



access all areas

planning for an inclusive environment



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executive summary

An environment which is inclusive and accessible recognises that people have different needs and different ways of using the environment; it celebrates this diversity and is safe, predictable, sustainable and sufficiently flexible to be used by everyone regardless of age, gender or disability.

This case study considers how 12 local planning authorities are working to achieve inclusive and accessible environments by incorporating the philosophy and principles of inclusive design into robust planning policies and supplementary planning documents and into their decision making. It demonstrates how authorities who do this well see accessibility and inclusive design as fundamental planning considerations which should be taken into account by planners and others right through from scheme conception and design to construction and use. As well as helping to make buildings and environments significantly more inclusive and accessible these practices also help to ensure that the planning process itself is more inclusive.

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what's it got to do with me – the planning context

Planning Policy Statement 1 (PPS1) promotes sustainable communities as a fundamental principle underlying planning; planning and development which encompasses good access is an essential part of this. PPS1 states that plans should contain inclusive access policies that promote high quality inclusive design. It emphasises that 'Planning authorities should plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider area development schemes.' All development should contribute to the creation of a safe, sustainable, liveable environment and mixed communities with good access to jobs and key services for all members of the community. Proposals which fail to do this should not be accepted. The planning system is therefore right at the heart of developing and promoting social cohesion and inclusion.

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Documents to be prepared with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development. One of the fundamental aims of sustainable development is social progress that recognises the needs of everyone. Inclusion and sustainable development are therefore inextricably linked.

This Act also introduced compulsory Design and Access Statements; local authorities should ensure that these effectively address the principles of inclusive design and explain how the needs of disabled people have been explicitly integrated into the proposals.

Local authorities should also ensure that planners' duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 to promote disability equality are effective by implementing the actions in the planning department's disability equality scheme.

Local authorities which take this seriously have begun to weave equality for disabled people into the culture of their authorities in



practical and demonstrable ways. This means including disabled people and disability equality in policy development and actions from the outset, rather than focusing on individualised responses to specific disabled people. It is about planning for equality at the beginning of the planning process rather than trying to add it at the end.

Wigan and many other authorities have appreciated that accessibility is a material planning consideration and that the earlier that accessibility is integrated into the development process the better informed the design and outcomes on the ground will be. However, sometimes planners and elected members shy away from accessibility issues, believing that building regulations will cover it or that the issues are too detailed for the planning stage. It is critical to change the hearts and minds of these planners and councillors to ensure that accessibility is firmly placed on the planning system's agenda. This can be done. In **Waltham Forest** requirements are set out early. For example, the Grouped Schools PFI Project was a redevelopment scheme to provide seven replacement schools with highly accessible environments as a result of critical access audits throughout the development process. Planners say that this was a competitive process from rival development consortia seeking to win a contract to redevelop the seven schools. Various schemes were worked up to satisfy a number of stringent educational and planning criteria including the need to provide highly accessible and safe environments for all pupils. An access audit ensured that the preferred bidder delivered the inclusive designs in accordance with the planning permissions granted.

the inclusive design philosophy

'Buildings don't need to shout out that they have been designed to be accessible to disabled people, they should just work well for everyone'

Julie Fleck OBE, Principal Advisor, Access and Inclusion, Greater London Authority



Inclusive design is a process that delivers an environment where everyone can access and benefit from the full range of opportunities available to members of society. It aims to remove barriers that create undue effort, separation or special treatment, and enables everyone regardless of disability, age or gender to participate equally, confidently and independently in mainstream activities with choice and dignity. Inclusive design:

- puts people at the heart of the design process
- responds to human diversity and difference
- offers dignity, autonomy and choice
- provides for flexibility in use.

The adoption of inclusive design principles will enable people to:

- use developments safely, with dignity and confidence
- use developments without undue effort, stress, separation or special treatment
- make effective choices about how they use the development
- participate equally in the development's activities
- be independent and in control of the experiences they are having in the development
- have enough space to ensure their comfort and convenience
- enjoy a healthy environment
- know where they are and find their way around.

It is based on the social model of disability which recognises that disabled people experience discrimination because buildings, transport, leisure facilities, public services and work are often arranged in a way that excludes them. In its report 'Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People' (Strategy Unit 2005) the Government sets out its vision of disability equality and explains:

'At present, disabled people do not have the same opportunities or choices as non-disabled people. Nor do they enjoy equal respect or full inclusion in society on an equal basis. The poverty, disadvantage and social exclusion experienced by many disabled



people is not the inevitable result of their impairments or medical conditions, but rather stems from attitudinal and environmental barriers. This is known as ‘the social model of disability’, and provides a basis for the successful implementation of the duty to promote disability equality.

Whilst many people have positive attitudes towards disabled people, some express pity, fear, lack of respect and sometimes even contempt. These attitudes are hurtful, can lead to discrimination and can also place unnecessary restrictions on disabled people

For many disabled people environmental barriers play an even more important role in restricting opportunities than attitudes. Although these barriers may be unintentional, that does not make their impact upon disabled people any less significant. When buildings, services and employment practices are designed in a way that fail to take into account the particular circumstances of disabled people, this excludes and disadvantages them. The same applies when budgets are set for a programme without adequately considering the additional needs of disabled people.’

Inclusive design has emerged as a way of tackling barriers that exclude and disadvantage disabled people. However, by designing and managing our built environment inclusively, the difficulties experienced by many older people and families with small children will also be overcome. Physical and environmental barriers that exclude faith groups, minority and other disadvantaged groups will also be overcome.

the access design process

Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council, amongst others, has recognised that inclusive developments require architects to think about accessibility as an integral part of the design process. Their Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), ‘Access For All’ (2006), encourages designers to use the concept of an access design

chain, a logical way of thinking about how people actually move from one place to another.

‘It’s easier to incorporate excellent access provision if the initial design process incorporates it’.

Peter Lainson, Chair, Essex Access Forum

Doing this effectively needs the early commitment of the applicant or architect. David Bonnett, an architect specialising in access design, has developed a five stage approach to inclusive design. Starting with a site-wide access strategy, zonal access plans, building design and details, the approach also considers post occupancy adjustments. It is critical to realise that the process doesn’t end once the building has been constructed, but continues through to its management and occupation.

‘Accessibility is not delivered the day the building is completed, it’s ongoing’

Dr David Bonnett RIBA, Architect and Access Consultant, Principal of David Bonnett Associates

If accessibility is left to the latter stages of the development process, features are often added on as afterthoughts. Sometimes this leads to conflict between aesthetics and functionality. However, officers from the case study authorities emphasise that accessibility does not need to detract from the aesthetic quality of a building or rural landscape if both aspects are considered hand in hand at the start of the design process.

In **London Borough of Waltham Forest**, Walthamstow Library is a Grade II listed building and has been refurbished to ensure it is a highly accessible environment. Public access to the upper parts of the building which had remained unused has been gained by means of a lift and the building now incorporates a glazed and more welcoming entrance. Kevin Herring, a planning officer at Waltham Forest believes this ‘maximizes the use of a public building which is a valuable educational and learning resource. Everyone is able to benefit from the comprehensive services it



offers. This has been achieved without compromising the character and appearance of a listed building.'

make it inclusive – early and direct engagement

Inclusive accessible environments will only be achieved if designers and planners understand how places are used. Inclusivity is a fundamental issue for the Olympic proposals. An access group is going to be established to look at the proposals. With a wide range of participants, including professionals, the group will have a chance to see and comment on the proposals as they evolve, encouraging a synergy to develop between specialists.

'Full disabled access not only guarantees that disabled people can travel round the building, but that they can open doors, turn on lights, buy a drink, get onto the stage, communicate with other people or make themselves a cup of tea.'

Professor Rob Imrie, PhD, King's College, London

When the plans for the Sadler's Wells building in Islington were in their early stages of design a consultative group called 'Free for All' was set up to determine the detailed designs for access provision before the outline application was submitted. The process was based on the premise that 'users know best'. Sadler's Wells wrote a commitment to disability access into the contract of every design and building consultant employed on the project. One example of the process was providing access through the stage door entrance. The immediate problem was the cramped nature of the area and space only for a 1:12 ramp. There were no clear sightlines from the outside door to the reception. The group lobbied the local Council to give the adjoining building to Sadler's Wells. The acquisition freed up the space and provides clear sightlines and a more spacious reception area. A longer, less steep ramp can also be accommodated. As a result of the group's involvement access provision is varied and includes a high contrast

signage and attention to size and simplicity of typefaces, low level duplicate touch signage in primary positions, infra-red systems for audio descriptions of performances, textured floor surfaces, automatic opening entrance doors, visual indicators for curtains up and induction loops.

working together – the positive role of effective consultation

'It's not just ticking a box – process and time is invested to make people feel valued'

Darryl Smith, Senior Policy Officer (Disabilities), Bradford City Council

Access groups are an important source of information. They are usually voluntary groups of disabled people who have an interest in, and actively campaign, to improve access to the built environment. They represent the interests of members of the community who might be disabled by inappropriate design or management of the built environment and public transport infrastructures. They provide a well informed, representative consumer view and as such are an essential partner group to developing and considering planning proposals. If a group does not exist in your area, consider setting one up with a neighbouring authority or forming one for a particular development proposal or engagement on the Local Development Framework (LDF) process.

Stoke on Trent City Council and London Borough of Islington

both aim to increase the capacity of their local groups making them more effective through regular and flexible contact, increased support and informal training. In Stoke group members also belong to other community groups and charitable organisations so that the council is able to take advantage of a wider range of opinion. The group has extended a general invitation to all who work in the built environment and planners attend meetings. The access officer has a standing invitation and feeds back any issue to the relevant team in the council and then



reports back to the group. This avoids the group wasting time in identifying appropriate officers and the access officer ensures that the group receives feedback and that complaints and comments are properly dealt with.

Access groups particularly appreciate presentations by architects and developers as this provides an effective way of resolving issues and tensions early on and gives the applicant team an opportunity of firsthand engagement. **Bradford City Council** has a joint Planning and Highway Access Forum, made up of council officers and disabled service users, most of whom are members of disability organisations. The forum facilitates direct feedback to both planners and applicants. Darryl Smith of **Bradford City Council** firmly believes that user involvement can help achieve an improvement in quality in building development and public realm works.

An Access Forum has been set up to act as a network of access groups working in **London**. A planning sub-group has been established to look at applications referred to the Mayor of London. Although this method of working can be time intensive, the direct engagement with disabled people at a strategic level is just as important as at the local level. A similar forum has been established in **Essex**. This group provides an informal support network for the local access groups enabling them to exchange ideas, experiences and opinions. Although most planning issues are dealt with by the local group, the forum represents the 14 local groups in county-wide issues such as the Local Transport Plan. Whenever there is news or information to share this is done via email.

Ikon is a contemporary art gallery that has relocated to the former Oozells Street School, set within Brindleyplace, a 17 acre city centre development in **Birmingham**. For the gallery Director, Elizabeth Macgregor, providing better access for disabled people was a key reason for the move to a better location and into a building that provided more suitable visitor services. This meant that the needs of disabled people were taken on board as an integral part of the scheme. The interior of this listed building was in a poor state of repair and was substantially rebuilt to create

three floors with galleries on the upper floors; this caused some concern about access. As the lead architect for Levitt Bernstein noted 'because it's a public building, a lot of people will be there for the first time and the routes through and to various parts have to be clear and simple. So immediately this has to make it easier for everyone with a disability because things are clear and straightforward; it was a question of how clear is the route and how wide is the stair, so we had to re-jig the stair a bit to get it wider.' In addition, the glass passenger lift positioned beside the main staircase allows visitors level access to all floors.

As this project was part funded by the lottery there was an obligation to consult with access groups. Given the limitations of working within an existing shell of a listed building and the art gallery's requirements for white walls, there were inevitable conflicts in dealing with light and colour on walls. However, other features such as an accessible toilet which was larger than Part M requirements were incorporated. The consultation sometimes caused frustration and delay to the development schedule particularly when contractors were on site waiting for decisions to be made about finishes. The parties agree that one way of resolving this type of conflict for future projects would be to have a strict framework for consultation and to aim for continuity of membership of the consultative group.

working with access officers

The case study authorities stress the importance of specialist advice provided by an access officer (some access officers provide advice to a few, neighbouring authorities), although unfortunately not all local planning authorities have access to one. The access officer at **Leeds City Council** offers pre-application advice, attends meetings and advises planning officers as well as having direct contact with applicants.

Access officers are often located within planning departments but work across all council areas, thereby providing a link and bridging the gaps between different service requirements. They can often



resolve tensions between conflicting objectives, for example between highway and conservation aspects of a proposal, by providing practical solutions.

Even where access officers are physically located can make a difference. Access officers located within the planning service tend to have more direct and informal contact over day to day issues, this helps to raise awareness about access issues amongst planning officers.

addressing accessibility through policy and SPD

Many authorities are in the process of preparing LDFs. Some consider accessibility to be a detailed consideration appropriate for Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD), but others have included policies in the core strategy. Policies on design and access should be included throughout the LDF rather than relying on a single stand alone policy.

Putting an appropriate range of policies and guidance in place will inform the planning application process, will make requirements much clearer for applicants and give planning officers robust support when negotiating proposals or resisting unacceptable schemes which are not in accordance with the development plan.

Horsham District Council is one of the first authorities to have a sound core strategy. Policy CP 16 refers to inclusive communities.

policy CP 16 inclusive communities

Positive measures which help create a socially inclusive and adaptable environment for a range of occupiers and users to meet their long term needs will be encouraged and supported. Particular account will be taken of the need to address the requirements stemming from:

- people with special needs, including the disabled or those with learning disabilities
- the needs of an ageing population, particularly in terms of housing and health
- the requirements of rural workers or essential workers in rural areas
- the co-ordination of services to fulfil the needs of young people
- the specific needs of minority groups within the district, including Gypsies and Travellers.

Horsham planners believe that policies of this nature are one way to address the needs of hard to reach groups. As their district is rural there is disparity between the rural areas and towns. This policy is seen as a way of drawing together the common threads. Barbara Childs, Horsham's LDF Programme Manager, says the policy is a result of various ideas. It is an interesting and innovative concept which development control planners are using as a hook to consider proposals for development such as care villages as a focus on older people, one of a number of key concerns in the district. 'There is a fine balance in the new planning system between detail and being visionary. Policies have to be fit for purpose, not just aspirational, but trying to focus on what is important within our area.' Additionally this cross cutting policy can be readily monitored using a set of key indicators.

Plymouth City Council was the first city council to have a core strategy approved. Accessibility runs through a number of the core strategy's strategic objectives and policies refer to the development of sustainable linked communities. David Taylor, Spatial Planning Co-ordinator, says one of the key planks of the city council's city strategy and core strategy is to build sustainable communities where everyone has equal access to all services and opportunities. 'We will all grow old, suffer illness or accidents, so it is in everyone's interest to ensure that our city, our homes, streets and transport infrastructure meet the needs of all of the community. The planning system and our recently approved core



strategy are important elements in helping to deliver equality for all members of the community.'

David feels that the following quote from the sustainable linked communities section of the core strategy summarizes the issue well.

'Equality and inclusion are goals that lie at the heart of creating sustainable, linked communities, where the needs of all sections of the local population for housing, transport, employment, leisure, safety and accessibility are recognised and provided for. In particular, it is important that the needs of young and older people are recognised but also the needs of race and faith groups, people with a disability and the needs of women and men (for example, the needs of parents/carers with dependent children).'

supplementary planning documents

The **City of London** has produced guidelines called 'Designing An Accessible City' (updated in 2006), packed with diagrams and photographs, it combines practical advice with internal and external sources of further information.

Wigan's SPD called 'Access for All' referred to above is an example of how a local authority can promote the idea of an access design chain; a logical way of thinking of movement from one place to another. The links in the chain relating to the external environment have been developed into supplementary planning requirements. Guidance is given on how to achieve these requirements using symbol and colour for each separate section. For example, entrances are symbolised by a brown entrance door, approach by a blue arrow and an orange football denotes sports and leisure. The guidance covers matters ranging from tactile paving to parking, swing gates to automatic teller machines with photographs and diagrams and references to other sources of information.

The **Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames** has an adopted SPD called 'Access for all – designing inclusive buildings'. This is



full of practical advice and diagrams based on the requirements under building regulations and is particularly aimed at smaller architects and builders who might not be able to access specialist advice as easily as large developers. Planners felt that the document would have more weight as a SPD and that this was an obvious vehicle under the LDF system for detailed technical advice. It provides advice on how to meet the requirements of an adopted Unitary Development Plan Policy (UDP). Daniel Hawes, Policy Planner, points out that one of the greatest benefits has been to bridge the gap between borough council and district council. By pulling these two frameworks together it has enabled planners at Kingston to bring accessibility into the planning process right at the start. This means that accessibility can be designed in from the outset benefiting everyone. The SPD is downloadable free of charge from Kingston's website.

Stoke on Trent is currently preparing an inclusive design SPD. This is seen as a way of putting inclusive design right at the beginning of the process tying in planning and building control requirements for a more joined up approach. This should avoid the need for amended planning applications after the building control stage. As part of this process a flyer has been produced encouraging people to contact the council if they would like to take part in a working group set up comprising people with backgrounds in planning, building control, access, highways, conservation and transport to develop the guidance. Liaison with the local access group will occur throughout the process together with consultation with the wider community.

When **Wigan** undertook consultation on its SPD, comments were received from the Lancashire Fisheries Consultative Association. They felt that the borough's angling population is ageing and needs close to water access as well as safe and secure car parking. As a result the detailed design guidance on access to urban and rural landscape was amended to incorporate a section on angling. The section includes information on accessible fishing points, footpaths and car parking. A photo of an accessible fishing peg was added and details of the British Disabled Angling Association were included as a further source of information.



dealing with planning applications

Successfully integrating accessibility and inclusive design into the planning application process depends on a number of factors ranging from support from senior management, an organisational and individual commitment to using the planning system to delivering an accessible environment and the availability and use of specialist advice.

Leeds City Council estimates that more than 40 per cent of planning applications are seen by its access specialists. Although planning officers make the initial selection, the access officer takes a quick look at all applications twice a week to pick up any that have fallen through the net. This can be particularly useful whilst officers become familiar with the types of schemes on which consultation is needed.

Wigan has a similar procedure. Detailed comments are returned to the development control officer outlining items that need to be resolved before any planning permission is granted. Both the access and planning officer work together to try and secure improvements and the fact that the access officer is located within the Planning and Regeneration Department makes this easier to do. Both officers use their UDP and SPD policies and bring these to the attention of applicants.

North Somerset Council's access officer has produced a guide for planners setting out why access is a material consideration, a set of basic questions and answers, notes on issues to look at under specific headings and a resource section. It is nicknamed the 'yellow folder' because of its deliberately chosen attention grabbing colour. An electronic version is available and a public web version aimed at agents will be online soon.

Planning officers in the **City of London** encourage and expect pre-application meetings to be held with applicants. Access issues are raised at this stage. Applicants are directed to the advice documents published by the authority and the city's access team. More complex proposals may also be referred to the City of London's Access Group. Applicants may be asked to present their

scheme to the group. These meetings help architects understand just how diverse the needs of disabled people are and frequently result in revisions to the scheme at an early stage helping to ensure that the building is inclusive for all.

At **City of London**, the access team is consulted on receipt of an application. Their response forms the basis of any further negotiations and an input to the committee report. Access officers contact applicants direct by letter, with copies to both the planning and building control officers outlining the legislative background, relevant policies in the London Plan and drawing attention to the City of London's own guidelines plus specific comments on the planning application. As a result of this proactive approach planners in the city do not encounter many problems and when they do occur they can call on the specialist advice of the user group in support of any necessary modifications.

City of London planners and access officers are proud that many creative solutions have been developed over time as a result of negotiation. By starting off with a character analysis of the building and what makes it special, together with a co-operative architect and a collaborative approach they believe it is possible to integrate access solutions seamlessly. At Unilever House on the Victoria Embankment, the original main entrance was reinstated and, as part of a major refurbishment scheme, a ramp was incorporated to provide disabled access. Designed sensitively this integrates well with the character and appearance of the façade. Internally a much more legible internal layout with lift access to all floors has also been provided.

In **Weston-super-Mare**, HSBC occupy a Grade II listed building in a prominent location which forms part of the council's Civic Pride Public Realm Improvement Programme. The bank wished to improve access into and throughout the building for customers. This included the provision of a lift and lowered counters. Externally the building had two stepped entrances. Pre-application discussions looked at the merits of the two entrances and it was agreed that after looking at various ramp and step configurations, a shallow flight of steps on one side and a ramp in excess of 1:15



should be constructed. An automated glazed entrance door was installed with a large bank logo in the centre of the glazing to clearly highlight it. Sympathetic materials were used that met both architectural needs and importantly those of the disabled customer. Simon Exley, Team Leader Development Control, **North Somerset District Council**, considers this to be a good example of the value in having pre-application discussions to work through the options and goals of everyone involved. 'Access for disabled people should be about good design too and this demonstrates that point very well.'

Some applicants are also very clued up. Leon Foster-Hill, B&Q's Diversity Advisor says that B&Q began its journey to accessibility in 1998 and continues to be committed to making its stores a welcoming environment for all of its customers. 'We have made sure that our disabled customers are welcomed by ensuring all of our stores have accessible car parking, level kerb areas, reflective strips on all bollards and improved signage. Within stores, manual and electric wheelchairs, induction hearing loops, lowered counters, wide doors with full vision panels and accessible toilet facilities are provided.' Leon says that B&Q continue to look for ways to make the shopping experience even better and always respond to feedback from customers. This has resulted in B&Q being awarded the Enhanced Accessibility Award at the 2006 RADAR People of the Year Awards.

planning conditions and obligations

'There is no value in engaging with the users of buildings, if the actual outcomes on the ground don't happen, don't work or aren't put in place'

Sarah Lewis, Planning Practice Officer, RTP1

Planning conditions and section 106 agreements can be effective; where details are not agreed before permission is granted, **Kingston upon Thames** uses standard conditions to ensure that their Lifetime Homes and wheelchair standard housing requirements are met.

Using planning conditions to promote the creation of accessible or wheelchair friendly homes is now commonplace, but **Waltham Forest** have taken this one stage further and have obliged developers to actively market wheelchair accessible housing solely to wheelchair users for a period. Advertising draws attention to the availability of wheelchair accessible housing on site hoardings, in sales offices or websites. If, after an agreed period, usually between three and six months, no buyers come forward the units can then be sold in the general market. The units are built with sufficient space to accommodate wheelchair needs, but not fully fitted out until necessary. To help with this, Waltham Forest is producing a SPD on planning obligations. The SPD provides planners with a framework for negotiation with developers. Planners say that this means they are not working from scratch on every case and developers are more likely to deliver on the ground as they are aware of the requirements from the start.

Kingston have a similar approach and have a standard S106 clause which requires that prior to any marketing of any of the residential units in the relevant scheme, a scheme for marketing of the wheelchair units must be approved. This scheme must apply for a specified period (6 months is suggested) and must include details of the proposed advertising in specialist publications. Throughout this selling period, the legal agreement requires that these units cannot be sold to people not requiring that level of accessibility (without prior agreement from the planning authority). At the end of the period, provided the authority is satisfied the marketing was properly done, the units can then be sold to anyone. The owner also has to notify Kingston's disability equality and access officer of the number of units sold to wheelchair users.



getting the most from design and access statements

'Think of a wall with various building blocks; pre-planning stage, planning, policy, district council, borough council, landscape, maintenance and management. The access statement is the cement that holds all these together...'

Darryl Smith, Senior Policy Officer (Disabilities), Bradford City Council

Design and Access statements (DAS) should demonstrate the applicant's approach to inclusion and show how all potential users regardless of disability, gender or age can enter the site, move around it and use the buildings and facilities. The statements are considered by many to be a helpful concept, but there is a general lack of understanding around what they are. There is evidence that some applicants adopt a 'tick box' attitude and that the quality of statements is poor.

Many authorities have produced guidance and checklists on what should be included in a DAS. **Waltham Forest** is developing guidance which asks applicants to include an accessibility plan highlighting entrances, lifts, parking and so on to enable a quick overview to be gained. More detailed plans of key access points are also included. **Kingston upon Thames** has adopted supplementary planning advice on design, sustainability and access statements. Aimed at applicants, this helps to explain the process and what issues should be covered by the statements. Sustainability is included as this is regarded as part of the design process and this advice forms part of the Borough's urban design action plan. **Wigan** has produced a template contained within its SPD whilst **Bradford** has a two page flyer which is sent out with application packs to point people in the right direction.

For large schemes like Stratford City in **London Borough of Newham**, a three part access statement is being produced for all the different zones of the development. The first part considers policy and standards, the second part addresses the particular

elements of that zone whilst the last part breaks new ground by developing standards which draw on existing practice but also develop standards for the public realm. These standards will apply across Stratford City. The first and third parts will be the same for each zone for consistency.

resolving conflict

Creating inclusive and accessible environments can create tensions with other planning issues, such as between the historic environment and accessibility. Often with listed buildings physical access poses the greatest challenge. Tensions can also arise with other issues such as health and safety requirements. For example a glass fronted reception area or security measures can create a barrier. Details such as décor or glazing can have a huge impact on a building's accessibility for people with visual impairment.

In the **London Borough of Greenwich** at Queen's House, part of the National Maritime Museum, access has been provided at basement level by forming a dished semicircular forecourt in front of an existing central door. External levels have been lowered and a base added to the existing external 'horseshoe' stairs. The new paved route provides access for all visitors and is not a separate route for people with disabilities. Internally a service stair was replaced with a new staircase and this provided the opportunity to install a lift in the stairwell. Even though the lift does not meet building regulation standards, it does mean that for the first time everyone can access the building's interior. At the museum an external platform lift has been provided to change levels between front areas and to reach Colonnade and Greenwich Park. These improvements have had a significant impact on the way the building is used and visited without compromising its historic integrity.

The **City of London** has produced a planning advice note called 'Improving Access to Listed Buildings' which contains a number of photographs showing examples of good solutions to access issues. It recognises that minor alterations can often make a



significant improvement. An example from the publication is Staple Inn Hall, a grade II listed building and paved courtyard in the Chancery Lane Conservation Area. This is a public building which hosts a number of public functions. A new access was formed by extending the landing in front of the existing building entrance and creating a new flight of steps constructed in materials to match the existing steps and those of surrounding listed buildings. The ramp would adjoin the new landing and exterior wall of the building and be finished in a dark finish metal grill material allowing the listed paving below to be viewed with a stainless steel handrail and glazed balustrade. Planners regard this as a good example of balancing the need to have disabled access to a public building and maintaining the special architectural and historic interest of the listed building and paving.

English Heritage have produced a number of advice and guidance documents about how to achieve easy access to historic buildings and landscapes, all available on their website.

David Bonnett believes that making a unique historic building accessible challenges all involved, not least because professional responsibilities may appear to be in conflict. At Kew Palace a 10 year restoration project has just taken place. David's experiences with Kew Palace shows that with careful research and creative thinking, solutions can be found that are satisfactory to all involved. 'There was evidence of an original adjoining structure, long since pulled down, and its footprint 'allowed' a location for a lift.' As well as all the typical barriers to physical access, Historic Royal Palaces wanted a holistic, integrated approach to address both physical and intellectual access issues throughout the exhibition and display. To help achieve this they directly employed a range of people from local disability and community groups to form the Kew Palace Disability Access Forum. The forum initially met monthly and then fortnightly as there was so much to address. The process has been two-way; design adjustments have been incorporated along the way and a temporary ramp was constructed so that Forum members could see work in progress. David Bonnett checked the feasibility of solutions by making physical checks on site to test the design proposals, using a



wheelchair. David says 'this very practical collaboration proved to be highly creative and developed an excellent working relationship between professionals.'

assessing the impact of what you are doing

'We don't need woolly generalised statements like 'it will all be accessible'; accessible to who, to what standard and who will judge it?'

Anthony Rylands, Access Officer for Disabled People, North Somerset

Just as the accessibility of a building or the environment does not end when the project is finished, it is critical to review the impact of planning policies and decisions made on planning applications. Consulting with groups or establishing access forums as well as practical feasibility checks like the ones at Kew Palace can all be useful ways of assessing likely outcomes of schemes.

Kingston upon Thames emphasises the importance of checking whether the DAS are adhered to. If details are conditional, planning or enforcement officers should follow through ensuring that they are properly and promptly considered and executed on the ground.

The Equality Standard for local government requires local authorities to undertake an impact assessment on all major policies which by definition includes LDF policies. As part of LDF monitoring, policies such as Horsham's core strategy policy on inclusive communities will be assessed.

accessing the planning system

As well as making environments more inclusive and accessible the planning system itself can be made more accessible. Practical issues like meeting people to explain the implications of proposals, thinking about the height and positioning of site notices and



flexibility over consultation period dates on neighbour notification letters can make a positive difference.

It may be beneficial for planners to visit a group of disabled or elderly people. You need to think about the needs of the people you are trying to reach and work around those needs accordingly.

Plymouth City Council has a leaflet called 'Accessing Planning Services' on their website. This promotes home visits and is also part of the council's e-government work. John Fox, based in development control, says that this makes people aware of the service giving them an opportunity to access the planning system if they are unable to visit the council offices or would like assistance with plans. Planning officers also note whether a home visit has been made or an added value form completed for each application and although it's early days this will allow home visits to be recorded and monitored so that any further issues can be picked up. John says 'we want to know what people think and to take all material considerations into account when dealing with applications. If service improvements like this one help us to get everyone's views then this will result in a better quality of decision.'

Presenting and providing information in a variety of formats such as talking newspapers and asking for feedback and information in different ways can make the planning process more relevant to its users. **Islington, Stoke on Trent and Kingston upon Thames** use a variety of techniques such as induction loops and BSL interpreters to make events more inclusive.

It is also important to hold meetings in venues that are in themselves accessible and many authorities such as **Islington** have produced a list of suitable venues. Flexibility over times for meetings is also necessary.

Incorporating a specific question or section about inclusive design and accessibility in surveys and questionnaires will help raise the profile, and promote awareness of, access issues. This will enable access issues to be embedded in the process and will also provide specific feedback on the council's vision and policies from all sectors of the community, not only specific groups concerned with this issue.



what does success look like? some critical success factors

Although there is still a long way to go before accessibility is fully integrated into the planning system, there are some local authorities who are working hard to achieve this. Some of the key points arising from these authorities are:

- raise awareness amongst planning officers and elected members that accessibility is a material planning consideration
- think of inclusive design as a philosophy
- engage with users early in the design and development process and listen to how they will actually use a building or space
- welcome the often unexpected results that direct engagement with the users of buildings will produce
- accept that designing for accessibility is a process which does not end with the construction of a building or environment, but carries on post-occupancy
- include robust planning policies and guidance in LDFs
- hold pre-application discussions and negotiate to ensure that access and inclusivity are included early in the process
- offer creative solutions to overcome conflicting demands
- use conditions and agreements to secure benefits for the whole community
- work together with access officers, access consultants and local access groups in a mutually supportive way
- link the planning service with corporate aims, objectives and activities to integrate access issues and achieve cross service benefits
- assess the impact of what you are doing and feedback to the users of the building and environment.



sources of further information

Diversity and Equality in Planning: A Good Practice Guide
(ODPM* 2005)

Planning and Diversity: Research into Policies and Procedures
(Sheffield Hallam/ODPM* 2004)

Planning, Buildings, Streets and Disability Equality
(DRC 2006)

Planning and Access for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide
(ODPM* 2003)

*now Communities and Local Government

councils and organisations interviewed for this case study

Many thanks to all of those that contributed to this case study

Aedas Access Consultancy

B&Q

Bradford City Council

CABE

Consilium Planning Consultancy Limited

City of London

David Bonnett Associates

Greater London Authority

Horsham District Council

London Borough of Islington

Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames

Kings College London

Leeds City Council

North Somerset Council

Plymouth City Council

Royal Association of Disability and Rehabilitation

Royal Town Planning Institute

Sheffield Hallam University

Stoke on Trent City Council

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

The individual planning and guidance documents referred to in the text are usually available on the Councils' websites.

A list of access consultants can be found through the National Register of Access Consultants [www.nrac.org.uk] and the Royal Association of Disability and Rehabilitation and the Access Association [www.access-association.org.uk] can help with further information.

The Disability Rights Commission

FREEPOST MID02164

Stratford upon Avon CV37 9BR

Telephone: 08457 622 633

Textphone: 08457 622 644

www.drc-gb.org

JRF Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The Homestead

40 Water End, York

North Yorkshire YO30 6WP

Telephone: 01904 629241

www.jrf.org.uk

Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

1 Kemble Street

London WC2B 4AN

Telephone: 020 7070 6700

www.cabe.org.uk

Royal National Institute of the Blind

105 Judd Street

London WC1H 9NE

Telephone: 020 7388 1266

www.rnib.org.uk

Communities and Local Government

Eland House, Bressenden Place

London SW1E 5DU

Helpline: 020 7944 4400

www.communities.gov.uk

The Royal Town Planning Institute

41 Botolph Lane

London EC3R 8DL

Telephone: 020 7929 9494

www.rtpi.org.uk

RADAR

12 City Forum, 250 City Road

London EC11V 8AF

Telephone: 020 7250 0008

www.radar.org.uk

JMU Access Partnership

105 Judd Street

London WC1H 9NE

Telephone: 020 7391 2002

www.jmuaccess.org.uk

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