

Access to the Built Environment

■ OBJECTIVES

To ensure that development proposals and streetscape works provide a barrier free, accessible environment for all, including disabled people, children, parents and the elderly. To provide guidance for property owners and agents on adaptations for access provision within Edinburgh's historic environment.

■ STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995)

This Act defines a disabled person as someone with "a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities." This is a broad definition embracing people with a wide range of impairments. The Act aims to end the discrimination which many disabled people face, and give disabled people rights in the areas of employment, access to goods, facilities and services and buying or renting land or property.

From 1st October 2004, under Part iii of the Act (Access to Goods and Services), service providers have a duty to consider making physical adjustments to their premises. Where a physical feature makes it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to use a service offered to the public, the service provider will be obliged to take reasonable steps to remove the physical feature, alter it, provide reasonable means of avoiding it OR provide a reasonable alternative way of making the service accessible. A physical feature is any feature arising from the design or construction of the building, any feature on any approach/access to a building or any fixtures, fittings, furnishings, equipment or materials on the premises.

The DDA 1995 requires reasonable adjustments to be made, but does not provide specific guidance as there are no standard solutions. The DDA Code of Practice advises that "reasonable" may vary according to the following:

- a) type of service provided
- b) nature of the service provider and its size and resources
- c) effect of the disability on the individual disabled person.

Any works required under the Disability Discrimination Act must comply with the provisions of Planning and Listed Building legislation.

Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas)

(Scotland) Act 1997

External features such as ramps or lifts may require planning permission and where applicable, listed building consent. Listed building consent may also be required for any internal alterations. The impact any alterations will have on the character of the listed building or the conservation area is a material planning consideration .

Some streetscape works are classed as Permitted Development under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992, and will not therefore require planning permission. However, these Permitted Development rights may be removed in conservation areas through Article 4 Directions. Advice should be sought from the planning authority on the consents required (Planning Help Desk Tel: 0131- 529-3596)

■ **POLICY CONTEXT**

National Planning Guidance:

Designing Places, the Scottish Executive Policy Statement on the planning and design of places, aims to raise standards of quality. It makes reference to ease of movement being one of six qualities at the heart of good design.

PAN 67 Housing Quality gives general advice about designing housing to ensure it is easy to get to and move around.

Scottish Office Circular 29/1981 Provision of Public Buildings: Consideration of the Needs of the Disabled - disabled access to public buildings is a material planning consideration and conditions can be used to secure access and facilities.

Historic Scotland The Memorandum of Guidance on Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas (1998).

The Edinburgh Streetscape Manual (Edinburgh Standards for Streets).

Development Quality Guideline : Quality of Landscaping in Developments.

Structure and Local Plan Policies

Local Plan policies seek to promote accessibility.

Central Edinburgh Local Plan Policy CDI 8 states that: “All development will in its design and layout be expected to contribute to an environment which is safe, equally accessible to all including people with particular mobility needs and sustainable in the long term”.

■ NEW DEVELOPMENT

General Provisions

In its assessment of any planning application, the authority will consider access provision as an integral part of the design of the proposal. The Council will encourage, where appropriate, measures including the following;

- a) provision of level access for people with impaired mobility into, within and between buildings,
- b) provision of accessible parking,
- c) suitable toilet facilities,
- d) adequate internal circulation space,
- e) contrasting surfaces to assist people with impaired vision,
- f) the use of large print, signs, standard symbols and Braille or Moon,
- g) adequate and appropriate lighting,
- h) alarm and evacuation systems and procedures (which may include wheelchair refuges as a last resort),
- i) the provision of induction loops.

The views of the Edinburgh Access Panel will be taken into account.

Housing

- a) New housing should be barrier free and accessible to everyone. Doorways should be wide enough for prams, double buggies and wheelchairs.
- b) Disabled people's housing should be well served by public transport and preferably close to local shops and amenities.
- c) Seating should be provided at outdoor play areas, areas of open space and bus stops.

Shops, Leisure and Community Facilities

- a) Facilities within large stores, supermarkets and leisure / community facilities should be provided for children, parents, the elderly and disabled people. These may include : fully accessible toilets; changing and feeding facilities for parents with children; play areas; a creche; and, in retail units, a modified check-out aisle for buggies, wheelchairs and ambulant disabled people which may include handrails.
- b) Lifts or ramps should be provided in conjunction with escalators and stairs to BS8300 specifications, and these alternatives should be clearly sign-posted. Stairs should be available and signed for those who prefer not to use lifts.
- c) Proposals should include well designed signage and interpretation where appropriate.

Entrances

- a) The main entrance to a building should be accessible by everyone, including those with mobility difficulties. Side, rear or basement entrances should be used only as a last resort.
- b) Entrances should be level or gently sloping with flush thresholds, easily identifiable, with automatic doors where appropriate.

- c) Heavy swing doors should be avoided. Doorways should be wide enough to accommodate prams, double pushchairs and wheelchairs. Entrance design should consider visibility and height of handles, the use of tonal contrast and reduction in glare from glazing.
- d) Lifts should be large enough to accommodate double prams, pushchairs and larger wheelchairs.
- e) The evacuation procedures for those who are sensory-impaired, mobility-impaired and those with learning difficulties should be fully considered.
- f) Ramps (maximum 1:12 gradient) should be provided in addition to steps.
- g) Handrails should be provided at both sides of ramps. They should continue between flights of steps and 300mm beyond top and bottom steps. Steps should be of a contrasting colour to assist those with visual impairments.
- h) Steps should incorporate discreet visual and tactile indicators for those with impaired vision.

Streetscape

- a) Surfaces should be non-slip, level and durable. Kerbs should be dropped at all crossing points of roads and accesses to car parks and should be delineated by tactile indicators. The palette of tonal and texture variations to create a harmonious streetscape outlined in Edinburgh's Standards for Streets should be followed.
- b) Pedestrian access routes should be as direct as possible, of suitable width (at least 2m) and not steeper than 1 :20.
- c) Traffic islands and pedestrian refuges should be able to accommodate a wheelchair or pram and the individual pushing it (2 metres wide).
- d) Seating, cycle racks, artworks and other street furniture should be carefully sited to avoid obstruction or hazard to pedestrians. Projecting objects should be avoided.
- e) Advertising boards, where permitted on the pavement, should be carefully positioned to avoid causing a hazard in line with current guidance. Hanging signs are preferred, in line with the guideline on Advertisement and Signs.
- f) Cash dispensers, ticket machines and similar facilities should avoid the use of steps and the machinery should be suitable for wheelchair users. Guidance is also available on Automatic Teller Machines.
- g) Signage should be clearly legible (colour contrast makes it clearer). Standard symbols to highlight facilities for disabled people should be placed in prominent positions without causing an impediment or hazard, and should co-ordinate with other street furniture and signage.
- h) Tree planting should avoid species with low or over-hanging branches.

Parking

- a) Parking facilities for disabled people should be identified close to the building they serve, preferably adjacent to exits / entrances and lifts, and be easily accessible from the building with dropped kerbs.
- b) Easy access for taxis and drop off / collection by carers should also be provided.
- c) Clear sign-posting should be provided to entrances accessible to those with disabilities.
- d) Disabled parking bays should be clearly marked and signed and should be a minimum of 2.4 metres wide with an adjacent 1 metre strip (which may be shared between adjoining bays) for access / egress. Parking provision should be in accordance with the Council's Parking Standards.

2. THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT

Much of Edinburgh's unique character is derived from its listed buildings and conservation areas. In these areas, provision for access and community safety will require the careful, managed change of the existing environment to respect and preserve this special character. This includes the listed buildings themselves, unlisted buildings and the wider streetscape context of the conservation areas and the World Heritage Site.

As from October 2004, service providers will be required to take reasonable steps to make their buildings and services accessible. However, there is also a statutory duty to preserve the character of the historic environment. Early discussion of adaptation proposals with the Planning Department and other agencies will be encouraged.

General Design Principles

1. Improvements to access should be considered within the context of the statutory duty to conserve the historic environment.
2. Full access for everyone via the principal entrance should always be the objective. However, there may be circumstances where the historic environment is so sensitive or the alterations would be so damaging to the character of a listed building that alternative access arrangements would be more appropriate to preserve that character.
3. In all cases, an innovative approach to design and high quality materials will be encouraged to provide solutions tailored to the particular building. Restrictions may be placed on colours and materials to protect the appearance of the listed building or conservation area.
4. Full access provision in accordance with the guidance above should always be made in extensions to historic buildings and new buildings in historic areas.
5. Applications for planning and listed building consent should be accompanied by an assessment of the barriers to access outside and inside their building, and how these can be overcome without detriment to the historic fabric. This is often called an Access Audit. This will enable the planning authority to make a balanced assessment of all the issues involved. There is a national register of Access Consultants (www.nrac.org.uk).

Detailed Design Issues

Ramps

- a) The placing of a ramp on a historic building should always be carefully considered, and the symmetry of existing elevations and the rhythm of the street as a whole should be respected.
- b) Consideration should be given to re-grading the ground at the entrance which may overcome the need for larger ramps and minimise the visual impact on the building. If this will cause a footway hazard, a ramp inside the building may be appropriate; the removal of steps and the lengthening of doors can sometimes accommodate this.
- c) Ramps should be located within the ground owned or controlled by the applicant wherever possible.
- d) Ramps on the public footway will require a Stopping-Up Order and may involve moving public utilities below the pavement. Advice on this issue should be sought from Network Services.
- e) The ramp must leave sufficient clear footway for pedestrians. This will vary according to the volume of pedestrian traffic (i.e. 2m for residential areas, 3m for main roads, 5-6m for busy shopping streets).
- f) Where a ramp is acceptable, high quality materials such as stone to match the existing building will be encouraged, although in some circumstances a high quality design in modern materials may be more appropriate. Surfaces should be non-slip, durable and well maintained. Lighting may be required.



Handrails

- a) Handrails can assist with mobility for many people. They should be carefully designed and sensitively located to avoid being visually intrusive, although they will need to contrast with their background material to help the partially sighted. This can be achieved with traditional materials and profiles.
- b) The profile of the handrail needs to be comfortable to hold providing a good grip, however, the uprights can be of a slender design.
- c) Handrails are not always a safety requirement for ramps less than 600mm high.



Tactile indicators

- a) Historic flooring materials should not be replaced with standard tactile paving where this would be visually intrusive. A tactile grid can be achieved by using materials to match the original which have been textured with ridges or dimples, in line with guidance provided in the Streetscape Manual, “Edinburgh Standards for Streets”
- b) The surface of setts can be smoothed in certain areas by selective pointing, or a narrow path in a complementary natural stone could be provided for crossings, where this complements the surrounding streetscape.



Visual indicators

- a) Brightly coloured high visibility strips should be avoided, unless their use helps to avoid other more visually intrusive works. Improving lighting within the building to remove shadows around hazards, such as stairs, is desirable and may not involve any statutory consents.



Doors

- a) Historic doors can be a barrier to access; they may be too narrow or too heavy but may be an integral part of the design of the building.
- b) They should be retained wherever possible; they are usually timber or glass and it is normally possible to adapt them by re-hanging, introducing opening mechanisms or visual indicators to make the handles more prominent.



Mechanical solutions

- a) A mechanical device such as a lift, platform lift or stair climber is often the only solution to overcome changes in level in a historic environment .
- b) Future maintenance must be considered.
- c) It should be possible to use the facility without assistance if it is located outside.
- d) An existing opening should be used where possible, minimising physical and visual disruption to the built fabric.
- e) The resting position of the lift should be at the lowest level possible, and the design of the platform and restraints should be as transparent as possible. Metal cages are disruptive to the streetscape (and the interior of historic buildings), and can seem intimidating to the user.
- f) Stair lifts and chair lifts may not be acceptable in sensitive interiors. It may be better to use a secondary stair, if one exists, or to rationalise the service provision within the building so that access to all floors is not required. An independent device such as a stair climber could also be considered in these circumstances.



Parking

- a) Parking should comply with the Council's Parking Standards, and care should be taken not to compromise the setting of the building.
- b) Planting should be considered for screening, and surfacing materials for the parking area, access path and handrails should be sensitive to the historic setting.
- c) Spaces should be marked with standard but discreet road markings and signs.

Managed solutions

- a) It may not always be possible to adapt a historic building because its fabric is so sensitive. Computer or audio links and staff training should all be considered to ensure that as far as possible all users of the building have access to the same service or experience.
- b) Reconsidering the way a building is used as part of an Access Audit could remove the need for expensive and damaging alterations. The way the building is used should be kept under continuous review.

■ REASONED JUSTIFICATION

The access improvements which are required under the DDA legislation to make access easier for disabled people will improve access for everyone. This is to be welcomed.

The Council's Equalities Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to addressing the causes of prejudice on society and covers a number of groups within the city which are likely to experience prejudice. These groups include disabled people, women, children, young and old people. The Council's Equalities Unit can be contacted on 0131-469-3898.

Historic buildings were rarely built with accessibility concerns in mind. While the Council encourages efforts to make all buildings equally accessible to everyone, it is recognised that many historic buildings and environments are unique and pose particular problems. This guideline therefore sets out principles of design, rather than providing prescriptive design solutions, and seeks to achieve access improvement without compromising the special character of listed buildings or conservation areas. Pre-application discussion with the relevant Council's Development Quality Team is recommended. The Planning Help Desk will be able to identify a specific contact. (0131-529-3596).

The Council's Network Services Teams (Tel: 529-3414) can provide advice on alterations affecting the city's streetscape, and Building Control will provide advice on the need for a Building Warrant (Tel:0131-529-4892)

The Edinburgh Access Panel is the relevant consultee for all Edinburgh planning applications and applications for building control relaxations with access implications. The Panel can be contacted c/o Thistle Foundation, Niddrie Mains Road, Edinburgh EH16 4EA.

■ FURTHER READING

Department of Transport Inclusive Mobility 2002

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 Code of Practice - Rights of Access, Goods, Facilities, Services and Premises The Stationary Office 2002

Disability Rights Commission 2004 - What It Means To You. A Guide for Service Providers. DRC 2003

Foster L - Access to the Historic Built Environment 1997 (ISBN 18733941 87)

Historic Scotland's Technical Advice Note 7 Access to the Built Heritage 1996

Lacey A (2004) Designing for Accessibility - Centre for Accessible Environments. Includes plans and dimensional data for access provision in public buildings

BS8300:2001 Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people - Code of Practice

English Heritage - Easy Access to Historic Properties

CADW - Overcoming the Barriers - Providing Physical Access to Historic Buildings

■ USEFUL SOURCES OF ADVICE

Capability Scotland (www.capability-scotland.org.uk)

The Centre for Accessible Environments (www.cae.org.uk)

Department of Transport (www.dft.gov.uk)

The Disability Rights Commission (Scotland) (www.drc-gb.org)

Historic Scotland (www.historic-scotland.gov.uk)

Joint Mobility Unit of the RNIB (www.jmuaccess.org.uk)

National Register of Access Consultants (www.nrac.org.uk)

For further details contact:

Head of Planning, The City of Edinburgh Council, 1 Cockburn Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1ZJ.

Tel: 0131 469 3634 Fax: 0131 529 7478

