

The Access Manual

Auditing and managing inclusive built environments

Second Edition

Ann Sawyer

Architect and Access Consultant

and

Keith Bright

Chartered Building Surveyor and Registered Access Consultant

The Access Manual

Second Edition

From the reviews of the First Edition:

‘Both authors are well known for their work on access . . . between them they have produced a useful book that is helpful in the context of our current built environment and what steps can be taken to improve access.’
Barrierfree

‘This is a well written and practical manual, recommended reading for building engineers concerned with the creation, planning and management of buildings.’
Building Engineer

‘Incredibly informative . . . will enable you to keep the edge over non-enlightened competitors’
Architectural Technology

‘This is an excellent book’
Access Journal

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Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK

Tel: +44 (0)1865 776868

Blackwell Publishing Inc., 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

Tel: +1 781 388 8250

Blackwell Publishing Asia Pty Ltd, 550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

Tel: +61 (0)3 8359 1011

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First edition published 2004 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

This edition published 2007

ISBN-10: 1-4051-4626-5

ISBN-13: 978-1-4051-4626-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sawyer, Ann.

The access manual : auditing and managing inclusive built environments / Ann Sawyer, Keith Bright. – 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-4051-4626-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-4051-4626-5 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Barrier-free design—Great Britain—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. Architectural design—Great Britain—Handbooks, manuals, etc. 3. Building laws—Great Britain—Handbooks, manuals, etc.

I. Bright, Keith. II. Title.

NA2545.P5S29 2006

720.87—dc22

2006017369

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

Set in 12/15pt Optima

by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

Printed and bound in Singapore

by COS Printers Pte Ltd

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

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Sample access audit reports and access statements can be found on website www.blackwellpublishing.com/theaccessmanual

'Good design should be for everyone'

Daniel Libeskind

About the authors

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He has published widely in academic and practice journals and is the author and editor of several highly regarded reference books related to the development of inclusive environments. He is

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Foreword

Spaces and places should inspire and excite. Well designed environments should be easy to use and welcoming. At CABI we aim to influence and educate designers and architects, from both the public and the private sector, to design environments that meet the needs of all their users. Designing and managing environments which enable physical, intellectual, cultural and emotional access requires an understanding of the barriers that many of us experience every day.

With CABI's Inclusive Environment Group we have a new forum in which to open up the debate around inclusive design, to challenge assumptions and explore new ways of doing things. We are working with our partners to deliver the message that inclusive design benefits everyone.

We are all part of an ever-ageing population so we all have good reason to support the changing housing, workplace and leisure needs this demographic shift is bringing about. This places an onus on designers, architects and others involved in the design and maintenance of the built environment to think creatively in order to bring about an accessible public realm for everyone.

We strongly believe that design should always be judged by whether or not it results in an inclusive environment. Good design should reflect the diversity of people who use it and not impose any kind of barriers.

We don't think awareness of these principles is high enough yet. Nobody sets out deliberately to design a poor building or public space. Yet they are all designed and many of them are not accessible. Our Design Review Panel sees a lot of plans for new development. Many of them fall short on inclusive design. Those that achieve compliance with legislation and standards often do so in ways which are joyless and penny-pinching.

Places that work for people need to be designed and managed effectively to enable them to use the space with confidence and

dignity. Ensuring we create environments which respond to the needs of the community takes time and requires active participation. Involving people within the design process is the first step to developing environments with people at their centre. Inclusive design needs to inspire good design and not be seen as an afterthought.

I welcome this book because it's about learning from people's individual needs about how to improve everyone's quality of life. That is what is needed to make those inspiring, inclusive, exciting places which CABA champions. Please make the most of what you find in this volume, but please don't use it merely to achieve compliance. Use it to spark creativity, humanity and urbanity in the buildings and public spaces we all use every day, so nobody need feel 'this place isn't for me' and everyone feels welcome.

Richard Simmons
Chief Executive CABA



Foreword

Most people now know that disabled people have a right to expect that services provided to the public should be user friendly for disabled people. In many cases the best way to achieve this objective is to ensure that the building is itself accessible. But this immediately raises another question. What exactly is an accessible building? How do building owners and tenants ensure their building is accessible? Is it just about meeting the needs of wheelchair users or is there a wider range of disabled people, such as those who are blind or deaf who also need to be accommodated?

This book provides practical advice on what to do. If design is good for disabled people it will be better for everyone. Equally, some consultants who advise on access have a temptation to gold plate what is necessary. The Disability Discrimination Act requires reasonable adjustments and, by definition, does not require unreasonable adjustments. It is therefore important to understand how much can be done on budgets which might well be limited. Again, helpful advice is provided. It need not cost much. Simple coloured tape can increase the visibility of glass doors and walls. A kick plate not only makes it easier for a wheelchair user to push through a door but it also protects the door and quickly pays for itself.

I welcome this guidance which should enable people to understand access requirements and to undertake access audits. From December 2006 many public bodies will be subject to the Equality Duty under the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. If they involve disabled people in determining their policies they are much more likely to fulfil their duty effectively.

Disabled people now have rights to take legal action against companies and public sector organisations which do not provide access to their services. The law is important but how much better if those organisations simply did it right in the first place so the law did not need to be used. This book should help to do just that.

Bert Massie CBE
Chairman of Disability Rights Commission

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Vin Goodwin, for his advice, opinions and encouragement, the Centre for Accessible Environments for providing me with the opportunity to explore the issues that form the basis of this book, and Keith Bright, whose knowledge and enthusiasm have been invaluable. Thanks also to my family for giving support and inspiration.

Ann Sawyer
July 2006

My thanks go, as always, to current and past members of the Research Group for Inclusive Environments whose work has contributed to the complex research activities on which many comments made in this book are based.

My personal thanks also go to past and present students on the MSc Inclusive Environments programme at Reading for bringing to the course their unique knowledge and real-life working experiences, and for demonstrating that education truly is a two-way process.

My special thanks go to Ann Sawyer who has worked so hard to bring this second edition to fruition.

Keith Bright
July 2006

Main photograph on cover, Plate 1, Plate 4 and Fig. 4.54 show Woodlands School, reproduced with kind permission from Investors in the Community.

Photograph of sign on cover, Plates 3, 7 and 8 and Fig. 4.63 show Idea Store Whitechapel, reproduced with kind permission from London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Introduction

Buildings are designed for people to use – to give shelter, to house, for work and for play. An environment that is designed to be accessible, or inclusive, allows those activities to take place without restricting access to people with certain abilities only. Inclusive design does not disable the users; it enables independent and equal use.

For many owners, designers and managers of buildings and environments, meeting the needs of all users, and especially disabled people, can seem difficult. However, it is possible to address the needs of the great majority of users with design and management solutions that neither conflict with each other, nor are expensive or difficult to carry out. An inclusive approach requires designers and building managers to consider abilities rather than disabilities, and integrate a range of needs into one solution that can be used by everyone. The improvement in accessibility that can result from this approach will benefit all users of the built environment, not just disabled people.

Inclusive design

Design guidance is often based on the needs of a notional 'average' person; however, everyone varies from the average in some way. People differ in height, strength and dexterity. People have different visual and hearing abilities or may have respiratory impairments or reduced stamina. Some of these people will consider themselves 'disabled', some will not. Some will see their abilities as a natural result of ageing or maybe a temporary illness. Older people may have limited mobility; some may use wheelchairs, sticks or crutches. These and other aids such as spectacles and hearing aids will allow people to alter their abilities. Mobility may be affected by having to carry a child or heavy shopping bags or push a buggy. These are all usual, everyday capacities that should

be catered for when designing buildings and environments. An inclusive approach accepts that people have a range of needs and leads to designs that allow the majority of people to use the built environment independently, safely and comfortably.

An example of this would be good, clear, effective signage, efficiently and sensibly used. This is not just needed by people with visual impairments; it is important for everyone and critical for those who are deaf or hard of hearing, people with learning difficulties or disabilities, older people or people whose first language is not that of the information given on the sign. Also, level, firm surfaces, which benefit wheelchair users, will help parents with pushchairs, people using walking aids or those carrying luggage.

An inclusive approach to design and management does not deny that there are specific areas where particular assistance can be provided. Hearing enhancement systems, such as induction loops, or the provision of information in Braille are useful to certain building users. Specific provisions that meet particular needs are also part of inclusive design.

Principles of universal design

There are many different terms in use to describe inclusive design. Terms such as accessible, trans-generational, or universal all have similar and overlapping definitions; what they all have in common is that the needs of as many people as possible are considered, including parents with children, elderly people and disabled people. The Centre for Universal Design has produced a useful list of principles of universal design that can be applied to products and buildings (see boxed text).

Costs and benefits

It is often thought that addressing the needs of everyone in new or existing buildings will lead to increased costs. However, careful consideration of the issues at design stage and good management throughout the life of a building can provide and maintain accessible environments at little or no extra cost. Designing buildings

1.1 Principles of universal design

- 1 Equitable – the design should be usable by people with diverse abilities and should appeal to all users.
- 2 Flexible – the design should cater for a wide range of individual preferences and abilities. This may mean some choice in methods of use (such as right or left handed access).
- 3 Simple and intuitive – use of the design should be easy to understand, regardless of experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.
- 4 Perceptible – the design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user’s sensory abilities.
- 5 Tolerance for error – the design minimises hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
- 6 Low physical effort – the design can be used efficiently and comfortably with a minimum of fatigue.
- 7 Size and space for approach and use – appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation and use, regardless of user’s body size, posture or mobility.

and environments to be inclusive from the outset can also avoid the need for costly, and often unsightly, alterations later on.

Elements of the built environment, such as buildings, pedestrian areas and transport infrastructure, are with us for a long time, but their life is dynamic, not static, and there are often opportunities to improve accessibility. Linking improvements to maintenance or refurbishment programmes can help ensure that the work is done cost-effectively.

There are also financial benefits to be had from designing inclusively. The population is ageing; current estimates suggest that by 2015 nearly one in five of us will be over 65. Older people with higher disposable incomes are becoming a more important force in the market place, and with increased opportunities in

employment, the spending power of disabled people will also grow. Service providers can increase and broaden their customer base by making their services, and the buildings that house them, accessible to everyone. Employers can benefit from the skills and abilities of disabled people, by ensuring that their buildings and procedures are accessible.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

With the introduction of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) the consideration of issues such as access and inclusive design has become even more important. The Act gives rights to disabled people with the intention of eliminating discrimination in the areas of:

- recruitment and employment;
- access to goods, facilities and services;
- buying or renting of land or property;
- education.

Since its introduction, the Act has been amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA), by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations 2003, which made extensive changes to the employment and occupation provisions, and most recently by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

The DDA applies to the whole of the UK and places duties on employers and service providers not to discriminate against disabled people. The DDA extends the definition of disability to cover a wide range of people including people with hearing and visual impairments, learning difficulties, mental illness and ambulant disabled people, such as those using walking aids or with arthritis. This definition may well be altered over time as cases come before the courts and as other legislation, such as the Human Rights Act, which expands the definition of disability even further, start to have an influence.

The DDA does not directly require buildings to be accessible to all disabled people and does not include standards for accessible

building design; it is the services on offer within buildings that are the concern of the Act. However, it is critical that building owners and managers, facilities managers and those commissioning or designing new buildings or works to existing buildings consider the implications of the Act in relation to building design and use. This will involve anticipating the needs of all building users, some of whom will fit the definition of disabled under the Act, and designing and managing buildings accordingly. Knowledge of access audits and access management will be a crucial factor in determining how well this can be done and will allow an effective response to the new legal requirements.

British Standards and Building Regulations

The publication of BS 8300:2001 Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people – Code of Practice, and the subsequent revision of Part M of the Building Regulations in 2004, raised standards of good practice in inclusive design.

BS 8300:2001, which was amended in June 2005, gives detailed guidance on the design of domestic and non-domestic buildings. The guidance draws on research, commissioned by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in 1997 and 2001, into the access needs of disabled people. The research looked into ergonomic issues such as reach ranges and space requirements in order to assess the capabilities and needs of people in relation to the use of buildings.

The BS is the most comprehensive standard to date covering the environmental needs of disabled people and it is likely to be used as a benchmark when considering what is ‘reasonable provision’ in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act.

The 2004 edition Approved Document M, which gives guidance on the requirements of Part M of the Building Regulations, refers to new and existing buildings being accessible and usable by people, including parents with children, elderly people and disabled people. The dimensional criteria in this edition of Approved Document M have been updated and revised to take account of the guidance given in BS 8300:2001.

The standards and dimensions recommended in this book are generally in line with BS 8300:2001, as amended. The good practice guidance draws on other sources from this country and abroad, from user groups and from the wide experience of the authors.

Objectives of the manual

The manual covers the design, improvement, maintenance and management of accessible environments. The intention is to encourage designers, owners and managers of buildings to look at how they can provide and operate buildings, services and employment facilities in a way that allows independent and convenient use by everyone.

The manual is intended to enable people with responsibility for the design and management of the built environment to:

- be aware the issues involved in accessibility;
- understand and commission access audits;
- create and manage an access improvement programme;
- maintain accessibility in buildings and working practices; and
- respond effectively to the legal requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended.

The section covering access auditing gives information on why audits and appraisals should be carried out, explains the audit process and how it fits into an access improvement programme. The section on access management covers the implementation of improvements and the importance of ongoing access management to ensure accessibility is sustained in use.

The manual also gives guidance on handover and commissioning of new and improved buildings, feedback procedures, post-occupancy evaluation and ongoing management of the accessible environment. Relevant legislation and standards are described, explaining the effect on accessible design and giving information on duties and obligations.

The design criteria cover access to and use of buildings and take account of the needs of a wide range of users. The design guidance

can be used when designing new buildings or taken as a standard to assess and improve existing ones.

Appendix A contains a number of sheets of 'general acceptability criteria', which can be used to highlight where access problems exist. Appendix B gives sources of reference and further information. Extracts from sample audit reports and access statements are available on the Blackwell website at www.blackwellpublishing.com/theaccessmanual and illustrate various report formats and content. Throughout the manual there are boxes giving hints and tips. The information given in the boxes covers issues that are not always found in standards, legislation or other guidance, and includes advice and thoughts that come from the authors' experience.

Inclusive design is about people and their needs, and, in the context of this manual, how these relate to the design, use and management of the built environment. The manual includes comprehensive information on standards, legislation and good practice, but also recognises that to achieve a truly accessible environment designers and operators of buildings must move beyond compliance with standards and adopt a new way of thinking. Taking a creative approach, considering the needs of everyone, integrating those needs into good, thoughtful designs and practices will help achieve an accessible, inclusive, built environment that enables people to participate fully in all aspects of society.

1

Access audits and appraisals

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Introduction

The purpose of an access audit is to establish how well a particular building or environment performs in terms of access and ease of use by a wide range of potential users, including disabled people, and to recommend access improvements. The process involves a thorough site inspection, an assessment of the management and use of the building or environment and the preparation of a report that identifies accessible user-friendly features as well as access problems. The report should recommend access improvements, prioritise action and indicate where improvements can be made through the building's maintenance programme and by altering management procedures. The audit is the first part of the access improvement process and should be followed by the preparation of an access plan setting out the strategy for the implementation of the proposals, and leading to ongoing management of the accessible environment. This will enable building owners to plan ahead for costly improvements and allow alterations to be made cost effectively and over time.

Usually, an audit will consider the needs of all users, and potential users, of a building or environment and assess the factors affecting independent use and access to services. However, an audit may be carried out in response to a particular issue, such as how to meet the needs of a disabled employee in the workplace,

and this may affect the scope of the audit and the standards used in assessing accessibility.

It is important to involve the building owners, managers and operators, as appropriate, in the audit process. Many of the issues that arise will be concerned with the operation and management of an environment, not just the fabric.

The term access appraisal is used to describe an audit of the proposals for a development. This involves making a detailed assessment of the proposed level of accessibility in a building or environment using drawings, specifications and consultation with the architect or designer. To be most effective an appraisal should be ongoing throughout the design process.

An audit can also be carried out to assess service provision. This may be useful for an organisation that is defined as a service provider by Part 3 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) or that wishes to improve its services generally.

Why carry out an access audit?

An access audit will give a picture of the level of accessibility in a building, identify points of good or bad access, identify areas of need that are not catered for and is a first step in the process of improving accessibility.

The increase in accessibility that can result from an access audit and subsequent access improvements will benefit all users of the building. Issues such as poor signs, doors that are heavy to open, and lack of handrails affect everyone, not just disabled people.

The reasons for carrying out or commissioning audits and appraisals may include:

- Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- funding conditions – Lottery funds, grant from trust or other body with specific access requirements;
- to gather data on buildings for comparison or analysis;

- to check compliance with certain standards, such as Part M of the Building Regulations;
- company policy on equal opportunities;
- public relations/company image;
- conservation by use of historic buildings;
- pressure from lobby groups;
- awareness of a particular problem.

The Code of Practice relating to Part 3 of the DDA clearly suggests that service providers are more likely to be able to comply with their duty to make adjustments in relation to physical features if they arrange for an access audit of their premises to be conducted and draw up an access plan or strategy. It states that 'acting on the results of such an evaluation may reduce the likelihood of legal claims against the service provider' (DRC 2002).



Figure 1.1 A good level of accessibility can benefit a wide range of people, including disabled people.

Audit preparation

Information about the building, the occupier, the services provided, the length of time the building will be occupied, the available budget and future plans for alterations or refurbishment should be collected before the actual audit commences. Taking all these factors into account will help ensure that the audit covers all the necessary issues and that the recommendations made are relevant, practical and likely to be effective.

Information on the commissioning and the scope of the audit should also be confirmed prior to commencement.

Information about the building

The size, number and location of buildings should be confirmed, along with their age and type and use. There will be particular issues relevant to specific building types, for example, an education building may have lecture theatres or laboratories with particular requirements, and a theatre will have particular acoustic requirements. The location of public transport and car parking should also be considered.

Historic buildings Whether a building is of any special architectural or historic interest is also relevant, especially if it is listed or there are restrictions on alterations. It should not be assumed that listed buildings cannot be altered. Guidance issued by English Heritage 'Easy Access to Historic Buildings' (EH 2004) acknowledges that in most cases the needs of access and conservation can be reconciled. The guidance quotes Planning Policy Guidance Note 15: Planning and the Historic Environment, which states:

'It is important in principle that disabled people should have dignified easy access to and within historic buildings. If it is treated as part of an integrated review of access requirements for all visitors or users, and a flexible and pragmatic approach is taken, it should normally be possible to plan suitable access for disabled people without compromising a building's special interest.'

When considering alterations to an historic or listed building, it is important to establish the extent of the listing. In some buildings, it may be only particular features, such as a façade or staircase, that are listed and alterations may be possible to other parts of the building. Some alterations may be possible even to listed parts if no permanent damage is done to the historic fabric. For example, it may be possible to fit a wheelchair stair lift as long as it can be removed at a later date with no damage to the fabric having occurred. Consultation with the local planning or historic buildings officer is always a good idea.

Even if physical alterations are not possible, there may be other ways of getting around an inaccessible feature, or providing the service or employment opportunity being offered within the building by a 'reasonable alternative method'.



Figure 1.2 Access to historic buildings can be improved with sensitive, well-designed alterations.

Future plans The length of future occupancy may influence proposals for improvement; whether the building is owned or let is also relevant. Plans for refurbishment or alterations should be taken into account as they may affect access or they may present an opportunity to make access improvements.

Information about staff, management and building use

It is essential to have information about the occupier and the nature of his or her business, for example, whether the occupier is an organisation that offers, or could offer, a service to members of the public. How a building or environment is used and managed can have a huge impact on its accessibility. A well-designed, accessible building can be made difficult or impossible to use unless management and maintenance procedures take account of access issues. Information on policies, procedures and building use should be collected and relevant issues identified.

Contact with staff, including any employees or other building users who are disabled, will give an opportunity to discuss how the building is used and whether there are any specific access problems. Questions to be asked could include:

- Have staff or management had any access training, or is any planned?
- Is there a member of staff in the company with responsibility for access issues?
- Is there a human resources department or a health and safety section in the company?

Costs and benefits

In some cases the available budget for improvements to the building may also be relevant as this can affect the scope of any alterations that may be recommended. For example, if the size of the budget prevents the installation of a lift, this may well affect the recommendations for using an upper floor for providing a service or as a place of employment for a current or potential disabled employee.