

# design and access statements: the access element



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Ensuring good accessibility for everyone in the approach to buildings is best dealt with at the planning application stage. Suitably designed spaces allow disabled people to use all of their senses, aiding their understanding and comprehension of spaces and allowing them to participate fully within a safe, healthy and inviting environment for anyone to enjoy.

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## introduction

The pilot group of 16 authorities that are sharing their learning on the use of Design and Access Statements accompanying planning applications have identified a need for guidance on the content of the access part of the statement. There has been some uncertainty about the relationship between this part of the statement and the requirements under part M of the Building Regulations and responsibilities under the DDA.

The aspect of 'access' that applies in the Design and Access Statement essentially derives from the influence of statutory planning on the external environment and the development of land and buildings. Ensuring good accessibility for everyone, including people with disabilities, in the approach to and between buildings is best dealt with at the planning application stage and in the pre-application discussions that lead to the formulation of a Design and Access Statement.

## site wide issues

Accessibility is likely to be limited and influenced by the existing physical environment and topography. The external spaces and integral infrastructure is one of the most important factors and is affected by a number of aspects such as the existing and required levels, gradients, roadways, approaches and operational issues.

Access requirements will influence the position and siting of the building/s and should be considered early in the process in reaching agreement on the levels and locations of key functions. This should take into account not only arrival, departure, parking and drop off but also access onto and across the site, to and between other buildings and functions.

There is a misconception that, so long as the footpath is not too steep, it can be as long as you like. Imagine trying to wheel yourself or climb a height of over one metre - it doesn't matter how shallow it is, you still have to make the ascent. Building Regulations recommend that when the level change gets too great, an alternative means is provided, i.e. mechanical lift. This has a huge impact on costings and on locations of functions and buildings.

There are many sites which have changes in level which are excessive. This then requires an assessment and understanding of the priorities; when and where to find management solutions or design physical solutions. This should all be explained within the Design and Access Statement.

## what do they need to contain

Circular 01/06 "Guidance on Changes to the Development Control System" makes it clear that the access component of statements relate only to "access to the development" and does not therefore extend to internal aspects of individual buildings.

The access section of the statement should generally explain how access arrangements will ensure that all users will have equal and convenient access to buildings and spaces and the public transport network. It should demonstrate how the access policy accords with relevant policies in local development documents, and how consultation on access issues has informed the design.

To the extent that they are relevant to the planning application and the site, the items in the following checklist may provide appropriate information and decisions regarding travel to the site and movement around it and into any buildings or structures:

- understanding of the function of the building, including any relevant operational implications, out of hours use, dual functions, etc
- understanding of the influence of external factors such as topography

- any standards of inclusion, ethos, policies and criteria used
- vehicular and transport links external to the site
- access to social amenities both within and in close proximity to the site - setting the accessible social context
- infrastructure within the site including, parking, drop off, access between buildings and functions, etc
- approaches to the site and entrances within the site including levels, travel distances, lighting, use of wayfinding techniques such as textures and tone, and safety considerations
- access for emergency services, circulation around the site and egress points for the evacuation of buildings in an emergency
- pedestrian, cycle and vehicular routes and the detailed arrangements of them
- relevant amenities within the site (if a large redevelopment) toilets, health, education, leisure, etc

## stage of development

What is contained within a statement will be dependent upon the scale, size, function and complexity of a scheme and whether it accompanies a detailed or outline application. An access statement for an extension to a community centre will obviously vary enormously from one relating to the masterplan for a large development area.

What is important is that inclusion is considered as part of an holistic design approach and that those issues which could have a dramatic affect upon the design, location of buildings and costings need to be considered at the very early stages.

## summary

Ensuring inclusion within our external environments has often been overlooked in the past.

The external landscape can be hugely beneficial for disabled people. Suitably designed spaces allow them to utilise all of their senses, aiding their understanding and comprehension of spaces and allowing them to participate fully within a safe, healthy and inviting environment for anyone to enjoy.

The Design and Access Statement should record and show the decisions that have been made to remove barriers to people with disabilities within the physical environment.



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