of local authorities across the country about possible developments to be funded by the councils. Indeed, so active was Lancaster-Gaye that a feature of the surviving records from this period is the amount of effort that went into working up schemes that never came to fruition. The minutes of 10 December 1971 reflect the evident frustration of the members: ‘The Committee felt that efforts should now be more concentrated on positive developments rather than unlikely or hypothetical schemes which involved the Association in valuable time and wasted effort’. At their next meeting they decided to pull out of the Manchester scheme which has been referred to above, after being in negotiation for two years (Minutes of 21 January 1972).

By the end of 1970 the Association had a promotional brochure ready for distribution to target local authorities in the major cities across England; the Committee expressed the view that it would be desirable to establish projects ‘in cities such as Newcastle, Liverpool, Nottingham, Bristol and elsewhere’ (Minutes of 18 December 1970). It should also be noted that at the same time the Association
was in contact with authorities in Scotland and Northern Ireland. When the first scheme was nearing completion, in mid-1973, it was said that it was the first of 23 projects then being planned by the Association (Moira Close Opening Ceremony Press Release).

Although the Association was clear about the objective of providing mixed developments, combining dwellings for disabled and non-disabled people, there is no written record of how the appropriate balance was decided. Memories differ as to how the figure of 25 per cent finally emerged as the norm or target for dwellings to be designed to full wheelchair standard. In practice the proportion of homes for disabled people has varied considerably from scheme to scheme, as the following table shows:

Table 1. Percentages of Early Habinteg Schemes Devoted to Disabled People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moira Close</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddock Wood</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ossett</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epworth Street</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peterborough</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bossom Court</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarm</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemlington</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By way of explanation, it should be pointed out that Paddock Wood and Peterborough are very small (just 8 dwellings each), the latter being interspersed within a development of social housing. Neither is in any way typical of Habinteg schemes. At the other end of the scale, the Hemlington estate is the largest project yet undertaken by the Association (210 dwellings in two phases), too large to justify a quarter of all dwellings being for wheelchair users.

The minutes from the early 1970s contain references to several discussions about whether to undertake rehabilitation schemes as well as new building. At that time rehabilitation was becoming a major activity among some of the better known and fastest growing associations in London. From the Habinteg point of view new building was much more straightforward, in the sense that it is easier to design for disabled people rather than to re-design existing buildings. Another factor here was that rehabilitation often involved individual houses, scattered about, and this was not consistent with the idea of integrating a mix of dwellings in close proximity to one another. Although rehabilitation was discussed repeatedly, and not ruled out, in practice the only such work undertaken by the Association has been as part of new build schemes, i.e. where an old building is to be retained amidst newly built houses.

Moira Close, Haringey

The first successful scheme, Moira Close, was developed at Lordship Lane, Haringey (hard by the Broadwater Farm estate which later gained notoriety for the riot that took place there in 1985). This scheme was under discussion from the second
meeting of the Committee in July 1970, by which time an architect had already been identified. Three weeks later the Committee had a long debate, with the architect, Mr Roman Halter, about his proposals, so at that stage things seemed to be moving quite rapidly. The Association was clearly benefiting from having Peter Rigby as a member, for he was able to secure the agreement of Haringey Borough Council to the provision of both the site and the necessary loan to enable the development to proceed. He also suggested at that time that the Association should make a film of the development as it progressed, and this was agreed - an early sign of the Association's proselytising approach. The film idea was quickly followed by others, including a 'sod cutting' ceremony at the Lordship Lane site.

This first scheme was developed during a period of very confused and rapidly changing financial arrangements for housing associations. The outcome was the introduction of a new form of assistance, Housing Association Grant, which covered around 80 per cent of approved capital costs, but it was not available for Moira Close. Instead, the scheme was funded by a loan of £572,200 from Haringey Borough Council (including £123,000 for the land). Initially, at least, there was also a 'welfare grant', paid by the Council, of £50 per year in respect of each of the dwellings for disabled people. Although subsequently Habinteg developed a detailed design guide for housing for disabled people, at first there was felt to be little precedent and the architect's brief was worked out as the design process proceeded, with committee members poring over the plans in some detail. The design of the estate comprised two storey brick and tile construction, set in an open plan layout around a series of pedestrian courtyards. The Association's emphasis on integration meant that the whole scheme was designed with the needs of disabled people in mind; thus all dwellings were provided with level or gently sloping access for wheelchairs, and also wide doorways and room to turn a wheelchair. The press release issued to mark the official opening emphasised the unique nature of the Association and the pioneering quality of the first scheme; it was claimed that Moira Close was the first integrated housing project of its kind in the country. It is worth quoting from the accompanying information sheet, which shows how, as early as 1973, the Association was advancing a perspective that years later came to be referred to as the social model of disability:

The Moira Close scheme is an attempt to combine integration and independence of disabled people in the community with the emphasis on integration; a situation that provides disabled people with the opportunity for self-determination and the chance to make the day to day decisions that we take for granted.

The scheme was built by Taylor Woodrow-Anglian. A major construction firm working on a small development of just 58 dwellings, for a small and inexperienced housing association was probably a combination likely to run into problems. The project got off to an unfortunate start when the Minister of Housing, Julian Amery, who was conducting the sod cutting ceremony, made a speech that was more concerned with government housing policy than with Habinteg and the novel features of the scheme. In the run up to the London Borough elections, due in May 1971 (when the Conservatives lost control of Haringey and 19 other Boroughs),
this was perhaps irresistible, but it is still remembered as an unfortunate turn of
events by those who were present, mainly because it was blamed for the lack of
press coverage of the event. To make matters worse, although work began on site in
the spring of 1971, 1972-73 proved to be a period when many builders ran into
difficulties, especially in the recruitment of skilled labour, and delays were
commonplace. As it turned out the planned first lettings in October 1972, with
completion in January 1973, were considerably delayed, and the first group of 37
tenants did not move into Moira Close until the summer of 1973, with the final set
of first lettings being delayed until the autumn.

The opening ceremony was performed by none other than the Prime Minister, Mr
Edward Heath. Opening ceremonies are all about gaining publicity, and the higher
the profile of the guest of honour the more and better the publicity gained. Even
though the scheme was in London and not far from Westminster, the procurement
of such a high profile VIP must be taken as a tribute to the unique and pioneering
nature of Moira Close. It was also a sign of the Association’s ambitious stance and its
understanding of the need to publicise its ideas and achievements. The idea of the
film of the development had not gone entirely according to plan, and filming did not
take place until the scheme was finished. However, the film was made and used to
spread news of the Association’s intentions.

The first tenants were selected mainly from lists of people nominated by the
Borough Council. It is standard practice for associations developing schemes
supported by a local authority or the Housing Corporation to offer a proportion of
vacancies to nominees of the local council, but Habinteg’s promotion of its principles
also led to applications coming from disabled people from far and wide. It is
important to note here that part of the Habinteg approach from Moira Close
onwards has been that disabled people are just as likely as anyone else to be part of
multi-person households, and therefore the dwellings designed for people in
wheelchairs must vary in size; in the case of Moira Close the wheelchair dwellings
are designed for 2, 3 and 5 person households.

As the construction stage ground slowly towards completion there was discussion at
the Committee about how best to manage the dwellings. Consideration had been
given to contracting out the management function (Minutes of 21 May and 16 July
1971), which at that stage was considered to be preferable to undertaking housing
management within the organisation, but in the end it was decided to undertake the
work in-house. This was an important decision, because it led to the adoption of the
Association’s distinctive system of Community Assistants, who live on site and
provide support services to tenants. Community Assistants differ from wardens in
sheltered housing schemes, in the sense that they underpin independence while the
warden symbolises the surrender of a degree of independence by an elderly person
moving from their own home. The idea of the system was that disabled tenants
would be able to combine independence and privacy within their own dwelling with
the security of knowing that there was someone on hand in case of need. Right
from the start there was an electronic call system installed so that tenants could
contact the Community Assistant at any time of the day or night. (Although this
provided valuable reassurance for tenants, in the early days there was no relief
system to back up the Community Assistant, who was, therefore, constantly on
duty.) Nevertheless, Jo Braine (Habinteg’s first housing management worker)
remembers that she received numerous letters from doctors who were opposed to
the principle of giving independent tenancies to their severely disabled patients, on
the grounds that their welfare would be endangered.

The open plan layout of Moira Close was described as ‘a village-like
development...set among lawns, trees and flower beds, giving an attractive rural
atmosphere’ (Opening ceremony press release). Even allowing a little poetic licence
this seems a little over the top, but for a scheme dating from a period when the
design of affordable housing often left quite a lot to be desired, Moira Close has
stood the test of time. The low rise, domestic scale of the scheme stands in marked
contrast to its immediate neighbour, the Broadwater Farm estate. The success of
Moira Close may be explained by the quality of the original design and layout, and
the high quality of scheme management provided by the resident community
assistant. There were some early and expensive roof repairs to be done, and the
first heating system was expensive and unsatisfactory, and had to be replaced, but
the overall concept has proved successful, and the open plan layout has not been
eroded by tenants enclosing patches of ground outside their homes. Another
indicator of success is that there are still several original tenants in residence.

**Other Schemes from the 1970s**

Moira Close has been discussed in some detail because of its significance as the
Association’s first scheme. Habinteg was in active negotiation with a number of
local authorities, but there were no more dwelling completions until 1977. A
Schedule of Developments dated February 1973 lists 26 locations, although many of
these never came to fruition. Two small schemes that did go ahead, however, were
at Peterborough and Paddock Wood, Tonbridge Wells. In both cases funding came
from the local authority.

It has already been shown how long it could take from inception to completion, and
surviving files for the Hemlington (Middlesbrough) scheme tell a similar story. The
first meeting between representatives of Habinteg and the council in Middlesbrough
took place in May 1974, and by October discussions had progressed to the point
where it was proposed that a start on site might be achieved in August 1975, with
first completions in June/July 1976. In practice completion was delayed by two years,
giving a period of four years from inception to first tenants moving in.

**Table 2. Schemes Developed in the 1970s**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>No. dwellings</th>
<th>Date of completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moira Close, Haringey</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddock Wood, Kent</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clifford Court, Ossett</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemlington, Middlesbrough, phase I</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After 6 years Habinteg had little to show for all the effort that had been expended, but over the next three years, by 1979, the Association had succeeded in establishing itself as the leader in its field, with schemes strategically located in different parts of the country. Any assessment of achievements in the 1970s would need to take account of both internal factors, specifically the inevitable need to generate momentum, and external factors, mainly the difficulties in the building industry in the early part of the decade and the uncertainty around the financial arrangements for housing associations in general. Habinteg also had the problems of persuading local authorities of the value of its particular approach, and then finding suitable sites. The location of Habinteg schemes has been seen as especially important because of the needs of wheelchair users for level or gently sloping sites with good, easy access to local facilities.

Habinteg’s early development of several schemes in the north Yorkshire and Teesside area were designed by the architects, Sykes, Able and Trotter, based in Stokesly, just south of Middlesbrough. (Previously known as Sykes and Able, the firm also designed the Ossett scheme). The partner most closely involved with Habinteg was Edwin Trotter, who developed a special interest in designing for people with physical impairments, and later became involved in the development of the concept of Lifetime Homes. The Hemlington scheme was part of a larger peripheral development undertaken by the Borough Council, and its size (the two phases taken together are by far the largest project ever undertaken by the Association) reflects the scale on which some local authorities were then working. Funding for the scheme was provided in the form of a mortgage loan by the Council rather than by the Housing Corporation. Incidentally, it should be mentioned here that although the local authority provided the loan, the scheme would still have qualified for Housing Association Grant, covering about 80 per cent of the capital cost. On the design and specification of Hemlington, there is evidence on file to show that there were early discussions about the proportions of dwellings to be provided for different groups: in January 1975 Derek Lancaster-Gaye proposed 20 per cent for disabled people, 5 per cent ‘mobility homes’, and 20 per cent for elderly people. Later he sent two pages of detailed comments on the design as it stood at April 1976. Other committee members were also involved in the details: Alex Moira returned a set of drawings of house plans and kitchen and bathroom layouts with a note saying, ‘Lots of comments I am afraid. But there seem to be matters of principle which we must sort out’. This highlights the degree of involvement of committee members at that time, justified (if need be) by the particular pioneering project on which the Association was engaged.
On the question of where the Association should develop new schemes, there was pressure from the Housing Corporation for it to confine its activities to the regions in which there were existing schemes. The Association, however, was sternly opposed to this view, arguing that it should be allowed, and helped, to meet the pressing need for housing for disabled people, wherever it occurred. In order to cover the whole of the United Kingdom, in 1976 the Association set up a separate organisation, Habinteg Ulster (this was necessary because it was not legally possible for English-based associations to operate in Northern Ireland). Initially this Association had virtually the same committee as its parent, although it gradually acquired more Ulster-based members. Habinteg (Ulster) was operating in a very different environment from its parent in England (local authorities had lost their housing responsibilities to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in 1972, and housing associations were not yet a major presence in the province), and the new association was not able to complete its first scheme until 1982. Since then it has completed 1,000 dwellings and has become one of the larger associations in Northern Ireland. In Scotland and Wales the Association sought to develop without a separate organisation, but to no avail during the 1970s. In due course, the Scottish Spastics Society set up its own housing association, now known as Horizon. The three associations maintain close links and share the same basic philosophy.

**Organisational Growth**

Reference has already been made to the important role played by the committee, and in particular by Derek Lancaster-Gaye, who travelled far and wide on Association business. In a very real sense they were the Association in the early years, before staff numbers increased. The committee met regularly, every six weeks. In December 1971, following the death of Sir Leslie Thomas, the committee decided to try to recruit a woman to the number, and in March 1972 they were joined by Lady Barbara Bossom, who was then president of the Herefordshire Spastics Society. She now recalls with affection the early meetings (before the Association became ‘a grown up organisation’), and the heady feeling of being part of such a small organisation with such grand ambitions. The committee then remained unchanged until the death of Dr Pigott in December 1974, and his replacement in May 1975 by Joyce Smith (a member and future chair of the Executive of the Spastics Society). From then onwards, however, new members of the committee came from outside the Spastics Society and gradually the organisation assumed greater independence. Nevertheless, Habinteg continued to draw on the Society for financial support. For instance, in 1977 the Association sought a loan from the Society to help with cash flow difficulties (mainly attributed to the heavy debt charges arising from Moira Close), and in 1978 the Society agreed to make an annual grant of £15,000 (initially for five years) to be paid into a reserve fund to cover expenditure directly beneficial to disabled tenants.

For some time Kathie Williams, initially working from within the Spastics Society, was the only employee of the Association. In July 1971 the committee decided to seek suitable offices and to employ two members of staff. After the move to Duke’s Mews financial services continued to be provided by the Society for several years, and outside consultants provided specialist contributions. As in many emerging
housing associations at that time (and as is common in business generally) established personal contacts were the basis for collaboration, and the Association can be said to have been run in a much more informal way than would be possible today. As the organisation grew, at least in terms of the number of schemes in the pipeline, there was discussion (January 1976) of the possibility of opening regional offices, in Bolton and Leeds. Kathie Williams left in 1976, to be replaced by Norman Summers, who moved from a post as Head of Development at the Spastics Society. He was given the title of Director in 1978. By the end of the decade the head staff consisted of the Director, a Development Officer, a part-time Finance Officer (until 1979 the Association continued to receive financial services from the Spastics Society), and two Housing Officers, plus support and scheme based workers. It was, therefore, still a very small organisation, and the workload on the two people responsible for development (Libby Chilton) and housing management (Jo Braine) was considerable - in the three years 1977-79 400 new dwellings were brought into management. Finding suitable tenants for all these new dwellings, widely spread across the country, was clearly a demanding task. On the departure of one of the housing officers in 1979 it was decided to base the new appointment in the north, working initially out of the scheme in Ossett.
CHAPTER 3: GOSPEL BEFORE GROWTH

The title of this chapter borrows a phrase used within Habinteg to indicate that increasing the number of houses and flats has always been less important than spreading the Association’s philosophy of integration. The idea of gospel before growth is linked to a theme mentioned by several staff and committee members, that the Association’s objective was to work itself out of a job. In other words, its task was to show what could be done, to set a standard that others could then adopt and follow.

During most of the 1980s housing associations in general had a pretty hard time. The Conservative government elected in May 1979 had some very clear and firm views on housing, the most important of which was that growth in home ownership was a desirable policy goal. The right for council tenants to buy their homes at substantial discounts from the market price was introduced in October 1980, and over 1 million council dwellings were sold during the 1980s as a whole. Housing associations suffered from being bracketed with local authorities as part of the public sector, and, indeed, it was only as a result of a campaign by the NFHA that charitable housing associations (including Habinteg) were exempt from the right to buy. Resources for new building were scarce as the government concentrated on trying to curb public expenditure, and completions by housing associations ran on a downward trend through to 1988. The difficulty facing Habinteg during the 1980s can be inferred from the aggregate figures for new building of wheelchair and mobility standard dwellings. The total number of new wheelchair standard dwellings built by housing associations in 1979 was 129, and by 1990 the figure had fallen to just 67. Over the same period the decline in the number of new mobility standard dwellings was even greater (Laurie, 1991: 5).

1981 was the United Nations International Year of Disabled People, but as far as disabled people in Britain were concerned it was the start of a period of ups and downs.

On the one hand, disabled people, who are always likely to be disadvantaged in the labour market experienced rising unemployment as well as cuts in welfare spending. Changes in housing policy had particularly undesirable consequences for disabled people. In addition to the declining output of wheelchair housing by local authorities and housing associations, the switch to greater reliance on the private sector was bad news for disabled people, because on the whole private builders are simply not interested in providing specialised or accessible housing. It should be noted here that when the Building Regulations were extended in 1985 to provide for access for disabled people, housing was specifically excluded.

On the other hand, the 1980s saw the burgeoning of the disability movement, in which disabled people began to organise and speak up for themselves more loudly and more effectively than in the past. For Habinteg and its tenants, despite the generally hostile policy environment, the 1980s was a time of definite progress. By 1985 the Association had doubled in size, and altogether it completed over 800 new dwellings between 1980 and 1990. The Association also matured as an organisation,
becoming more professional in its management, and turning itself into a housing organisation focused on disability, as distinct from a voluntary organisation for disabled people that happened to provide housing. The social origins of the Association in the Spastics Society continued to be important throughout the 1970s, but during the next ten years the links were loosened as new staff were appointed and new committee members recruited from outside (this was a process helped along by pressure from the Housing Corporation, which wanted to see a more independent Habinteg).

Stock Growth

Table 3: Schemes Completed in the 1980s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers of Dwellings</th>
<th>Wheelchair Units</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nunhead, Southwark</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronte Close, Barnsley</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Werdyke, York</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilda Sq, Whitchurch (Bristol)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halifax Drive, Telford</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy Johnson Ct, Hull</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montgomery Cl, Norwich</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willow Vale, Hammersmith</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatrice Rd, Southwark</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illingworth Pl, Milton Keynes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dovecot St, Stockton</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1985-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glebe Rd, Gillingham</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barracks Field, Wrexham</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermitage Rd, Roche (Cornwall)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herringthorpe I, Rotherham</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herringthorpe II</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devonshire Ave, Leeds</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bossom Ct, Liverpool</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downham Rd/Hertford Rd</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1988-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hackney</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>234</strong></td>
<td><strong>596</strong></td>
<td><strong>830</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Development in the 1980s got off to a flying start, with the first scheme to be completed being opened by the prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. At Tappesfield Road/Barset Road, Nunhead, south London, the Association built 92 flats and houses adjacent to local authority and nineteenth century private housing. The estate was designed by the Design Research Unit, a large firm of architects and designers responsible for several Habinteg schemes (including Bristol, Milton Keynes and Telford). In this case the local authority pedestrianised parts of three streets, enabling a largely traffic free environment to be created, within which the architects designed a mix of flats and two and three storey houses. In keeping with the Habinteg approach, the units for disabled people are dispersed around the scheme, and it is difficult to distinguish them from the general needs properties. A feature of the design is the way that the general needs houses ‘wrap over’ the flats for wheelchair users. This means that the general needs houses have their front door at ground level, along with their kitchen/dining room, which is therefore accessible to wheelchair users (although it has to be said that the ground floor WC is not wheelchair accessible). From the start the flats for disabled people were linked to the Community Assistant’s house and office by a communication system.

The opening ceremony, in September 1980, was rather less successful than Edward Heath’s visit to Moira Close, mainly because, in the Labour stronghold of Southwark, Margaret Thatcher was heckled by demonstrators, and because she was not inclined to stick to the itinerary and route planned for her. According to committee members who were present the visit was reduced to something of a fiasco, but, nevertheless, it must be counted as a coup for a small housing association to have secured the presence of two prime ministers to open its schemes. It is ironic that it was Margaret Thatcher who opened the Nunhead scheme, for it was one of the last estates to be completed before her government abolished the Parker Morris space standards, allowing providers to reduce the size of new houses, when, as everyone involved with housing for disabled people knows, a little bit more space inside the dwelling is what wheelchair users need most.

After Nunhead two schemes were completed in 1981, in York and Barnsley, but it was really from 1983 onwards that there was a steady stream of new housing becoming available for letting, in localities widely spread across the country. At Milton Keynes in 1985 the Association celebrated completion of its 1000th dwelling. Meanwhile, Habinteg Ulster had completed its first schemes, at Bangor in 1982 and at Holywood and Poleglass in 1983. However, developments in Wales and Scotland continued to be frustrated. It was not until 1987 that Habinteg was able to complete its first, and so far only, development in Wales, at Wrexham. However, by 1989 it had become clear that the policy of the recently established Tai Cymru (the result of splitting the Housing Corporation into three separate organisations covering England, Wales and Scotland) was to give grant allocations only to associations based in Wales. Attempts to establish a presence in Scotland continued until at least 1984, but proved fruitless, and in 1988 the Scottish Council for Spastics set up its own housing association, known as Horizon.
In England it was also sometimes a struggle to persuade the Housing Corporation that Habinteg had something distinctive to offer. The minutes of the committee meeting of 23 September 1985 record that:

Committee members were surprised that some staff in the Housing Corporation’s regional offices still did not understand the Habinteg approach nor the complexity of wheelchair housing. It was agreed that there was a continuous need to publicise and explain the complexity of design and management of housing for wheelchair users.

Libby Chilton recalls that although there was a norm of 25 per cent provision for disabled people in each new scheme, there was always a need to negotiate with the local authority supporting the project, and to reflect local needs and circumstances. The figures in Table 3 (page ?) show that there was no such thing as a standard Habinteg scheme, and that both overall size and the proportion of dwellings for disabled people varied a lot. Overall, however, 28 per cent of the Association’s output in the 1980s was for disabled people. During the 1980s the Association developed its first projects specifically for disabled people who required high levels of care. Bronte Close, Barnsley, completed in 1981, consists of a total of 53 dwellings, two of which comprise a staffed group home for people with learning disabilities; at Oldbrook, Milton Keynes, the Association agreed to allocate 10 of the 20 bungalows for disabled people to people referred by the local Social Services Department because of a need for extra care; and also at Milton Keynes Habinteg acted as developers for a scheme providing for 40 people in shared flats managed by MacIntyre Care Ltd. These schemes, and others that came later, reflect both the widening scope of the Association’s activities and its willingness to respond positively to the pressures on all housing associations to enter into partnership arrangements with other service providers.

A Maturing Organisation

For a long time, Habinteg was essentially an offshoot of the Spastics Society, and although it was a registered housing association from 1975 the staff continued to be people with no previous experience in housing work. The first full-time finance officer, David Adams, was appointed in 1980, from a post in the Spastics Society, but he was the last such appointment and from then onwards things began to change. A significant factor in this was the Housing Corporation, and one way of looking at the history of Habinteg is to see it as gradually moving from under the wing of the Spastics Society, increasingly into the sphere of influence of the Corporation. By 1983 there were no longer any Spastics Society staff on the Habinteg committee (although the Society was then invited to send an observer). The following year the Housing Corporation’s monitoring process led to praise for the Association’s housing management performance but also to the suggestion that more housing management expertise was required on the committee itself.

Norman Summers retired as Director in 1983 and was replaced by Debby Ounsted, who was the first person to be recruited from another housing association. People who worked for Habinteg at that time say that it was already a special organisation
which generated strong commitment and loyalty. Debby Ounsted’s arrival meant that for a while the three key posts of director, housing manager and development manager were filled by women, which was unusual in housing associations at that time. Ounsted is highly regarded in the housing association world, and within Habinteg she is seen as both a very good manager and a highly successful ambassador for the organisation. Building on the achievements of her predecessors Ounsted is credited with transforming the Association, and raising its external profile. One of her first challenges was to deal with a budgetary problem, in the form of a large accumulated deficit arising largely from two schemes. At Milton Keynes there were substantial costs to be borne on a project that was abandoned at a late stage, and on a scheme in Hammersmith it had been necessary to undertake a re-design after the initial tendering process had been completed.

Over the next few years Ounsted began the twin tasks of developing the professionalism of the organisation as a housing provider, to reflect its increasing size (and the expectations of the Housing Corporation), and strengthening the promotional side of the Association’s work. Moving the Association into new offices was one sign of growing independence, and in 1985 this was achieved by a move to 10 Nottingham Place, Marylebone (this was just two doors away from where the housing reformer Octavia Hill had lived when she started her work in the 1860s). Unfortunately, although the new offices were centrally located they did not provide good access for disabled people, a factor which was later to contribute to another move.

As the Association grew larger it became more difficult to manage everything centrally, and, as mentioned earlier, it was decided in 1979 to divide housing management responsibilities on a north-south basis, with the northern base located on its Ossett estate. However, this was only a temporary measure, and in 1982 the northern office was moved to Bradford. Later in the decade, in 1987, a northern support group was established, chaired by committee member, Dr David Robertson, and in due course this became the Northern Regional Committee with a degree of devolved decision making power. By this stage, 1989, 45 per cent of the stock was located in the Housing Corporation’s north east region. At the same time, a southern regional office was opened in Wimbledon, and later another regional committee was established.

**Spreading the Word**

It is generally agreed among committee members that, although the dictum of gospel before growth was understood, the public relations and proselytising activity needed to be improved. Debby Ounsted devoted considerable effort to writing and speaking about the Habinteg philosophy, and in 1986 a new committee member, Richard Walker-Arnott, was recruited because of his expertise in public relations. The time was right for Habinteg to become more influential - to punch above its weight, as one insider has put it - because the wider housing community was becoming more aware of the need to provide better and more appropriate homes for people with disabilities, and because the disability movement itself was gathering momentum. Debby Ounsted was lobbying at Housing Corporation head quarters to move
disability issues up the agenda, she was publishing articles and papers on the subject and in 1985/86 she was involved in setting up NATWHAG (National Wheelchair Housing Associations Group). This was a group of five associations (Habinteg, John Grooms Association for the Disabled, Cheshire Foundation Housing Association, Raglan HA and the Shaftesbury Society HA) with an established interest in disability. Two important publications, written by Debby Ounsted, *Disability - Need it be a Handicap?* (1986), and *Wheelchairs no handicap in housing* (1985) both helped to draw attention to the issues and to raise the profile of the Association. Also in 1985 Habinteg produced its first *Design Guide*, initially for internal use but later for sale to the wider audience of housing providers. In November 1986 more good publicity was obtained when Habinteg featured on the front cover of *Voluntary Housing* (the monthly magazine of the NFHA) and an inside story discussed the Milton Keynes scheme, officially opened by the local MP in September.

In 1988 the Committee agreed to the idea of making a promotional video, although fund raising was a slow process and the project never came to fruition. As the 1980s drew to a close there were other things to worry about - in particular, the impact of the new funding regime for housing associations. Apart from the challenge of setting their own rents for the first time for fifteen years, housing associations had to come to terms with a grant system which transferred development risk to associations themselves, and which required them to raise large amounts of investment capital from private lenders. This raised important questions for the housing association movement as a whole, but from the point of view of specialist associations it raised specific questions about whether their activities could continue to be funded. In a sense, therefore, Habinteg was thrown on to the back foot, defending what had been achieved, and arguing for the protection of associations’ ability to build for disabled people. In the event, the 1990s turned out to be an exciting decade of progress for the Association. In 1997 NATWHAG (National Wheelchair Housing Association Group) chaired by Habinteg’s Chief Executive Mike Donnelly, worked with Home Housing Trust and the Housing Corporation to publish the ‘Wheelchair Housing Design Guide’. This was written by the architect Stephen Thorpe –also a Habinteg committee member.
CHAPTER 4: ‘LIFETIME HOMES’

During the 1990s Habinteg continued to build new schemes (adding nearly 700 units to its total stock), but the key themes of this period were the Association’s role in the development of ‘Lifetime Homes’ and the promotion of the extension of Part M of the Building Regulations to include housing.

Policy Context

At the start of the 1990s housing associations were still coming to terms with the changes that had begun in the late 1980s. All new lettings after January 1989 were on assured tenancies, rents set by associations were to be at ‘affordable’ levels (i.e. higher than they had been under the fair rent system), and new building was to be funded by increasing proportions of private finance. For the first time they were given the lead role in social housing, and resources for new investment were increased substantially: by 1992-93 total investment by housing associations was three and a half times the amount in 1988-89. However, this was the high point, and there was then a series of increasingly severe cuts, reducing the Housing Corporation’s Approved Development Programme to less than the 1988-89 level by the end of the decade. When the new financial regime came into operation there was at first no suggestion that associations would face a steep decline in the grant rate (the amount of government support per dwelling), nor that they would be plunged into a period of cut-throat competition for the declining resources at the disposal of the Housing Corporation. Nor was it clear that the policy of letting rents rise to cover the costs of private finance would be put into reverse in the second half of the decade, or that the transfer of local authority housing to newly formed associations would become a central plank of policy of both the outgoing Conservative government and the incoming Labour administration after 1997 (with profound long term implications for what used to be thought of as ‘voluntary housing’). A final general comment on the 1990s is that a turbulent decade from the point of view of housing associations closed with increasing pressure on them to change with the times: some of the largest and best known associations have changed their names, merged or entered into group structures, diversified their activities and/or re-launched themselves as social investment agencies.

Throughout all this turmoil Habinteg remained remarkably untouched. As government initiatives came and went, with damaging consequences for some associations, Habinteg retained its independence and stuck to its established principles, providing high quality integrated living environments for disabled and non-disabled people. This is not to say, of course, that the Association was unchanged or that it opted for a quiet and easy life - far from it, for this was the decade when Habinteg campaigned most energetically and effectively for improvements in housing standards.

Expanding the Business
One effect of the changed policy environment of the 1990s was that housing associations had to think more commercially, if only to come to terms with the implications of private finance and the increased risks of new development. In the first part of the decade there was certainly plenty of investment capital available, but increasing proportions of it were channelled towards the established ‘superleague’ of large associations, making it harder for smaller developing associations, like Habinteg, to attract grant allocations. In Habinteg’s case there was also the problem of costs and standards: wheelchair housing is inevitably more expensive than general needs housing, and the principle of visitability meant that Habinteg’s general needs housing required more generous space standards than were being accepted by some associations. During the early 1990s when the pressure was on associations to produce the largest number of dwellings for the least public expenditure per unit, Habinteg resisted the temptation to reduce standards, with the result that its unit costs were seen by the Corporation as rather high, adding to the difficulties in attracting substantial grant allocations. Another interesting feature of this period is that the Housing Corporation began to encourage associations to expand geographically, and to compete in new areas. It is ironic, given the history of the Corporation’s attempts to persuade Habinteg to consolidate in certain regions, that by the 1990s Habinteg consciously avoided becoming over-stretched by further rapid geographical expansion. It also avoided expansion through buying completed properties ‘off the shelf’, on the grounds that speculatively built private houses would not meet the Association’s exacting access and space standards.

The rate of growth of any housing association is, ultimately, dependent on the amount of grant that it can attract. During the 1990s Habinteg struggled to maintain the size of its grant allocation from the Housing Corporation, suitable sites were becoming more difficult to obtain at affordable prices, and on average schemes were only half as big as in the 1980s (22 dwellings compared with almost 44). Looking at the achievements of the 1990s as a whole, the figures in Table 4 show that a quarter of all new dwellings built by Habinteg were for wheelchair users. They also show that, as in the 1980s, London and Yorkshire and Humberside continued to be the two main areas for new building. By the end of the decade development had become more geographically focused (in Hull, Bradford, Blackburn, Cornwall and the south east), representing a marked change of emphasis from the early days when anywhere and everywhere was considered. The new approach is an inevitable response to the demands of managing a growing but dispersed stock and the economic advantage to be gained from concentrating in certain areas.

Table 4. Schemes Completed in the 1990s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme</th>
<th>Wheelchair Units</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lion Close, Lewisham</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackfriars Ct, Ipswich</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pendean Ct, Liskeard</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+group home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
John St & Weatherly Cl, Rochester  6  26  32  1991
Off Talbot St, Chesterfield  5  23  28  1991
Clifton Rd/White St, Birmingham  1  2  3  1991
Park Rd, Hull  13  21  34  1991
Royal Orchard Cl, Wandsworth  13  16  29  1991
+ group home

Duffield Dr, Tottenham  7  7  14  1992
Shapland Way, Enfield  7  16  23  1992
Wesley St, Ossett  2  6  8  1992

Carn Brea Lane, Cambourne  8  23  31  1993
Dart Cl, Phase I, Strood  6  15  21  1993
  "  "  II "  6  8  10  1993
Morris Ct, Chingford  8  15  23  1993
Maryland St, Newham  7  18  25  1993

Blenheim Cl, Oswestry  9  21  30  1994
Stephenson Ct, N Shields  7  22  29  1994
Whinney Banks, Middlesbrough  5  18  23  1994

Pageant Ave, Colindale  7  23  30  1995
Bilton Grange, Hull  11  41  52  1995
Royal Quays, N Shields  8  28  36  1995

Chauncey Cl, Edmonton  2  14  16  1996
Broadway East, Rotherham  1  3  4  1996

Cordingley Cl, Bradford  2  5  7  1997
Rhoyds Phase I, Bradford  2  5  7  1998
Marshall Cl, Roche, Cornwall  2  10  12  1998
Delamark Rd, Sheerness  -  10  10  1998
Summergroves, Hull  1  -  1  1998

Minehead Rd, Hull  9  31  40  1999
Gipsyville, Hull  4  14  18  1999

Total 172 498 670

One important fact not revealed in the table is the changes in the standards of new building: from 1994 all new dwellings built by Habinteg have met Lifetime Homes standards, which represent a significant improvement on the past.
Lifetime Homes

The emergence of the concept of Lifetime Homes marked an important step forward in the Habinteg story; Alex Moira described it as the most exciting development in the twenty year history of the Association up to that point. Hitherto, the Association had stood for the provision of integrated housing environments, but with Lifetime Homes it moved on to espouse a wider vision. The established Habinteg approach was essentially based on two distinct types of housing, homes for wheelchair users and for non-disabled people. The latter were designed to ‘mobility standards’ and were therefore accessible to wheelchair users, but were not intended to be lived in by them. The concept of Lifetime Homes represents a step change in thinking, for it is based on the recognition that while very few people require to use a wheelchair for the whole of their life, a larger proportion need to do so at some stage, often in old age. The principle underlying Lifetime Homes is that new houses should be designed so that they are both readily accessible to visitors in wheelchairs and easily adaptable to enable a wheelchair user to live there (albeit at less than full wheelchair standard). Rather than thinking in terms of two categories of people, disabled and non-disabled, Lifetime Homes is about designing for everyone.

The term Lifetime Homes was first used in connection with a project launched by the Helen Hamlyn Foundation, in 1989, and applied at that time to the needs of elderly people. Debby Ounsted saw that the concept had wider application, and considerable relevance to the Habinteg approach, but required more development resources than could be generated by the Foundation and/or the Association. Therefore, she and the director of the Helen Hamlyn Foundation approached the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, run by a former housing association man, Richard Best, and a steering group was formed to carry things forward. After Ounsted’s departure from Habinteg, Mike Donnelly who was then development director, advised on technical matters and took a main role on the steering group. He became actively involved in the technical sub-committee that worked on developing the criteria for Lifetime Homes. The objective was to devise a set of standards that would make the dwelling accessible to and usable by people with disabilities from the start and adaptable to increasing infirmity over time. Thus it was necessary to ensure that there was sufficient space, appropriately configured, to allow for wheelchair mobility, and to ensure, for example, that bathroom walls were suitably constructed for the secure attachment of grab rails, but not, initially, to provide the rails themselves. Reaching agreement about the criteria was not just a technical matter, because there was the unavoidable question of cost: would Lifetime Homes be affordable within the funding systems approved by the government and the Housing Corporation? It has to be acknowledged that in the early 1990s all the pressure on housing associations was to reduce costs, and so it was not a good time to be proposing increases in new build standards, especially if there were significant cost implications.

However, a set of 16 criteria was finally agreed within the Lifetime Homes group. These criteria were then worked up into house plans by the architect Edwin Trotter, whose long experience of designing Habinteg schemes for disabled people made him a leader in this field. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation promoted Lifetime
Homes in various ways. Mike Donnelly was appointed as an adviser on Lifetime Homes and for two years he and two other advisers toured the country running workshops and seminars. Joseph Rowntree Foundation also ran a series of publications, the first of which was called simply, *Lifetime Homes*, 1993. This laid out the sixteen criteria, which are reproduced below:

**Lifetime Homes Standards**

1. The car parking space must be capable of enlargement to 3300mm width.
2. The distance from the car parking space to the home should be kept to a minimum and should be level or gently sloping.
3. The approach to all entrances should be level or gently sloping.
4. All entrances should be illuminated and have level access over the threshold, and the main entrance should be covered.
5. Communal stairs should provide easy access and where homes are reached by a lift, it should be wheelchair accessible.
6. The width of the doorways and hallways should conform to specifications allowing wheelchair access.
7. There should be space for turning a wheelchair in dining areas and living rooms and adequate circulation space for wheelchair users elsewhere.
8. The living room should be at ground floor or entrance level.
9. In houses of two or more storeys, there should be space on the ground floor or entrance level that could be used as a convenient bed-space.
10. There should be a ground floor or entrance level wheelchair accessible WC, with drainage provision allowing a shower to be fitted in the future.
11. Walls in bathrooms and toilets should be capable of taking adaptations such as handrails.
12. The design should incorporate provision for a future stair lift and a suitably identified space for a through-the-floor lift from the ground to the first floor.
13. The design should provide for a reasonable route for a potential hoist from the main bedroom to the bathroom.
14. The bathroom should be designed to incorporate ease of access to the bath, WC and wash basin.
15. Living room window glazing should begin at 800mm or lower and windows should be easy to open/operate.

16. Switches, sockets, ventilation and service controls should be at a height usable by all (i.e between 450 and 1200 mm from the floor).

From the Habinteg point of view, the key advances over the standards previously achieved by the Association are the provision for a through-floor lift, identification of a potential hoist run from the bed to the bathroom, and for a shower to be added at entrance level. But more generally, the term Lifetime Homes has given fresh coherence and impetus to the wider Habinteg project of trying to persuade everyone to build more accessible and inclusive homes. These standards have been incorporated into all new Habinteg dwellings designed since the early 1990s, and in 1992 the Association produced an updated design guide, which was successfully marketed to other housing providers. The success of the guide led to it being described as ‘the authoritative design guide and technical manual for special provision for wheelchair users in integrated social housing schemes’ (Goldsmith, 1997: 345).

However, although Lifetime Homes represented a significant step forward, the standards remained optional. The Housing Corporation supports Lifetime Homes but its Scheme Development Standards do not require registered social landlords to comply fully with the sixteen criteria. There are really two main problems to be overcome. One is the problem of persuading people to change the way they think about designing for disability, moving away from a focus on special provision for disabled people towards an approach which puts consideration of disabled and older people at the forefront of any design. The other problem is, of course, cost. This is partly the age old problem of the tension between short-term savings in initial construction costs against the longer term expense in the form of running costs or conversion, the cost of adaptations at a later stage can be prohibitive. Habinteg has been involved in a lot of work to show that Lifetime Homes can be constructed without undue additional expenditure, but ultimately there is no escape from the fact that Lifetime Homes have to be built to somewhat more generous space standards than is generally the case in modern housing, especially at the cheaper end of the private sector.

**Extending Part M to Housing**

On the whole, private builders have shown virtually no interest in building houses suitable for disabled people. Their approach is driven by market forces, and they have generally regarded provision for disabled people as a welfare responsibility of the state and its agents the housing associations. Thus the Habinteg philosophy had made no headway in the private sector, and the only way that builders would change their approach would be in response to regulations applicable to all. The first national Building Regulations were established as recently as 1976, but they had nothing to say about disability. However, during the 1980s there was some progress on making new buildings accessible to and usable by disabled people. A campaign to change and improve the situation - in effect to give some teeth to provisions within
the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act, 1970 - culminated in what became Part M of the revised Building Regulations issued in 1985. Part M dealt specifically with public access to buildings other than housing. The Access Committee for England (which had been set up in 1984 by the then Minister for the Disabled, Sir Hugh Rossi – later a Habinteg committee member) started to campaign for Part M to be extended to housing in 1990, but it was a long and contested struggle, for the representatives of private builders argued against any change that might add to costs.

The extension of Part M was a cause taken up by Mike Donnelly who convinced the director, Richard Best, of Joseph Rowntree Foundation, that it was a necessary underpinning for Lifetime Homes. By establishing a statutory minimum to be met by all house builders a revised Part M would provide a higher baseline, albeit short of full Lifetime Homes standards. It would be a demonstration of an official change of approach and expectation that the needs of disabled people had to be taken into account in the construction of all houses. The Conservative government ran a consultation exercise on proposals to extend Part M, but did not move any further before the general election in 1997. Labour’s opposition spokesman, Nick Raynsford, had promised action, and when in office he was instrumental in setting up a working party, involving Mike Donnelly (by then the director of Habinteg) together with others appointed as representatives from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the House Builders Federation.

Inevitably perhaps, debate within the working party was polarised, with the HBF representatives contesting the principle and then the practicality of extending the regulations. They were concerned about the difficulty of constructing a reliably watertight level threshold, and the cost implications of larger ground floor areas, wider circulation space and the provision of a second, entry level, WC. Extending Part M to include the full set of Lifetime Homes criteria was never a realistic expectation, but eventually agreement was reached, and, in October 1998, revised regulations were published, and took effect from October 1999. The new Part M regulations, therefore, are less demanding than Lifetime Homes, which are themselves less generous than wheelchair standards. Part M homes are designed for ‘visitability’ by disabled people. They do not necessarily provide homes disabled people can live in comfortably and do not give flexibility to respond to individuals changing needs. From the Habinteg point of view, therefore, there remains much work still to be done.

Organisational Change

Before leaving the 1990s it is necessary to mention some other aspects of change in the Association. Organisationally, Habinteg had been following the logic of regionalisation: once the number of dwellings to be managed reaches a certain point it begins to make sense to decentralise staff and decision making. It has been mentioned already that Habinteg had located a housing manager in the north (John Bell) from the early 1980s, and that a regional committee for the north was also in existence. These sorts of developments were welcomed and encouraged by both local authorities and the Housing Corporation, especially during the early and mid
1990s. If housing associations were to take over from local authorities as the main providers of social rented housing, and if there was to be competition amongst them, then from the point of view of local authorities it was clearly better to work with associations that had some visible presence on the ground in areas where they were managing property. As a result there was a trend among geographically diverse associations to establish local offices and regional committees, to demonstrate local accountability.

However, nothing stands still for long in management circles, and by the end of the decade ideas were changing. Habinteg’s board decided in 1997 to restructure the organisation, moving away from an area base towards a functional structure. This meant abolishing the two regional committees and setting up three new committees dealing with specific issues across the whole of the Association’s area of operation (these committees are: Finance and Resources, Marketing and Development and Operations). The staff were also reorganised into functional departments, albeit with a regional presence, reflecting the fact that the properties are where they are and must be managed locally. Thus the Association continues to operate in the north from its office in Bradford, although the southern regional office was closed and merged with the head office when it moved to new premises in central London in 1998.

Like other associations in the 1990s, Habinteg changed the name of its management committee to the board. Membership also reflected changed expectations about representation and accountability: for example, in 1991 Bert Massie became the first disabled person to join the committee, and more recently there has been a policy of recruiting more tenants members. Other changes of note include the retirement of founding chairman Alex Moira, in 1995, after twenty five years. He had retired from the chair in 1988, and his successor, Peter Rigby, handed over to Michael Holyer in 1994. On the staff side, Debby Ounsted moved to the Octavia Hill Housing Trust in 1992, and her successor, Caroline Cayzer, moved on within a year, to be replaced by Mike Donnelly.

Finally, during the late 1990s the Association reviewed the role of community assistants. The community assistants are a distinctive feature of the Habinteg approach, providing a valuable estate based service to all tenants, but especially to those with disabilities. While some old-established housing organisations (such as the Guinness Trust) moved away from their tradition of resident estate managers, Habinteg retains its commitment to this approach, which is arguably of increased relevance in the present period. Amongst other things, the review of the role of community assistants widened their contribution to day to day housing management, while defining their working hours in more conventional terms (i.e. relieving them of the responsibility of being on duty to deal with emergency calls twenty four hours a day). This has meant, on the one hand that community assistants have more paper work to deal with, while on the other hand, a call centre service was put in place to deal with emergencies when they are off duty.
CHAPTER 5: The future - Universal Housing

Looking Back

The first thirty years of the Habinteg story have taken place against a background of rapid social and economic change. Housing associations have made great progress, in terms of growth, openness, customer orientation and partnership working. They have come in from the edges of housing policy, to occupy a position where they are central to the achievement of government objectives. This transformation has both advantages and disadvantages. Now housing associations have far more resources at their disposal than in the period when Habinteg first started its work, but it is arguable that then they were freer to innovate and to pioneer the sorts of new approaches developed by Habinteg over the years. As housing associations have become instruments of housing policy they have had to accept more regulation and more steering of their activities in directions set by government priorities.

Nevertheless, Habinteg is an example of an association that has maintained a very clear view of its own priorities, successfully pursuing its course despite the difficulties. Perhaps the greatest challenge came from the 1990s emphasis on quantity over quality. It would have been easy to compromise on principle, but the Association chose this very moment to argue for higher standards, in the form of Lifetime Homes and the extension of Part M. This apparently high risk stance has proved to be successful. Moreover, the fact that Habinteg did not take on huge debts to private lenders has meant that it is now financially healthier than it might have been under a growth-at-all-costs strategy.

It is important to recognise that Habinteg has stuck to its principles but has not become stuck in a rut. It has continued to move forward in terms of both stock growth and the ideas that it exists to promote. What was different about Habinteg when it started was its insistence that independence for disabled people was essential but not enough - they must not be isolated by their independence, and therefore the visitability of neighbouring houses was established as a fundamental principle. Over the years Habinteg and its architects refined and improved the design of homes for people with disabilities, but then they moved on to Lifetime Homes, designed to be suitable for anyone and everyone.

Looking Forward

Habinteg is now established in all Housing Corporation regions in England, it has its sister associations in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and it is setting up links with other countries, building on the widespread interest that has been shown in its work. During 2000 the Association completed its 2000th dwelling, changed its corporate logo and colour scheme, and set new challenges for itself. Lifetime Homes are not yet required in England even in new social rented housing, and although Part M now applies in the private sector as well, it falls some way short of Lifetime Homes. And, anyway, Lifetime Homes are not the end of the story. The association
that set out to work itself out of a job has helped to move the targets forward onto new ground.

However, the changes that have occurred in the first thirty years of the Habinteg story are a reminder of the unpredictability of the future. The growth of the disability movement and the restructuring of the welfare state were not widely foreseen. In 1970 housing associations were very much junior partners, heavily reliant on local authorities for development loans. At that stage no one foresaw the transformation that would be brought about by the introduction of housing association grant, just four years into the future. Even when housing associations were given the lead role after 1989, few, if any, could have believed that by 2000 we would be discussing the prospect of registered social landlords taking over from council housing as the second largest tenure category in the country.

The publication of the government’s green paper on housing (Quality and Choice: a decent home for all (2000)) provides some indication of the general framework within which the Association will be working over the next few years at least. From the point of view of an interest in disability, a striking feature of the green paper is that despite the emphasis on quality there is no sign of any government commitment to higher standards of design for new housing. Although Lifetime Homes standards are to become mandatory in new social housing in Wales and Northern Ireland, and in Scotland there is a barrier-free approach, there is no reference to similar moves in England.

Nevertheless, the results of the comprehensive spending review, announced shortly after the publication of the green paper, do promise much higher levels of investment in new building by housing associations, and the announcement of a higher grant rate for 2001/02 gives further comfort. Despite the reticence of the green paper, there are grounds for cautious optimism that the near future will prove to be a more a favourable climate for the promotion of new ideas about housing, housing design and housing services.

**Universal Housing Solutions**

Habinteg is already exploring and developing these new ideas, recently it has committed itself to the concept of Universal Design.

The organisation has decided to move on from being just a provider of high quality specialist housing to become an advocate for an approach to design in which the distinctions between disabled and able-bodied people melt away. This reflects a crucial leap in the development of the Habinteg philosophy. It is an important inversion of normal practice; instead of making special provision for disabled people as a kind of add-on to the ‘normal’ environment it is about starting from the position of saying that what is good design for disabled people is good design for everyone.

The dictionary definition of universal is,” Common to all cases, unlimited, all embracing, general; applicable to all purposes or conditions”. Habinteg has worked up into its own definitions:
• "Universal design and services respect human diversity, promoting inclusion of everybody.
• Universal housing defines good homes as attractive, easy and comfortable to use by the widest range of users.
• Universal housing is an ambitious vision; a way of working to provide thoughtful and flexible designs and services, ensuring total inclusion, irrespective of age, culture, background, ability or disability"

The concept is a growing world-wide movement and has been largely promoted in the U.S.A. and Canada where many organisations have taken it forward. There, they are taking it across many areas, including inclusive employment, inclusive communities and universal accessibility. In practical terms, this applies to economics, housing, transport, social policy, technology and consumer products. In Europe too, termed as ‘Inclusive design’ the movement is growing.
In this country, these ideas are really just beginning, but must take off over the next few years, as the benefits become obvious to all. It fits very well with the Government's policies on Social Inclusion and the changing demographics of an ageing society.
Already the organisation exceeds the standard Lifetime Home criteria in design.
Universal design is the ultimate goal, an environment free of barriers and excluding no-one. To bring the journey and the debate to its full circle the environment built to universal design standards meets the original aspirations of the Social Model of Disability. For Habinteg, implementing universal housing is the logical extension of the founding principles.

Conclusion

This history of Habinteg began by noting that it was an organisation with a mission to change the way society is organised. Over the thirty years since 1970 it has refined and broadened its ambition but the commitment remains as strong as ever, indeed stronger. Such a grand objective was never going to be achieved in a short period, but it is interesting how difficult it has been to get the message across. It is not particularly complex or difficult to understand that disabled people are denied basic social rights by physical environments, products and services that prevent them participating in activities that everyone else takes for granted. Nor is it the case that it is impracticable to deal with the problem and to produce accessible buildings and neighbourhoods.

Habinteg is well placed to meet the challenges of the future and promote and develop truly universal housing.

References


**Back cover text**

This book traces the journey from a simple idea of social justice for disabled people in housing to the growing concept of universal housing, producing designs and services that can be used by everybody.

From the early stages of integrated design, Habinteg has progressed to providing thoughtful and flexible housing, ensuring total inclusion, irrespective of age, culture, background, ability or disability.

It is the story of a remarkable housing association, pursuing its very clear vision of the future.
To discuss how Habinteg can help you achieve your objectives, please contact: Habinteg Housing association 1 Pemberton Row, Fetter Lane, London EC4A 3PQ. Tel 020 7822 8700 Fax: 020 7822 8701

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