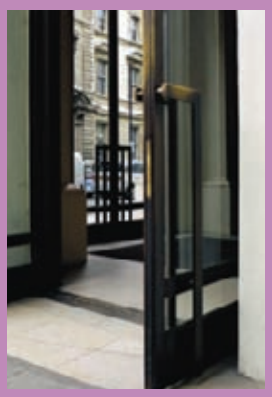
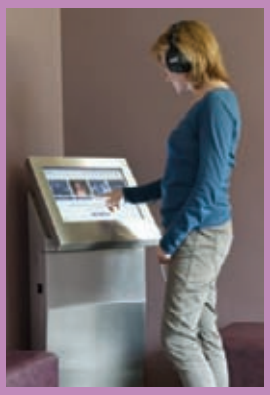
ENGLISH HERITAGE





Easy Access to Historic Buildings

English Heritage's commitment to access

Too many people think of the historic environment as being inaccessible. English Heritage knows that this need not be the case. On the contrary, we have seen and been involved with some amazing solutions to all types of barriers, physical and otherwise. What we have learnt is that with the right kind of thought and discussion a way can be found round almost any barrier. We also recognise that people's expectations – and the technical opportunities to meet them – are constantly evolving. For that reason we are using our growing awareness to the issues disabled people face to constantly improve the accessibility of all our own services.

While the needs of disabled people must be our highest priority, we also know that easier access will benefit almost all of us at some stage in our lives. Whether during pregnancy, as a parent pushing a buggy or an older person who is finding steps a bit harder to manage, we all value thoughtful and effective design for our access needs.

We want to see the broadest possible public access to the historic environment and to the interpretation that makes it come alive. This is because we believe that the historic environment can make a positive difference to the lives not only of individuals but whole communities. For that reason we will continue to promote solutions that make access easier while simultaneously encouraging responsible care of the historic places that matter to us all.

In its search for a more inclusive approach to the historic environment English Heritage is keen to celebrate access solutions that combine conservation with excellent, high quality modern design. Our publications on *Easy Access to Historic Landscapes* and *Easy Access to Historic Buildings* show how this vision can be turned into practical reality.

Baroness Andrews
Chair, English Heritage

Contents

Access was improved at the scheduled Ypres Tower in Rye, East Sussex, by creating a gently sloping approach path across the lawn and reconstructing an original medieval doorway to give level access to the ground floor.

The policy of the Equality Act is not a minimalist policy of simply ensuring that some access is available to disabled people; it is, so far as is reasonably practicable, to approximate the access enjoyed by disabled people to that enjoyed by the rest of the public. The purpose of the duty to make reasonable adjustments is to provide access to a service as close as it is reasonably possible to get to the standard normally offered to the public at large (and their equivalents in relation to associations or the exercise of public functions).

Equality Act 2010 Statutory Code of Practice: Services, Public Functions and Associations, 2011, page 90, 7.4

Part 1: Why access matters

English Heritage recognises that everyone should be able to enjoy easy and inclusive access to the historic environment. Removing the barriers to access can allow many more people to use and benefit from the historic environment, and if done sensitively need not compromise the ability of future generations to do the same.

Providing easy access to properties that have changes of level, uneven routes and other obstacles can seem daunting. It is nevertheless remarkable how much can be achieved with careful thought and good advice. While physical barriers often pose the greatest challenges, improvements to interpretation and services can also increase people's ability to engage with our cultural heritage, compensating at least in part for any unavoidable limitations to physical access.

Making it easier to use buildings and their surrounding landscapes can also be a legislative requirement. The Equality Act gives people protection from discrimination in a range of areas including the accessing of services, education and employment. Organisations and individuals who have duties under the Act have to make sure that they do not discriminate, which means that they may need to adapt their premises to allow disabled people to access services and employment.

These guidelines are intended for those who own, manage or occupy historic buildings in England. They are also for the benefit of those who will be professionally involved in planning alterations or in advising on alternative forms of service provision. Their first aim is to explain how the process of improving access can be satisfactorily aligned with the wider principles of conservation. As well as providing a summary of the statutory framework they illustrate different successful approaches, ranging from minor improvement works to high-quality modern design solutions.

The guidelines do not deal with those aspects of access that relate to broader policies, practices and procedures, or with general design issues. These are covered in detail in other publications – good, comprehensive design guidance is available in BS 8300 and also covered in *Approved Document M* of the Building Regulations. The guidelines do, however, contain significant detail on the nature of historic buildings, their features and the challenges they pose.

The construction of a new visitor centre at Whitby Abbey, with a passenger lift within the ruined shell of the 17th-century mansion, provided the opportunity to improve access to the abbey ruins. Consent was obtained to open up a blocked doorway at upper-floor level and to form a ramped bridge from the opening onto the elevated abbey precincts.

Picture to the right:
© Martine Hamilton Knight / Built Vision

Picture below:
© Tony Bartholomew

Conservation principles

Buildings, landscapes and monuments – the physical survivals of our past – are protected not their own sake but for our benefit and that of the generations who will succeed us. They are an integral part of our cultural identity and contribute towards a strong sense of place, whether in a local, regional or national context. They are irreplaceable, but sometimes they need to be modified to meet the changing needs of their occupants. The survival of most historic buildings depends upon their continued, viable use and this may, among other things, require alterations to improve access.

Sensitive alteration will have due regard for what it is that makes a particular building special or significant. Significance may arise from its distinctive physical features, from its layout and relative completeness, from the materials and methods of its construction, or from its association with particular personalities and events. Significance may also lie in the archaeological remains that survive hidden in the ground below. Understanding the significance of a building is a vital first step in thinking about how much it can be changed.

In most cases access can be improved without compromising the special interest of historic buildings. There are only rare occasions when nothing can be done to improve or facilitate access. By undertaking a careful process of research, brief-taking, consultation and creative exploration of alternatives, good quality solutions that add a new layer of history to our historic buildings are usually possible.

The English Heritage document *Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment* sets out a consistent approach to making decisions about all aspects of the historic environment. It also shows how its protection can be reconciled with the economic and social needs and aspirations of the people who live in it. The principles align with the National Planning Policy Framework, which sets out the Government's planning policies for England, provides a framework for sustainable development and gives strategies for conserving and enhancing the historic environment. The provision of easy access can be an important part of a sustainable approach to caring for the historic environment and *Conservation Principles* shows how access can be improved without compromising the significance of special places.

Consent for the new passenger lift at Colchester Castle was dependent upon the outcome of an archaeological investigation. The cost and time to conduct an investigation needs to be anticipated in the building budget and programme.

The statutory framework

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. The Act covers discrimination because of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. These categories are known in the Act as 'protected characteristics'. The Act sets out the different ways in which it is unlawful to treat someone, such as direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, victimisation and failing to make a reasonable adjustment for a disabled person.

People and organisations who own, manage or occupy historic buildings in England, and who have duties under the service-provider, employer, education and other provisions of the act, need to ensure that they do not discriminate against people with protected characteristics. When considering physical access to buildings and their surroundings it is necessary to take account of duties relating to disabled people and to consider potential barriers to access. However, it is important to remember that the Equality Act is about people and not buildings. The Act does not include standards for accessible building design, though following good-practice guidance, such as the standards set out in BS 8300 and *Approved Document M* of the Building Regulations, can help duty holders provide a reasonable standard of access and thus fulfill their duties under the Act.

Employers

All employers, large and small, have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to avoid substantial disadvantage to disabled employees. The duty to make these changes is not speculative, but relates to the actual needs of a specific individual who is disabled. It may, however, be more cost-effective to consider access improvements as part of a programme of planned refurbishment, thereby allowing for disabled people to be employed in the future without the need for further alterations.

Service providers

The duty to make reasonable adjustments requires service providers to take positive steps to ensure that disabled people can access services at a standard that is as close as possible to that offered to the public at large. This duty may require service providers to make reasonable adjustments to any physical features, including furniture and displays, wherever disabled customers or potential customers would otherwise be at a substantial disadvantage compared with non-disabled people.

Unlike the duty imposed on employers, this is an anticipatory duty; service providers are required to anticipate the needs of disabled people and to accommodate them in a wide variety of ways. The duty to make reasonable adjustments is also a continuous one and service providers will need to review the changes they have made at periodic intervals.

Volunteers

Volunteers may also be protected under the Equality Act. If volunteers have a contract and receive more than just out-of-pocket expenses then they may be treated as employees. Other volunteers may also be protected as guidance states that providing someone with a volunteering opportunity counts as providing them with a service and so service-provider duties come into play.

Educational institutions

Post-16 educational institutions have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students, including modifications to physical features. This duty is similar to that imposed on service providers and is again anticipatory.

Where educational buildings are used for conferences, banquets, and other non-educational purposes, this is likely to give rise to service-provider duties.

The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Public Sector Equality Duty, which is made up of a general equality duty supported by specific duties, is part of the Equality Act and applies to certain public sector bodies, including key organisations such as local authorities and the providers of health, transport and education services. Those bodies must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different groups. This duty encourages consideration of physical access for disabled people and the making of appropriate adjustments.

The Equality Act does not override other legislation such as listed building or planning legislation, and the need to obtain appropriate approvals still applies in the case of changes made to improve access.

Planning permission

Planning control is the system used to manage the development of land and buildings; it is administered by local planning authorities. Planning permission is required for most kinds of work that involve material alteration to the external appearance of a building. It also covers most changes of use. A planning application normally needs to be supported by a design and access statement that sets out the principles that have been applied to the proposal and then goes on to provide information about how inclusive access is to be achieved. It needs to make particular reference to the needs of disabled people, and can be used to explain any proposed reasonable adjustments to physical features of the building.

The Planning system can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities … Local Planning Authorities should aim to involve all sections of the community in the development of Local Plans and in planning decisions, and should facilitate neighbourhood planning. Planning policies and decisions should … aim to achieve places which promote … (among other things) … safe and accessible environments (and) developments.

Extracts from Paragraph 69 of the National Planning Policy Framework. DCLG, March 2012.

The Building Regulations 2010: *Approved Document M* (2004)

Part M of the Building Regulations is about access to and use of buildings. It applies to material alterations of and extensions to non-domestic buildings and to material changes to some non-domestic uses. The regulation requires reasonable provision to be made for people to gain access to the building and to use its facilities. *Approved Document M* gives guidance on meeting the regulation and sets out minimum standards for access.

Following the guidance in *Approved Document M* can be a helpful way to establish reasonable provision under the Equality Act. Failing to meet the guidance need not automatically imply discrimination, however, as there may be other means of achieving the same end result. This approach is in line with the principles that underpin the protection of listed buildings, in that it can allow access to be provided in ways that avoid removing those features of a building which contribute to its significance, and thus to its listing.

Access statements and Part M of the Building Regulations

Departure from the guidance set out in *Approved Document M* can be explained by an access statement supporting the application. In the case of existing buildings, and particularly in the case of historic buildings, such a statement will allow a designer to identify the constraints imposed by the existing structure and its immediate environment. Where full access proves to be impracticable or only achievable at disproportionate cost, compensatory measures can be proposed. Essentially the access statement is a way of demonstrating that every effort has been made to provide an inclusive environment and it should not be used to justify lower standards of access provision.

Historic buildings and *Approved Document M*

The need to conserve the special characteristics of historic buildings is recognised in *Approved Document M*. The guidance states that the aim should be to improve accessibility where practically possible, provided that the work does not prejudice the character of the building or increase the risk of long-term deterioration to the building fabric or fittings. Consultation with conservation and access officers is recommended, as well as taking into account the views of English Heritage and local access groups in order to make the building as accessible as possible.

Listed building consent

Under the terms of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act (1990) consent is required for any works of demolition, alteration or extension that will affect the character of a listed building, including any associated structures and fittings within its curtilage. Listed building legislation applies to both internal and external changes, irrespective of whether features are identified separately in the list description. The advice of the local planning authority should be sought on the need for consent at an early stage in the design process.

When seeking listed building consent it is important to provide information about the architectural and historical significance of the building and to assess the likely impact of the access proposals in relation to this. The application must demonstrate why any potentially damaging works are necessary or desirable, thus establishing that a balance is being struck between conservation and access. If a detailed proposal is refused consent it may still be possible to achieve an acceptable alternative design solution through negotiation and resubmission. Even if consent continues to be refused, there is likely to be a means of appeal. Whether or not the service provider's duty to take all reasonable steps to ensure accessibility includes pursuing an appeal will depend on the circumstances of the case.

It may also be necessary to apply for listed building consent for temporary access measures, including those made in advance of permanent solutions being adopted, if these will affect the character of the building. The local planning authority will advise on the need for consent. Portable ramps that are not fixed in place and which are removed after use do not require consent.

BS 8300:2009 + A1:2010 Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people. Code of practice

BS 8300 provides guidance on good practice in the design of buildings and their approaches to allow convenient use by disabled people. The extent to which the standards apply to historic buildings will be determined on an individual basis. It should be noted that in certain respects guidance in the British Standard differs from that in *Approved Document M*.

The refurbished entrance to the Treasury in Horse Guards Road has a symmetrical arrangement of ramp and steps. High-quality design complements the refurbishment of the historic elements.

Stair lifts are visually intrusive and not an ideal access solution, but can provide access when it is impossible to accommodate a vertical lift. At Winchester Cathedral the scale of the background architecture helps reduce the visual impact.

Ecclesiastical buildings

Some Christian denominations are exempted from the need to obtain listed building consent under the terms of the 1990 Planning Act, because they have consent procedures of their own which have been accepted by the Government as providing an appropriate level of protection for their historic buildings. For the Church of England, all places of worship (not just those which are listed) are subject to the Faculty Jurisdiction system, which balances the needs of worship and mission with care and conservation of the buildings. Other denominations with their own control systems are the Church in Wales, the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Baptist Union of Great Britain. However, the service provider provisions of the Equality Act cover activities within places of worship, irrespective of the denomination.

Under the Church of England's Faculty Jurisdiction Rules, parishes proposing significant alterations to their listed church should provide a Statement of Significance and Statement of Need to be taken into account when changes to the buildings are proposed. This emphasises the principle, also set out in the Church of England's case law of consistory court judgements, that where changes are proposed to a listed church there should be a clear need for the works which is sufficient to outweigh the normal assumption against alteration. Improvements to access should be considered in this context, in the light of what is reasonable.

Scheduled monument consent

As well as being listed, some historic buildings and their surroundings may be protected under the Ancient Monuments Act (1979). Consent is required for any work to an archaeological site or building that has been registered as a scheduled monument. Applications for consent are dealt with by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, acting on advice from English Heritage.

The consent procedures will include four key principles: an application to an independent body, consultation with amenity bodies, consideration being given to the significance of the buildings themselves, and a right of appeal.

At All Souls Church, Langham Place, London, an inconspicuous handrail leads up the side of the porch steps and a shallow ramp to a side entrance leads to a lobby and passenger lift that serves the church and the crypt. Visual impact upon the porch, which is of critical significance to the streetscape and the church, is minimal.

Historic gardens and landscapes

The parks, gardens and other designed landscapes associated with historic buildings may also be of special historic interest in their own right and therefore included on English Heritage's *Register of Parks and Gardens*. The Register contains a diverse range of sites: gardens, squares, cemeteries and parks. If planning permission is required for any proposed alterations, the local planning authority must consult the Garden History Society in all cases, and English Heritage in the case of gardens registered as grade I or II*.

Where planning permission is not required but the proposed changes may affect the character or appearance of the garden or landscape, it is still advisable to seek professional guidance, especially in the case of ecclesiastical buildings, which will need denominational approval. Historic landscapes not included in the Register may be of considerable local value and any changes to their design, layout, character or appearance should be considered in this context.

At Stourhead, Wiltshire, the ramped path provides an alternative route adjacent to the garden steps.

If a building within a historic landscape is listed, changes to that landscape may also impact upon the setting of the building and should be considered in relation to the significance of both. Planning permission may be required for such changes, and the advice of the local planning authority should be sought.

Guidance on access to historic gardens and landscapes is given in English Heritage's companion guide, *Easy Access to Historic Landscapes*.

The ramped access at the Geffrye Museum in London has been designed as part of the sunken herb garden.

Part 2: Planning better access

What is reasonable?

The access strategy

Any organisation, be it a high-street retailer, museum or restaurant, that wants to make it easier for people to use its historic building is strongly advised to start by establishing an access strategy – a document that answers six simple questions:

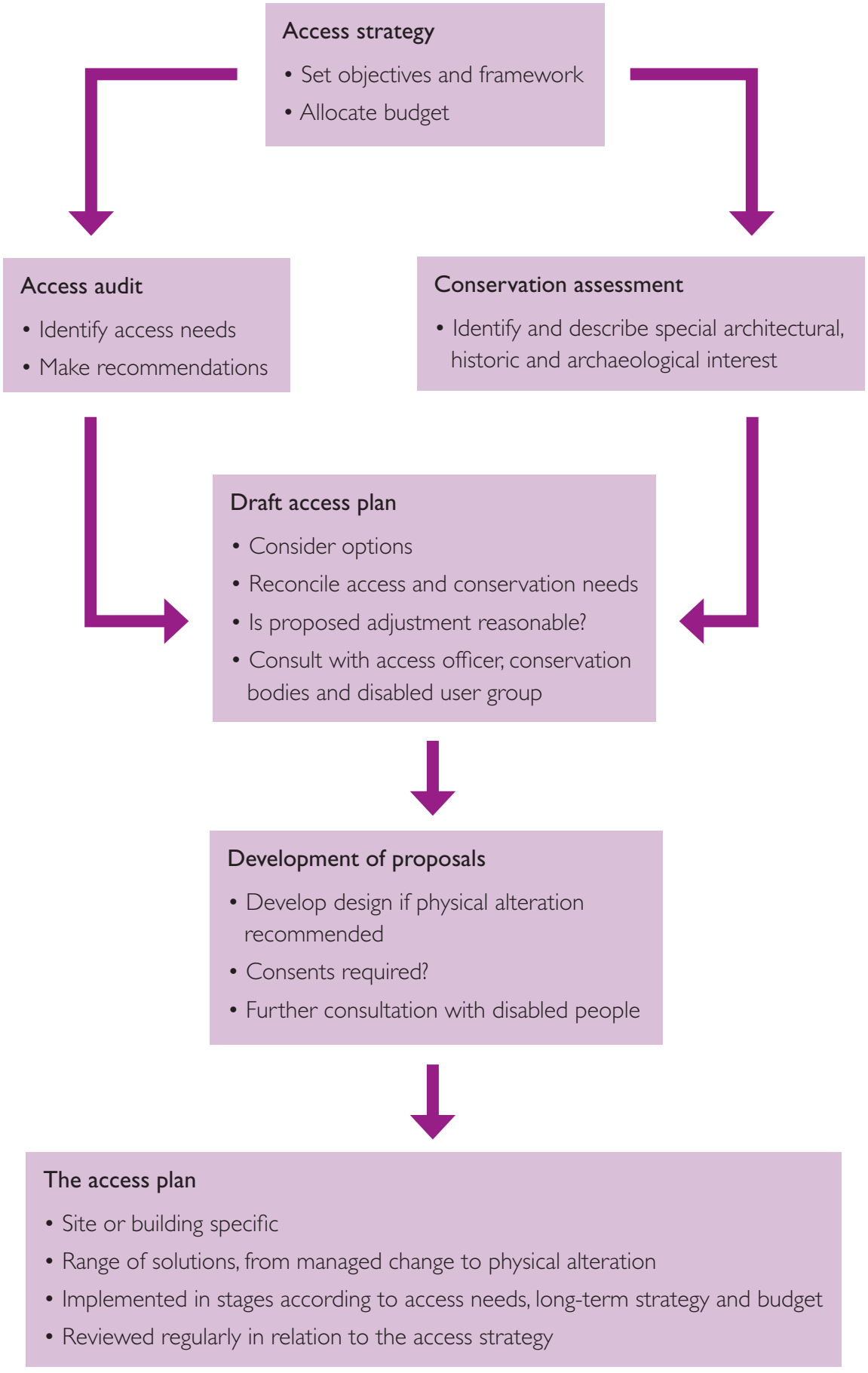
- what is it that needs to be improved – is it the building itself, the way it is managed or a combination of the two?
- what would be a reasonable adjustment?
- what are the statutory obligations that have to be met?
- which are the conservation considerations that need to be taken into account?
- who is going to be responsible for balancing these requirements?
- how much will it cost and how long is it going to take?

The secret of a successful strategy is clarity – making sure that the needs of visitors and users are as clearly understood as the sensitivities of the building that will be accommodating them. With careful planning it should be possible to provide suitable access for disabled people without compromising a building's special interest.

Strategic commitment from the top of the organisation is another vital component, as is the presence of someone who will be responsible for implementing and reviewing the measures identified in the access planning process.

The Equality Act requires service providers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people in the way they deliver their services. However, the Act does not specify how a service provider should go about meeting its obligations; it is up to them to decide whether they need to physically alter an obstructing feature or whether they can find a way of avoiding it or providing the same service in an alternative way.

It is not always necessary to remove an obstacle. In many cases the same desired result can be achieved by providing alternative routes or re-organising the use of spaces, without any need for physical alterations. To avoid making the wrong decisions organisations and professionals should never undertake access works without first understanding which solutions would actually be preferred by disabled people themselves.


Access strategy
• Set objectives and framework
• Allocate budget
Access audit
• Identify access needs
• Make recommendations
Conservation assessment
• Identify and describe special architectural, historic and archaeological interest
Draft access plan
• Consider options
• Reconcile access and conservation needs
• Is proposed adjustment reasonable?
• Consult with access officer, conservation bodies and disabled user group
Development of proposals
• Develop design if physical alteration recommended
• Consents required?
• Further consultation with disabled people
The access plan
• Site or building specific
• Range of solutions, from managed change to physical alteration
• Implemented in stages according to access needs, long-term strategy and budget
• Reviewed regularly in relation to the access strategy

The access audit

The first step in planning access improvements is to undertake an access audit. This will assess and document barriers to access which exist within a building and its surroundings. A good audit will consider the requirements of wheelchair users, ambulant disabled people and those with sensory impairments and learning disabilities. It will consider intellectual access as well as physical access and can take into account the needs of families with young children and older people.

It is helpful for the audit to follow the sequence of the visitor's journey through the building – from arrival on foot, by car or public transport, through entry into the building, access to each of the services and facilities provided and finally to the exit route. An audit can also consider how people would be helped to leave in the event of an emergency.

The purpose of the audit is to compare the existing situation with best-practice guidance, thereby helping to identify any barriers to access that there may be. The auditor will make recommendations about possible ways of improving access, taking into account the use and nature of the building. It is recommended that someone experienced in assessing access issues should carry out the audit. Reference could be made to the National Register of Access Consultants.

The conservation assessment

A complementary part of the process will be to prepare a conservation assessment that establishes the significance of a building or site and its constituent parts in terms of its special architectural, historic or archaeological interest. These are usually prepared by architectural historians or conservation architects but amenity societies and local authorities may also be a source of guidance. In the case of ecclesiastical buildings, the statement of significance should provide the equivalent of a conservation assessment.

The access plan

Once an access audit and conservation assessment have been completed it becomes possible to prepare a detailed access plan that reconciles, where necessary, the needs of access and conservation. The plan will consider options for improvement, identify needs and impacts, and look at what is likely to be a reasonable adjustment. This stage of the process should include consultation not only with access and conservation bodies but with disabled people themselves.

The aim of an access plan should be, as far as is reasonably practicable, to provide a standard of access for disabled people equal to that enjoyed by the rest of the public.

The access plan will normally have four related objectives:

- establish short and long-term aims in relation to opportunities
- set out proposed solutions, ranging from change of operational use to physical alteration
- identify statutory consents or other approvals that are required
- propose timescales for implementation.

Linked to maintenance and management procedures, the plan can also help ensure that access remains an ongoing priority. To make sure this happens it should be reviewed at regular intervals and used to record decisions and alterations to the original scheme and timetable.

The role of the conservation officer

The job of local authority building conservation officers is to provide specialist advice on the repair and maintenance of historic buildings. This can be particularly valuable if alterations to improve access are likely to need planning permission or listed building consent.

It is the detailed preparation of the access plan that will confirm the need for any alterations to a historic building, including those requiring listed building or scheduled monument consent. However, the process should begin by considering all the other options available – including the provision of the service by other means – and assessing the impact that each of these would have on the building's significance.

If there are any conflicts between the interests of access and conservation, it may be possible to reconcile these through creative and sensitive design. For financial and operational reasons physical works may need to phased over a period of time, in which case the plan may need to allow for alternative ways of providing the service in the interim.

The access plan should not be restricted to wheelchair users. It also needs to consider the requirements of people with limited mobility, sensory impairments and learning disabilities, families with young children and older people. A well-drafted plan should be central to any organisation's strategic commitment to improving access. It also needs to be reviewed regularly so that the current provisions can be kept up-to-date, not only in terms of changes in regulations but also new technical solutions, both of which the service provider is duty-bound to take reasonable steps to comply with.

Focus groups made up of disabled people, or drawn from a local access group, can be invaluable in testing proposals before they are incorporated into the access plan. The finished plan can also be used both as the basis of any access statement required for statutory consents and to provide a useful record of decisions taken in relation to duties under the Equality Act.

The role of the access officer

Access officers are normally based in the planning or building control departments of local authorities. As well as helping to develop access policies and design guidance, they advise on development proposals in relation to planning policy and Part M of the Building Regulations. They also facilitate local access groups made up of disabled people. All of this makes them invaluable sources of practical advice on access improvements so they should be consulted as early as possible in the development of an access plan.

Management issues

No access plan will be truly successful unless it is underpinned by a commitment from the very top of the organisation to meet or exceed currently agreed standards of good practice. It also needs the backing of universal staff awareness brought about through a combination of training and ongoing management support. An accessible WC used to store cleaning materials rapidly ceases to be accessible; a cluttered reception desk with a profusion of leaflets and notices offers clear information to no one. Good access depends on the effective management of the whole service – in many instances a simple change in operational working can overcome an apparently stubborn physical access issue.

A successful access plan will consider a range of solutions, including management procedures and physical improvements..

No1 Smithery, Chatham Historic Dockyard, is a scheduled monument and grade II* listed. The restoration of the building includes a new accessible public entrance with ramp and steps. The scale of the façade allows this significant new addition.

Power-assisted doors located in the returns of the portico at the Royal Opera House provide an easily accessible route.

Funding for access improvements

Neither English Heritage nor the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is in a position to provide the owners of historic buildings with money specifically to improve access. However, HLF can fund physical and sensory access improvements to historic buildings or sites (including places of worship) if they form part of a wider project to repair and open up the building or site to the public. HLF can also grant-aid the completion of an access audit as part of the development phase of a project.

At Ripon Town Hall the whole pavement has been ramped up to threshold level over the original steps, part of a scheme that included the addition of a lift and accessible toilets inside. Railings have been added because of the increase in kerb height, but no handrail has been provided for the steps.

Barriers to access

Overcoming barriers

First and foremost, the access planning process is about finding ways to overcome the barriers to access that are the concern of the Equality Act – and especially those relating to physical obstructions.

All service providers covered by the Equality Act are required to make whatever reasonable adjustments are necessary to ensure that disabled people are not put at a substantial disadvantage. Potential obstacles fall into two broad categories:

- external physical elements of the building and its setting, including landscape features, kerbs, exterior surfaces, paving, parking areas, building entrances and exits as well as emergency escape routes
- any feature arising from the design or construction of a building itself, including architectural details (such as plinths, column bases, staircases, ironwork and door openings), fixtures, fittings, furnishings, furniture, equipment and other materials.

King's Bench Walk, Inner Temple, London. A short-rise platform lift is positioned behind railings where it descends to basement level and connects to the primary circulation routes.

With a minor adjustment to liturgical practice, a church member in a wheelchair receives communion in the nave at the church of St James the Great, Colchester.

Cobbles and setts can be difficult for ambulant disabled people to walk on, especially if they are rough, uneven or open-jointed. At Brougham Castle, Cumbria, a smooth path is laid across an uneven surface to create a more accessible route.

It is important that each feature is properly understood, both in its own right and in the context of the whole building. Every effort should be made to leave features unchanged and visible if they contribute to the building's significance, character or composition. In some circumstances a reasonable adjustment may involve avoiding a feature rather than making an alteration.

The type of service or activity that takes place within the building will also be a major factor in determining the appropriate level of access and the required degree of alteration. The Equality Act lists the factors that affect whether a potential adjustment is seen as reasonable – the size and financial resources of an organisation are taken into account..

Any proposed change of use that involves service-provider or education functions needs careful consideration of the way in which the resultant access requirements could be accommodated within the existing structure.

The Equality Act outlines four options for overcoming a barrier caused by a physical feature. These are:

- removal of the feature
- alterations to the feature
- providing a reasonable means of avoiding it
- providing the service by a reasonable alternative method if none of the preceding options is viable.

The Act does not prescribe which option should be considered first, but the Code of Practice recommends that service providers should start by considering whether the physical feature which creates a barrier can be removed or altered. This represents an inclusive approach to access because it makes services available to everyone in the same way. The Act requires that any means of avoiding the physical feature must be a 'reasonable' one. In determining reasonableness consideration should be given to the dignity of disabled people and the extent to which they are caused inconvenience or anxiety. It should always be remembered that the aim is to achieve a standard of access for disabled people that is equal to that enjoyed by the rest of the public.

At the Royal Academy, Piccadilly, the permanent scheme (right) which replaced unsightly temporary ramps (left) involved the modification of the plinth to accommodate the raised courtyard levels. Picture to the left © Francis Ware

The new entrance arrangements at St John's Smith Square include a ramp from the pavement giving access to a lift serving internal levels.

Dialogue and discussion

English Heritage encourages early pre-application consultation with local-authority conservation, building control, access and archaeology staff; with local access groups and, in the case of major buildings undergoing potentially substantial alterations, with its own staff. In many planning departments, applications involving access provisions are reviewed by an access officer, who should be able to advise on the suitability of the proposed solutions, or recommend alternative sources of advice and guidance. Continuous dialogue and feedback from users can ease the handling of applications for listed building and other consents, and help to achieve solutions which satisfactorily combine access and conservation.

The stone balustrade has been cut through on one side of the entrance to the Seaman's Hall at Somerset House to provide ramped access.

The Christopher Wren-designed church of St James sits between Piccadilly and Jermyn streets, which are at different levels. Level access has been achieved from Jermyn Street by altering a window to form a doorway, which is located in a 19th-century addition to the original body of the church and deemed less sensitive.

Visitor using the interactive display in the Visitor Centre at Knole, Kent.

Removing the feature

It may be the case that those features which form a barrier are also those which make up the special interest of the building – a narrow doorway or staircase for example. In this case, removal is unlikely to constitute a reasonable adjustment. Additive change is more likely to be appropriate than destructive change. It may be the case that when balancing the long-term future of the building with the short-term needs of its occupants a reversible semi-permanent solution may be the most appropriate.

To determine reasonableness, it will be essential to assess the relative contribution such features make to the building as a whole, and to set this against the costs and benefits which removal might bring. Frequency of use could also be a significant issue when making this assessment.

Altering the feature

It may be possible to make alterations without adversely affecting the historic fabric or quality of the building. Alternatives that look beyond standard solutions might include the sympathetic reduction, rather than removal, of physical features. Where it is not possible to adhere completely to the design standard recommended in BS 8300 or *Approved Document M* of the Building Regulations, the access statement can be used to identify the constraints imposed by the existing structure and justify the proposed reasonable adjustment.

These before and after photographs show the removal of steps and the lowering of the entrance levels at the United Church, Winchester.

Picture below: © Joe Low

At St Michael's House in Cambridge access has been provided to the café and exhibition space. The scheme does not meet all the provisions of *Approved Document M* of the Building Regulations but still provides a reasonable standard of access.

Finding ways round barriers to access

It may be possible to avoid the feature that creates a barrier by changing the way in which a building is managed, perhaps by providing access via a side route or by opening up a secondary main entrance. The principal entrance may still be available, but the preferred option would be to ensure that everyone uses the accessible entrance. This may require further changes to the management of the building and to the use of its internal spaces. Circulation routes within a building could be adjusted to avoid barriers such as stepped thresholds and narrow doorways.

Providing the service in another way

This option can be considered in addition to the approaches discussed above or where physical changes have been considered and rejected. However, this approach alone may not be considered reasonable if one of the other options would have provided a more inclusive service for all users. In considering this option, service providers might investigate, for example:

- relocating public services from the upper to the ground floor, in order to overcome barriers to access
- using print, computer or audio-visual means to provide access to the service, where physical barriers cannot be overcome.

It is recommended that disabled users of the service should be consulted to establish the acceptability of providing the service in a different way to that offered to others.

Picture above: At Morley Town Hall in West Yorkshire an accessible principal entrance has been created at the side of the building, making use of the sloping pavement to provide level access.

Picture right: At the Queen's House in Greenwich level access has been provided at basement level by forming a gently dished semicircular forecourt in front of an existing central door opening on the north front. The new paved route forms the access for all public visitors.

Reasonable adjustments in practice

The Equality Act Code of Practice guidance for service providers gives a list of measures that can be taken to identify or make reasonable adjustments:

- planning in advance for the requirements of disabled people and reviewing the reasonable adjustments in place
- conducting access audits on premises
- asking disabled customers for their views on reasonable adjustments
- consulting local and national disability groups
- drawing disabled people's attention to relevant reasonable adjustments so they know they can use the service
- properly maintaining auxiliary aids and having contingency plans in place in case of the failure of the auxiliary aid
- training employees to appreciate how to respond to requests for reasonable adjustment
- encouraging employees to develop additional serving skills for disabled people (for example, communicating with hearing-impaired people);
- ensuring that employees are aware of the duty to make reasonable adjustments and understand how to communicate with disabled customers so that such adjustments can be identified and made.

At the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight the public entrance was relocated to the west elevation and a new ramp introduced to provide access to the main gallery. A glass balustrade and the use of concrete matching the colour of the limestone cladding limits the visual impact of the new intervention.

© Chester Masonry

At Cragside, near Morpeth, a touch-screen computer provides a virtual tour of parts of the house that are inaccessible.

© National Trust

Part 3: Making access a reality

Practical advice and examples

Easy physical access involves people being able to circulate freely and cope with changes in level. Horizontal movement is most likely to be constrained by floor surfaces, corridors, doorways, thresholds and small changes in level. Improvements to vertical circulation may require alterations to steps, stairs and handrails or involve the introduction of ramps or lifts. All of these can affect the appearance and significance of the building. Path surfaces, steps and gradients present similar issues in parks and gardens and much of the guidance below will be equally applicable to outdoor environments.

What follows is an overview of situations in which difficult decisions often need to be made. Some of the examples may not conform strictly to guidance in *Approved Document M* of the Building Regulations but nevertheless achieve a successful balance between reasonable adjustment and the sensitivities of historic places.

Where there is a physical barrier, the service provider's aim should be to make its services accessible to disabled people and, in particular, to provide access to a service as close as it is reasonably possible to get to the standard normally offered to the public at large. When considering which option to adopt, service providers must balance and compare the alternatives in light of the policy of the Act, which is, as far as is reasonably practicable, to approximate the access enjoyed by disabled persons to that enjoyed by the rest of the public.

Equality Act 2010 Statutory Code of Practice: Services, Public Functions and Associations, 2011, page 106, 7.58

Asymmetrical elevations can accommodate alteration more easily. The addition of this significant ramp at Ealing Town Hall does not upset the balance of the overall composition and the design and use of materials is sympathetic.

At Huddersfield station the asymmetry of a single ramp rising to the portico is insignificant when seen against the heroic scale of the larger design.

At Manchester Art Gallery the symmetrical composition of the main façade is not disturbed by the ramp, which rises to the portico entrance on one side only.

Horizontal movement

Making an entrance

The aim should be to make a building's main entrance accessible to everyone on a permanent basis. Conservation constraints may arise from the design and character of the building's façade and setting and each building will have its own characteristics, which should, as far as possible, be respected in considering alterations for access.

Classical buildings, for example, are usually built to a single, unified plan that follows strict rules of symmetry and proportion. Derived from the idea of a temple, the entrance is often set upon a base and approached by a flight of steps. Alterations to such buildings need to respect these rules, although sometimes relatively small-scale changes may break them without significantly affecting the appearance.

Symmetry may be less of an issue in other types of less formal architecture. Proportion and balance will still be important, but greater flexibility may allow, for example, the insertion of a single asymmetrical ramp.

Georgian and Victorian terraced houses with steps up to the front door can pose seemingly intractable problems in relation to access. Alternative entrance points such as a mews may be available. Alternatively a basement area between the building and the pavement may allow the incorporation of a platform lift to provide access from

A Minton tile floor, such as this one underneath matting at Osborne House, is particularly vulnerable to both foot traffic and wheelchairs and needs to be protected.

Many entrances to 18th-century and 19th-century terraced town houses have steps up to the front entrance, along with a basement area. An external platform lift was installed within the basement area of this London house, the steps and landing altered and the railings adapted in keeping with the existing design. A lift was installed within the house. The house has since been sold and the platform lift removed.

street level to the basement floor. Platform lifts can often be visually less intrusive than ramps over basement areas.

In urban locations, space in front of buildings will frequently be restricted. Where it is available, it may be possible to re-grade the pedestrian approach up to or within a porch or portico. Where an existing entrance cannot be adapted it may be possible to form a new accessible entrance for everyone to use.

Inside the building

Large secular buildings were often designed with a hierarchy of spaces and a prescribed sequence of movement through the building – the entrance hall, principal staircase, primary corridor and principal rooms. The form and decoration of each of these spaces may be part of the building's special interest and the visual impact of any alteration must be carefully considered. In smaller buildings there may simply be too little space for additions such as ramps or lifts, while the visual impact might be equally damaging.

When dealing with level changes and restricted space, the conservation concerns are likely to centre on issues of scale, proportion and continuity in materials, design and finish, as well as structural factors affecting corridor widths and floor levels.

Floors

Routes through buildings need to be free of trip hazards and smooth enough for easy wheelchair use. However, the levelling or alteration of historic floors should only be considered as a last resort once other less potentially damaging options have been fully considered.

If the historic floor surface is particularly fragile, it is likely to require protection against foot traffic and wheelchairs, especially the heavy electrically powered ones. A temporary covering, removable for occasional viewing, may be the only appropriate answer. In such cases, fully accessible information about the floor and its importance should be available near by.

Over-polished floors can be hazardous and slip-resistant finishes are important, particularly in areas where the floor may become wet. Loose rugs without any underlay to anchor them or with edges creating a trip hazard should also be avoided. Thick pile carpets can hinder wheelchair passage.

Doors and openings

Door and window openings establish the character of an elevation and are an integral part of the façade; alterations to their proportions or detail should generally be avoided.

Where the principal entrance is a key element in the design of a building façade, the door frame or surround and the door itself are likely to be significant. Alteration may be possible but should be carefully considered. In the case of heavy doors it may be possible to add a powered opening device or at least a bell to call for assistance.

Standard guidance recommends an 800mm clear opening for a head-on approach, although the majority of manually propelled wheelchairs can manage with slightly less than this. A compromise may therefore be possible, subject to consultation. *Approved Document M* suggests a minimum clear width of 750mm in existing buildings.

Room to manoeuvre alongside the leading edge of a door is particularly important. Where space is inadequate and an alternative route is not feasible, doors could be held open or even removed.

Wheelchairs and other mobility aids can inadvertently damage narrow door cases and joinery. Applied protection may be necessary to safeguard the historic fabric.

Double doors with narrow leaves can also pose a problem as it can be difficult for a wheelchair user to open both doors together. Doors can be held open with electromagnetic catches, linked if necessary to a fire alarm system. Powered opening may be possible, although the addition of devices may cause damage to joinery. It may even be possible to fix the leaves together to act as a single door. Sometimes leaves may have to be replaced with ones of unequal width, to provide a clear 800mm opening on one side.

The addition of vision panels in important historic doors is rarely acceptable. It is more usual to hold doors open to achieve improved access.

Every effort should be made to retain historic door furniture or traditional ironmongery that is integral to the design and character of the door. Automating the door opening or relying on staff assistance is likely to be preferable to replacing significant fittings with lever-type handles.

Removal of original timbers in significant buildings should be avoided, especially when integral to the frame construction. Exposed sill plates across thresholds, such as this one at Deal Castle in Kent, typically pose a problem. A reversible ramp to provide access across the threshold is likely to be preferable to raising the floor locally.

Consideration should be given to the height, ease of use and visual contrast between the handle and door. Self-closing mechanisms with an abrupt or heavy action should be regularly adjusted to their minimum operating pressure.

Thresholds

The generally accepted maximum raised threshold over which an independent wheelchair user can manoeuvre is 15mm, although in practice some people may be able to negotiate a slightly higher one, especially if the leading edge is bevelled. Short temporary threshold ramps can be provided, though care should be taken to ensure they are used safely.

In timber-framed buildings every effort should be made to avoid cutting sill plates or other framing members that contribute to the building's structural integrity. A bevelled fillet on either side can resolve a small difference in height. If sill plates are to be covered by a raised floor or ramp, care should be taken to maintain ventilation and avoid moisture entrapment, which can lead to timber decay.

Corridors

Circulation routes must allow easy movement and provide a sense of location and direction. The preferred unobstructed width of a corridor is 1200mm, though 1800mm is recommended to allow wheelchair users to pass each other.

Visual contrast

Visual contrast can be a useful way to distinguish floor and wall surfaces and thus help people to orient themselves. Contrasting colour for doors or door frames and potential obstructions will also help them to move around safely. Light reflectance values (LRV) should be checked to ensure adequate contrast.

Visual contrast to step nosings is recommended and can be particularly helpful for people with visual impairments. Contrasting nosings can be provided on carpeted stairs, removable paint can be used if appropriate and where alteration is not possible directional lighting can help provide shadow contrast.

Access improvements at the Almeida Theatre, London, were part of a larger project. The foyer ramp gives access to the stalls seating area.

The addition of a carefully detailed external structure has improved access to this civic building in Corsham, Wiltshire, while not compromising its appearance.

Modifications to the relatively modern bridge to the Inner Ward at Barnard Castle, Co Durham, replaced steps with a ramp, giving an accessible main visitor route.

A ramp made by sloping the paving at the west front of Winchester Cathedral created an accessible route into the building.

Vertical movement

Ramps

Ramps are usually preferable to platform lifts and can provide easy and convenient access provided gradients are not too steep or too long. They also tend to be cheaper and much easier to maintain. However, where changes of level are too great, where there is inadequate space or there is an established need to protect architectural or archaeological features, a lift may still have to be considered.

Any slope of 1:20 or steeper is defined as a ramp by *Approved Document M*. Gradients should be as shallow as practicable as steep slopes create difficulties for some wheelchair users and ambulant disabled people. Standard guidance advises a maximum gradient of 1:12 for a distance of up to 2m between level landings. A longer ramp is acceptable where the gradient is shallower and suitable landings are provided. In exceptional circumstances, steeper grades over shorter distances may be preferable to no ramp at all, although these will not be suitable for some wheelchair users without assistance and care should be taken to ensure safe use. Electrically powered wheelchairs can generally cope with steeper slopes than manually propelled ones. The case for a steeper or longer ramp than that recommended in the *Approved Document M* would need to be made in the Access Statement.

At St James' Church, Colchester, the level change at the north porch is more than a metre. A removable ramp at the south door provides access until a permanent solution is provided.

Removable ramps tend to remain in place for several years. They rarely represent a satisfactory architectural solution but can be used out of necessity while a well-designed permanent solution is being agreed.

Removable timber ramps, such as this one at Richmond Castle in North Yorkshire, can provide access where a permanent intervention is not possible.

When forming permanent ramps and raising floor levels, account should be taken of design features such as skirtings, plinths or dado rails. These can often make important contributions to the scale and proportion of a room.

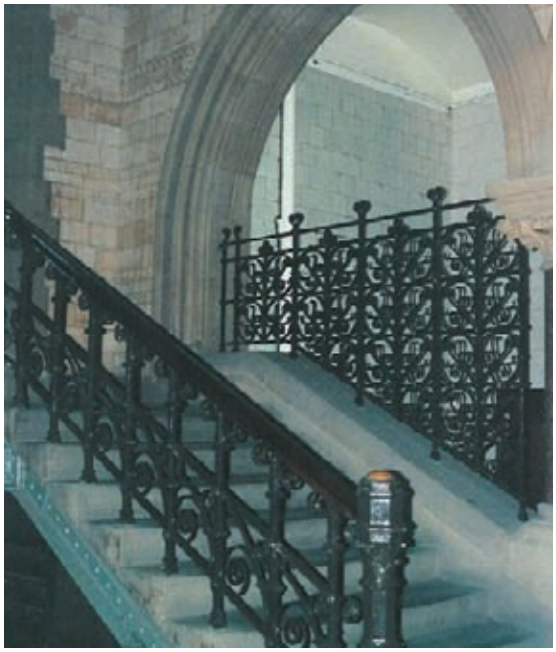
Temporary ramps can have a detrimental visual impact and are unlikely to provide a satisfactory long-term solution to access problems. However, they may be considered a reasonable adjustment prior to the provision of a planned permanent solution, or where access may be needed for a relatively short period in a building's life, or where use is infrequent. Temporary measures should be made to the same standards of design and construction as permanent interventions, not least because they may also require formal approval. Just like permanent arrangements, they should seek to minimise visual impact and to provide the greatest possible degree of integration and independence.

In places of worship, changes in floor levels may have historical and liturgical significance. Where level changes are not great a temporary ramp might be considered though a permanent intervention, carefully designed to respect the historic integrity of its surroundings, is always preferable.

The use of portable ramps has management implications, such as the availability of staff to erect and remove them as required and to ensure their safe use. They may be used from time to time for a single visitor, or periodically for an event lasting several days. As well as avoiding the risk of visual intrusion, portable ramps may also be preferable for smaller properties or those where wheelchair use is infrequent. Appropriate staffing arrangements, training and storage space are integral parts of the solution.

A ramp to one side of the entrance to the Foundling Museum, London, sits behind an existing wall. The new central handrail to the steps allows for left and right-hand use.

It may not be possible or desirable to alter some stairs. Where this is the case alternative forms of access, such as a virtual tour, could be considered.



This stair at Manchester Town hall has a handrail to one side only, not meeting current guidance. The addition of a secondary handrail was not deemed necessary because lift access is available near by.

The new handrail at Huddersfield station is in keeping with its context.

The original handrail at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool does not comply with current profile recommendations and does not project 300mm beyond the top riser because it abuts the pilaster. No changes have been proposed as a nearby lift provides alternative access.

Many ambulant disabled people do not find ramps easy to use. Where a change of level is greater than 300mm it is recommended that steps are provided as well as a ramp. Changes of level of 2m or more should be accompanied by an alternative means of access such as a lift.

Stairs and landings

The principal staircase is often the major element in the most important public space within a building. It is therefore likely to be of considerable architectural and historic importance. Such staircases often fail to comply with current standards and changing them is likely to be contentious. An alternative solution may be possible if there is a secondary staircase that would be less sensitive to alteration.

Handrails

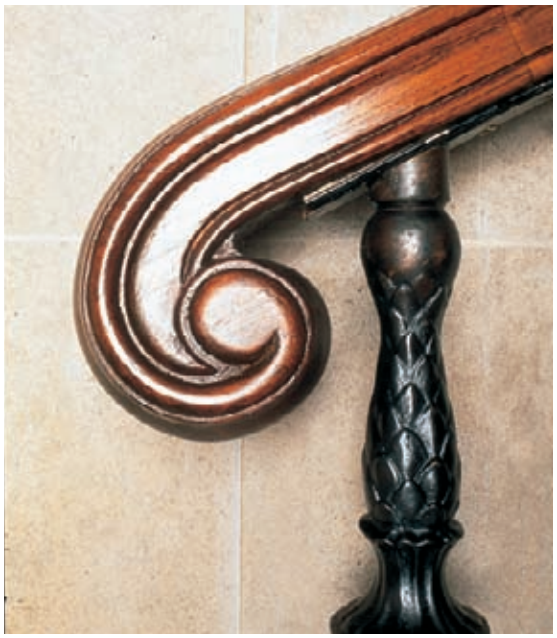
Handrails are highly visible and so represent a critical design issue. The introduction of new handrails to stairs will inevitably impact upon the character of existing spaces and features, even when designed with great care and sensitivity. Detailed design studies, supported by accurate drawings and visualisations, are essential if such interventions are to be properly planned and their impact fully understood.

In older buildings, handrails were not generally designed to extend 300mm beyond the first or last riser, or to have the currently recommended profile. Where handrails do not extend or have a profile that cannot be gripped it may be possible to insert a more suitable additional rail.

A mock-up (picture above right) was used to investigate the visual impact of the proposed handrail at the grade I listed John Rylands Library, Manchester, before the permanent installation. The resulting permanent handrail (below) has been designed to relate to the very high-quality bronze work in the library. The central location improves access to the stairs with minimal impact on the building fabric.

Current standards require all flights of steps to have handrails on both sides and additional central handrails where a flight is more than 1800mm wide. On wider flights where side handrails cannot be provided a single, central handrail gives the desired left- and right-hand option. On narrow stairways, one good handrail is better than none.

The historic context of a staircase may suggest the replication of an existing handrail design which does not fully comply with guidance in *Approved Document M*, but which could nonetheless be regarded as a reasonable adjustment. Where conservation and aesthetic considerations require the retention of non-compliant but historic handrails then this issue should be raised in the Access Statement.



This handrail at the Bank of England shows how it is possible to form new versions that match existing designs and materials.

At the Victoria and Albert Museum in London long symmetrical shallow ramps have been combined with steps that complement the scale of the Cromwell Road frontage. There is one central handrail to the steps.

A new accessible entrance at Tate Britain has wide steps and ramps.

This elegant solution at the Royal Institute of British Architects overcomes a small change of level at the entrance.

The once-derelict grade I listed church of St Luke in London has been converted into a community and music education centre for the London Symphony Orchestra. Access improvements to the entrance are sensitive to the architectural importance of the building.

At the Queen's House in Greenwich a new staircase replaced a service stair that had been altered and so had potential for further change. The new stair allowed for the construction of a lift in the stair well. While not meeting all the standards in *Approved Document M*, the lift does provide access to upper floor levels for the first time.

Lifts

The best way to provide accessible circulation between different floors of a building is to install an integrated and suitably sized passenger lift. As well as helping wheelchair users it can also be of benefit to ambulant disabled people, older people and people with pushchairs. A passenger lift is more likely to be feasible in larger buildings. Where space is at a premium, or a lower-cost solution is required, a short-rise platform lift may be a more viable solution.

Passenger and platform lifts are best located in the less-sensitive parts of historic buildings, for example secondary staircases and light wells or in areas that have already been disturbed or altered. Pits and openings for lift shafts should be carefully located to avoid loss or damage to significant timbers, archaeological remains or decorative surfaces.

Lift controls should be designed for ease of use by everyone and should incorporate tactile, visually contrasting illuminated buttons set at an appropriate height and location. Audible information can help people using and waiting for the lift.

The lift car should be large enough to accommodate any type of wheelchair with at least one other passenger. A lift car 2000mm wide by 1400mm deep will accommodate most scooters and allow wheelchair users to turn through 180 degrees. It may also be more suitable where there is heavy visitor use.

A lift at Blickling Hall in Norfolk has been located within one of the turrets without damage to the internal structure.

In some historic buildings, a smaller car may be the only option. The minimum size needed to accommodate one wheelchair user and a companion is 1400mm deep by 1100mm wide. If circumstances allow, it should operate as a through lift, with doors on opposite sides, so that the wheelchair user does not have to turn round or reverse on exit. This also applies to short-rise platform lifts.

Whatever the type of lift, requirements for ongoing maintenance and management should not be overlooked, particularly in the case of external lifts that are exposed to the elements.

Certain passenger lifts and most platform lifts avoid the need for expensive and space-consuming overruns and lifts pits. Short-rise platform lifts offer scope for level changes up to 4m if contained within an enclosed lift shaft. The minimum platform size required to accommodate a wheelchair user is 800mm wide by 1250mm where the platform is not enclosed and 900mm wide by 1400mm deep when it is. An enclosed platform 1100mm wide by 1400mm deep will accommodate an accompanied wheelchair user and is the smallest that will allow two doors located at 90 degrees to one another.

At St Luke's Church in London the rebuilding of an unsafe internal staircase allowed space for a lift, making all levels accessible.

These sensitively designed steps with adjacent platform lift at the main entrance to St Mary's Church in Beverley overcome a substantial change of level and provide improved access for everyone.

Traditional stair or platform lifts that follow the incline of a stair should only be used where standard passenger or platform lifts cannot be installed. They tend to be unpopular with disabled people and can be undignified or impossible for some people to use. They may also create unacceptable visual intrusion and cannot be fitted to a staircase on an escape route if they constitute a hazard or reduce the width of the stairway to less than the acceptable minimum. They should only be considered as a last resort when it is impossible to accommodate a vertical lift or ramp or where alternative routes are not available.

This platform lift at Lambeth Palace has been carefully designed with glass sides and matching floor finish. The lift and stair do not detract from their surroundings.

At St George's, Brandon Hill, in Bristol external hydraulic lifts provide access at two level changes between the upper churchyard car park and the church, which is now a concert hall. The lifts have also proved useful in moving heavier equipment and large instruments.

At Eastbury Manor, Barking, the entrance lobby floor can be raised to form a ramp to overcome a level change at the entrance.

Stair climbers are devices that are attached to wheelchairs to allow them to be transported up or down a flight of stairs. They must be operated by trained staff, do not serve all types of wheelchair, nor do they resolve the access problems of those who have difficulties with steps. They may also cause embarrassment and can give rise to anxiety because of their perceived lack of safety. The damage they can do to stair treads may also make them unsuitable for use on significant historic staircases. A stair climber may be the only solution to some access problems but should only be considered when there is no other practical option.

A wheelchair platform lift was provided when the stairs to the Saint's Chapel at St Albans Cathedral were rebuilt. The area was carefully excavated by the cathedral archaeologist before construction went ahead. The lift motor is housed below the steps so cannot be heard.

Emergency escape

Ways out must be considered alongside ways in. Responsibility for providing an adequate means of escape for everyone using a building rests with the building management or service providers. Emergency plans should allow for evacuation without reliance on the fire service, and should be drawn up following consultation with the fire officer and disabled users of the building to ensure their needs are taken into account. All staff who may be expected to help with the evacuation of disabled people should receive appropriate training.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 sets out requirements for fire safety and is supported by a number of supplementary guides including *Fire Safety Risk Assessment – Means of Escape for Disabled People*. Guidance is also given in BS 9999: *2008 Code of Practice for Fire Safety in the Design, Management and Use of Buildings*.

Disabled people may be able to evacuate themselves from ground-floor accommodation but need assistance with escape from higher or lower floor levels. It may be necessary to provide fire-protected places of refuge adjacent to staircases where people can safely wait for assistance. An evacuation lift is the preferred form of escape and increasingly used as an alternative to carrying wheelchair users down the stairs. Guidance on evacuation lifts is given in BS 9999.

Emergency evacuation plans should be sufficiently flexible to meet the needs of disabled visitors whose specific requirements cannot be identified in advance. Separate plans for disabled employees can be tailored to their particular needs and the known availability of assistance.

These fire doors at Winchester Cathedral were sensitively designed and custom made to fit a range of openings.

Evacuation chairs can form a useful part of an emergency escape strategy, but some people may be unable to transfer to a chair or may prefer to be carried in their wheelchair.

Lighting, signs and information

Lighting

Good lighting allows people to move easily and safely into and around buildings. Effectively used, it can make obstacles appear more obvious and provide guidance along routes.

Lighting should avoid glare, pools of bright light and areas of deep shadow. Interior lighting schemes may need to be supplemented by sensitively positioned additional fittings to ensure that appropriate levels of illumination are achieved, particularly where there are stairs or changes in level. For example, window blinds can be a useful method of eliminating glare or confusing shadows at certain times of the day.

Sudden changes in light levels should be avoided, and areas of transition from bright to dimly lit space should be created where possible. It can be helpful to provide a place to rest or pause and become accustomed to the lower levels of lighting. While high-contrast lighting schemes that enhance the dramatic effect of a building or space are becoming increasingly common, it is usually possible to ensure that lighting levels are more consistent in those areas where safety may be an issue.

Signs

Signs should be simple, short, easily understood and located where they will be well lit and clearly visible. Exterior signs need to identify the accessible entrance if this is not also the main entrance. Signs can also indicate distances to key features or areas, the presence and gradient of inclines, and how assistance may be obtained.

Clear and easily visible signs designed to a consistent style help everyone – for example, people who are deaf or hearing impaired may be reluctant to ask for directions in case they are unable to hear or decipher the response. Signs using symbols are useful for people with learning disabilities and visitors whose first language is not English.

Picture top left: Some people, such as this visitor to Dyrham Park, will require information in alternative formats, such as Braille.

Picture below: Accessible information can be provided in a range of ways, as here at the National Trust's 'Back to Backs' in Birmingham.

At St Luke's Church in London signs are designed to be easy to read. This sign can also be played like a xylophone, with a different note for each location.

Use of trained staff to provide guided tours can be part of an overall access strategy.

English Heritage produces a guide to give information on access for visitors to its properties.

In general the signboard should contrast with its background and the lettering should contrast with the signboard. Lower-case lettering with opening capitals is generally easier to read than all capitals. The size of the lettering also needs to be appropriate for the distance from which it will be viewed. The sign itself should be at a height that allows it to be seen in crowded areas or where queues are likely. Braille and embossed information may be incorporated in signs in a historic interior, provided it is done with sensitivity, although it will always be most effective as part of an integrated communication scheme. Tactile signs are only useful if placed where they can be easily reached.

Wherever signs are to be positioned, careful consideration needs to be given to the way they are fixed and the impact they will have on the character of the space to which they are being added. Free-standing signs may sometimes be more appropriate than permanently mounted ones, for example when events are taking place.

Information

Comprehensive information about access, itself in accessible formats, is often most usefully provided in advance of a visit. An access guide can be sent out as a leaflet or provided on a website to allow people to plan their visit. As well as explaining how the building can be reached by public transport it will describe the parking facilities and access arrangements in and around the building, highlighting any access restrictions and alternative provisions that have been made.

All staff, and especially those who deal with the public, should be familiar with the requirements of disabled people, and with the facilities available to them. Training of this kind requires a strategic commitment on the part of any organisation and is particularly effective when it is specifically targeted towards each person's role.

Landscape and settings

An accompanying English Heritage guide *Easy Access to Historic Landscapes* has been produced to help property owners and managers make their historic landscapes more accessible to all visitors. Like this document, it provides guidance on achieving a balance between access and conservation and gives examples of good practice.

English Heritage's streetscape manuals, *Streets for All*, set out principles of good practice for street management – such as reducing clutter, co-ordinating design and reinforcing local character. The manuals, covering each of the English regions, provide advice on street design that reflects the region's historic character.

Access to a building and its surroundings, or to wider historic landscapes, should always be considered from the point of arrival, whether by foot, car or public transport. Many historic paths or drives are made of cobble or sett paving, riven stone slabs or gravel, all of which can represent a barrier to access. These materials are nonetheless often an integral part of the significance and character of the landscape.

In Tunbridge Wells, where the paving tradition is red and blue brick, the tactile surface at crossings is made with brick paviors.

The various types of tactile paving can be formed using natural stone.

Tactile blister paving in Chichester is made with machined York stone to integrate into the surrounding paving.

The compressed hoggin path to the South Terrace at Kenwood House in London provides a suitable surface for all to use while still being appropriate in the historic landscape setting.

These two photographs show gravel paths at Audley End House. Deep gravel can cause difficulties for wheelchair users and others; bound gravel will provide a firmer and more even surface.

Carefully positioned level areas can provide resting places on long routes.

At the Tower of London a smoother route has been provided with paving slabs set into an area of stone setts.

As with buildings, easy access to gardens and landscapes is best achieved by understanding their significance and the needs of users, thereby balancing the needs of access and conservation. Examples of adjustments that could be considered and evaluated include:

- replacing existing gravel surfaces with self-binding gravel to provide a firmer surface
- relaying stone setts with tighter joints or pointing them to form a less recessed joint
- incorporating a level route within an area which has an uneven surface
- introducing alternative routes through a park or to a building, and adding appropriate signs
- introducing alternative routes which give access to certain key features and views within the landscape, while acknowledging that it may not be possible to access all areas
- using interpretation or multimedia devices to provide alternative access to those areas that will remain physically inaccessible
- taking full advantage of the sensory qualities of all gardens and landscapes, and of seasonal changes
- providing handrails, powered mobility vehicles and frequent resting places to maximise access for as many people as possible
- use of trained staff and guided tours as an alternative to making physical changes.

Street furniture and seating

Service providers should think carefully about the design, location and justification for street furniture such as interpretation panels, bollards, cycle racks, free-standing signs, lamp-posts and waste bins. These can become obstacles when set on pedestrian routes. Grouping items together can make them more easily visible and thus less of a hazard.

Benches and internal seating should offer a range of heights and a choice between those with and without backs and armrests. There should also be space for a wheelchair user to pull up next to a seated companion. Tables, where they are provided, should be wheelchair accessible.

Bollards should only be used when absolutely necessary. Visual contrast will increase the visibility of these and other potential obstacles.

Picture above: Tables such as this one, provided by the National Trust at Plas Newydd, Anglesey, allow wheelchair users to sit next to seated companions and also give space for pushchairs.

Picture right: This interpretation panel at St Augustine's Abbey is carefully positioned to allow use by all visitors.

Published sources of information

Primary legislation

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979

Equality Act 2010

Planning Act 2008

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Official guidance and policy documents

Building Regulations 2010. *Approved Document M: Access to and Use of Buildings*. 2004 edition with 2010 amendments

BS 7913:1998. *Guide to the Principles of the Conservation of Historic Buildings*. British Standards Institute, 1998

BS 8300:2009+A1:2010. *Design of Buildings and their Approaches to Meet the Needs of Disabled People: Code of Practice*. British Standards Institute, 2010

BS 9999:2008. *Code of Practice for Fire Safety in the Design, Management and Use of Buildings*. British Standards Institute, 2008

Conservation Plan Guidance. Heritage Lottery Fund, 2012

Equality Act 2010 Code of Practice: Employment Statutory Code of Practice. Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2011

Equality Act 2010 Code of Practice: Services, Public Functions and Associations Statutory Code of Practice. London: Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2011

Making Your Project Accessible for Disabled People. Heritage Lottery Fund, 2012

National Planning Policy Framework. Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012

PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide. Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010

Sources of publications and information

British Standards are available from the British Standards Institution at **www.bsigroup.co.uk**

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) publications can be downloaded at **www.equalityhumanrights.com**

English Heritage publications are available from **www.english-heritage.org.uk**

Building Regulations Approved documents can be downloaded at **www.planningportal.gov.uk**

HMSO and Stationery Office documents are available from **www.tso.co.uk**

UK legislation is available at **www.legislation.gov.uk**

For general enquiries about statutorily protected listed buildings, scheduled monuments and registered parks and gardens in England contact **customers@english-heritage.org.uk**

Where to go for further help

General reading

Barker, Peter and Fraser, June, 2000. *Sign Design Guide – A Guide to Inclusive Signage*. London: JMU Access Partnership and Sign Design Society

Brereton, Christopher, 1995. *The Repair of Historic Buildings: Advice on Principles and Methods*. London: English Heritage

Cave, Adrian, 2007. *Making Existing Buildings Accessible: Museums and Art Galleries*. London: RIBA

English Heritage, 2000. *Streets for All: A Guide to the Management of London's Streets*. London: English Heritage

English Heritage, 2005. *Streets for All* (set of eight regional manuals). London: English Heritage

English Heritage, 2007. *Conservation Principles: Policies and Guidance for the Sustainable Management of the Historic Environment*. London: English Heritage

English Heritage, 2013. *Practical Building Conservation: Conservation Basics*. London: English Heritage

Penton, John, 2008. *Widening the Eye of the Needle: Access to Church Buildings for People with Disabilities (3rd rev edn)*. London: Church House Publishing

Sawyer, Ann and Bright, Keith, 2008. *The Access Manual: Auditing and Managing Inclusive Built Environments (2nd edn)*. Oxford: Blackwell

Access organisations

Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID)
www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk
020 7296 8000

Centre for Accessible Environments
www.cae.org.uk
020 7822 8232

National Register of Access Consultants
www.nrac.org.uk
020 7822 8232

Royal National Institute of Blind People
www.rnib.org.uk
0303 123 9999

National amenity societies

Ancient Monuments Society
www.ancientmonumentssociety.org.uk
020 7236 3934

Council for British Archaeology
www.archaeologyuk.org
01904 671 417

The Garden History Society
www.gardenhistorysociety.org
020 7608 2409

The Georgian Group
www.georgiangroup.org.uk
020 7529 8920

Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
www.spab.org.uk
020 7377 1644

The Twentieth Century Society
www.c20society.org.uk
020 7250 3857

The Victorian Society
www.victoriansociety.org.uk
020 8994 1019

Church bodies

Baptist Union of Great Britain
www.baptist.org.uk
01235 517700

Catholic Church in England and Wales
www.cbcew.org.uk/care-of-churches
020 7630 8220

Church Care
www.churchcare.co.uk (general)
www.churchcare.co.uk/images/access_and_disabled_people.pdf (access guidance)
0207 898 1000 (churches)
020 7898 1888 (cathedrals)

Jewish Heritage UK
www.jewish-heritage-uk.org
161 238 8621

The Methodist Church
www.methodist.org.uk
020 7486 5502 (helpdesk)
0161 235 6739 (conservation officer)

Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
www.quaker.org.uk/property-matters
020 7633 1000

General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
www.unitarian.org.uk
020 7240 2384

The United Reformed Church
www.urc.org.uk
020 7916 2020

Other bodies

Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers UK
www.algao.org.uk
01975 564071

Cadw (Heritage in Wales)
www.cadw.wales.gov.uk
01443 336000

Department for Communities and Local Government
www.communities.gov.uk
0303 444 0000

Department of the Environment (Northern Ireland)
www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/built-home
028 9054 0540

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
www.defra.gov.uk
08459 335577

English Heritage
www.english-heritage.org.uk
0870 333 1181 (Customer Services)

Heritage Lottery Fund
www.hlf.org.uk
020 7591 6000

Historic Scotland
www.historic-scotland.gov.uk
0131 668 8600

Institute of Historic Building Conservation
www.ihbc.org.uk
01747 873133

National Trust
www.nationaltrust.org.uk
01793 817400

Published December 2012

Revised text by Ann Sawyer, Centre for Accessible Environments, based on first edition (2004) text by John Adams and Lisa Foster

Edited and brought to press by Whimster Associates

Artwork: chacha.co.uk

For copies of this document, or if you require an alternative accessible version (for instance in audio, Braille or large print) please contact:

Customer Services Department
English Heritage
PO Box 569
Swindon SN2 2YP

tel: 0870 333 1181
fax: 01793 414 926
textphone: 0800 015 0516

English Heritage is the Government's statutory adviser on the historic environment.

www.english-heritage.org.uk

ENGLISH HERITAGE