

# Access Statements

To assist Building Control Bodies in making judgements about whether proposals make reasonable provision, it is recommended that an Access Statement is provided at the time plans are deposited. This is particularly important for existing buildings and extensions. It should also be used to demonstrate how access to historic buildings will be achieved.

The guidance on access in the planning system (Planning and Access for Disabled People - a Code of Practice Guide) published by the ODPM, recommends the provision of an access statement to identify the philosophy and approach to inclusive design adopted, the key issues of the particular scheme and the sources of advice and guidance used.

An access statement provided for Building Control purposes should be

seen as complementary to and as a development of the information provided for Planning purposes, rather than a separate document. It will be beneficial to update the statement as the building work progresses to provide the end user of the building a record of what decisions were made with regard to accessibility which may help with the ongoing DDA obligations.

If an alternative detail or design to those provided in Approved Document M or BS 8300 (Design of Buildings and their Approaches to Meet the Needs of Disabled People), an access statement should be submitted to the Building Control Body which should demonstrate the reasons for the variance and any compensatory features.

## BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

Approved Document M to the Building Regulations 2000 (as amended) recommends that access statements be provided. Similarly the Planning system has introduced the concept of providing access statements for planning applications. They should be complimentary to each other so that consistency for the Local Authority is maintained.

An access statement for planning purposes is generally only looking at the wider aspects of access and social inclusion, whereas the Building Control one will look at the detailed proposals in relation to the building in question.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 places a duty on service providers, employers, education bodies, transport providers and others to ensure that they are not discriminating against people with disabilities. It is essential therefore that the built environment meets this objective. The provision of an access statement may also help to demonstrate an organisations commitment to meeting the requirements of the DDA.

Designing for everyone can be very difficult and legislating for every circumstance is equally difficult, therefore flexibility in approach is required. Part M is framed in terms such as 'reasonable' and 'suitable' provision, and it should therefore be possible to have alternative solutions. This is where an access statement can help to inform and overcome the competing factors such as cost, usage, location, management plans and geographical issues etc.

If an application shows full compliance with the requirements of Part M, there will be no need for a supporting access statement. It therefore follows that statements are only required where there is an intention not to fully meet the requirements in the Building Regulations or to meet them in an alternative way .

The drive from Government is to achieve an inclusive society by promoting disability equality.

Social inclusion means recognising the different needs of all people and the variations in the ways they use the built environment. Even though an environment is 'accessible' it does not mean it is 'inclusive' because it can lead to separate facilities and therefore segregate people because they have a disability. Social inclusion recognises that people are not disabled by their impairment, but by the environment ( the barriers and structures present in society) and introduces the concept of a single solution for everyone. The requirement for an Access Statement encourages access issues to be addressed at an early stage.

## Access Statements

An Access Statement is an explanation of 'how access and facilities for people with disabilities and others has been addressed in a particular scheme'. The statement will allow Building Control Officers to assess whether reasonable/suitable provision has been achieved.

The statement will vary in size dependent on the type and scale of the development but should generally include the following elements wherever relevant:-

- Description of proposed works and the intended use of the building
- Access design philosophy on the scheme
- Sources of advice and guidance
- Evidence of any consultation with the Council's Access Officer or the Local Access Group
- Description of the building
- Key issues of the scheme
- Current access provisions
- Proposed areas for improvement
- Areas not proposed for improvement and/or reasons why an alternative approach has been adopted

# Access Statements

## When is an Access Statement required

Applications requiring a full Access Statement include new and substantially extended buildings or changes of use where the intended use is:-

- Shops and commercial uses, Restaurants, Public Houses and Bars, Offices, Banks, Public Buildings, Leisure, Assembly and Recreation facilities, Mixed Use developments, Churches, Schools/Colleges, Hotels, Industrial, Storage and General, Listed Buildings etc.
- Residential purposes such as flats, houses and bungalows, nursing or old peoples homes, student accommodation etc.

Applications will not generally require an access statement if the works are for altered or extended dwellings, i.e. houses, bungalows and flats. Similarly, minor alterations or extensions to other uses may not require a statement where it can clearly be seen that the accessibility of the building is not affected.

## Matters for consideration

Matters for consideration on any development include but are not exclusively:-

- Disabled parking provision or setting down points or garaging
- Approach routes to building - wayfinding signage, gradient, width, surface finish
- External hazards/features - hard landscaping, projections, furniture
- External steps/ramps - gradient, width, guarding and heights
- Entrances - primary and secondary
- Doors - operation, size, level threshold, automatic, controls
- Entrance lobbies - sizes, manoeuvrability
- Reception - counter height
- Aids for hearing impaired people - induction loop

- Visibility of signage - size and contrast for people with impaired vision
- Interpretation and Braille facilities
- Internal corridors - widths, obstructions, gradients
- Internal steps/ramps - height, width, guarding, rise and going
- Lifts - size, height of controls
- WC accommodation - size, layout, number
- Spectator seating - number of spaces, choice of viewing point, other facilities
- Access to special facilities - meeting rooms, swimming pools, sports equipment etc
- Usability of the building/facilities - to meet the DDA
- Management arrangements - for assisted access and means of escape

Special considerations need to be given to Listed Buildings, development in Conservation Areas and other buildings or spaces of special interest.

## Ongoing obligations for owners/occupiers

The Access Statement should be amended to reflect any subsequent decisions reached on site so that any new owner or occupier can be aware of the rationale used in making decisions which impact on accessibility and their ongoing obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act. An up to date Access Statement can form part of the 'Sellers Pack' which will help to inform future owner/occupiers of the access provision in the building.