



## DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE NOTE

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# Design & Access Statements

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UPDATED April 2010

Attention is drawn to the guidance provided by Communities & Local Government in the publication "Guidance on Information Requirements and Validation" (2010) available on the CLG website

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/1505220.pdf>

### **Why are Design and Access Statements required?**

Planning Policy Statement (PPS)1 sets out the overarching planning policies on the delivery of sustainable development through the planning system. Good design plays a fundamental role in achieving this. As PPS1 states: *"Good design ensures attractive, usable, durable and adaptable places and is a key element in achieving sustainable development. Good design is indivisible from good planning. Planning authorities should plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider area development schemes. Good design should contribute positively to making places better for people. Design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted."*

A design and access statement is a short report accompanying and supporting a planning application to illustrate the process that has led to the development proposal, and to explain the proposal in a structured way. The level of detail required in a design and access statement depends on the scale and complexity of the application, and the length of the statement varies accordingly. **Statements must be proportionate to the complexity of the application, but need not be long.**

Design and Access Statements are the applicants' opportunity to explain the rationale behind the design proposal. It allows the applicant to clearly express the aspects of the design which are vital to the viability of a given project and will assist in the negotiation, consultation and determination process.

Submitted statements assist the Council's officers, members and consultees and any interested parties assessing the application to understand the thinking and principles behind the proposal. It will also allow officers to enter into negotiations for improvements to proposals, where appropriate, with a greater depth of understanding of the issues which are fundamental to the viability of the project and will assist in the decision making process.

### **When is a Design and Access Statement Necessary?**

The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) states that from August 10<sup>th</sup> 2006 many types of application require the submission of a Design and Access Statement.

There are exceptions to this requirement and applicants are advised to refer to Article 4C of the GDPO for full details but, in summary, a Design & Access Statement is **not** statutorily required for:

- engineering or mining operations
- development of an existing dwellinghouse, or development within the curtilage of a dwellinghouse for any purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the dwellinghouse, where no part of that dwellinghouse or curtilage is within a designated area (World Heritage Site or conservation area)
- a material change in the use of land or buildings, unless it also involves operational development
- extensions to the time limits for implementing existing planning permissions development of an existing flat for any purpose incidental to the enjoyment of the flat as such, where no part of that flat is within a designated area
- the extension of an existing building used for non-domestic purposes where the floorspace created by the development does not exceed 100 square metres and where no part of the building or the development is within a designated area
- the erection, construction, improvement or alteration of a gate, fence, wall or other means of enclosure, up to 2m high or the height of the existing means of enclosure, whichever is the higher, where no part of the building or the development is within a designated area or the curtilage of a listed building
- development on operational land consisting of the erection of a building or structure up to 100 cubic metres in volume and 15m in height and where no part of the development is within a designated area
- the alteration of an existing building where the alteration does not increase the size of the building and where no part of the building or the development is within a designated area
- the erection, alteration or replacement of plant or machinery where, as a result of the development, the height of the plant or machinery would not exceed the greater of 15 metres above ground level, or the height of the original plant or machinery, and where no part of the development is within a designated area;  
or

- development of land pursuant to section 73 (determination of applications to develop land without conditions previously attached) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Design and Access Statements are not required for applications relating to advertisement control, tree preservation orders or storage of hazardous substances. Neither are they required for applications for prior approval for proposed development, or non-material amendments to existing planning permissions.

Design and Access Statements **are** required for applications for listed building consent. These statements differ slightly in content, as discussed in more detail below

Applications which require a Design and Access Statement will **not** be registered without one.

### **Pre-Application Discussions**

PPS1 advises that pre-application discussions are critically important and benefit both developers and local planning authorities in ensuring a better mutual understanding of objectives and the constraints that exist, and that local planning authorities and applicants should take a positive attitude towards early engagement in pre-application discussions. Although not specifically required by either the GDPO or the listed building regulations, it is considered good practice to use design and access statements as an aid to pre-application discussions, particularly for more complicated applications. Design and access statements can be a cost effective and useful way to discuss a proposal throughout the design process, whilst early discussion on the inclusive access component should help to establish any initial access issues.

### **What should be included in the Design and Access Statement?**

The level of detail to be included in any Statement will be largely dictated by the size and complexity of the development proposal. However, it will be essential that sufficient detail is included to clearly express the design concepts, principles and overall rationale.

The statement should ideally be prepared as a part of the overall design process and the contents of the statement should reflect this process.

**NOTE:** It is unlikely that a Design and Access Statement prepared at the end of the design process will meet the Councils needs to effectively assess the submitted planning application and applicants are strongly encouraged to consider and prepare their statements at the earliest stages of the development process.

### **The Design component:**

#### **Amount**

The amount of development is how much development is proposed. For residential development, this means the number of proposed units for residential use and for all other development, this means the proposed floor space for each proposed use.

Amount cannot be reserved within an outline application, although it is common to express a maximum amount of floorspace for each use in the planning application and for this to be made the subject of a planning condition. The design and access statement for both outline and detailed applications should explain the amount of development proposed for each use, how this will be distributed across the site, how the proposal relates to the site's surroundings, and what consideration is being given to ensure that accessibility for users to and between parts of the development is maximised. Where the application specifies a range of floorspace for a particular use, the reasons for this should be explained clearly in the design and access statement.

## **Layout**

The layout is the way in which buildings, routes and open spaces (both private and public) are provided, placed and orientated in relation to each other and buildings and spaces surrounding the development.

If layout is reserved at the outline stage, the outline planning application should provide information on the approximate location of buildings, routes and open spaces proposed. The design and access statement accompanying an outline application should explain the principles behind the choice of development zones and blocks or building plots proposed and how these principles, including the need for appropriate access will inform the detailed layout. The use of illustrative diagrams is encouraged to assist in explaining this.

For detailed applications, and outline applications where layout is not reserved, the design and access statement should explain the proposed layout in terms of the relationship between buildings and public and private spaces within and around the site, and how these relationships will help to create safe, vibrant and successful places. An indication should also be given of factors important to accessibility of the site for users, such as travel distances and gradients, and the orientation of blocks and units in relation to any site topography to afford optimum accessibility. The layout of buildings can also have a profound impact on the energy consumption and thermal comfort during winter and summer, and thus the building's carbon emission performance.

PPS1 makes clear that a key objective for new developments should be that they create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder or fear of crime does not undermine quality of life or community cohesion. Design and access statements for outline and detailed applications should therefore demonstrate how **crime prevention measures** have been considered in the design of the proposal and how the design reflects the attributes of safe, sustainable places set out in Safer Places- the Planning System and Crime Prevention (ODPM/Home Office, 2003). Further advice on 'Secured by Design' principles is available from the Police

## **Scale**

Scale is the height, width and length of a building or buildings in relation to its surroundings.

If scale has been reserved at the outline stage, the application should still indicate parameters for the upper and lower limits of the height, width and length of each building, to establish a 3-dimensional building envelope within which the detailed

design of buildings will be constructed. In such cases the design component of the statement should explain the principles behind these parameters and how these will inform the final scale of the buildings.

For detailed applications, and outline applications that do not reserve scale, the design and access statement should explain the scale of buildings proposed, including why particular heights have been settled upon, and how these relate to the site's surroundings and the relevant skyline. The statement should also explain the size of building parts, particularly entrances and facades with regard to how they will relate to the human scale.

## **Landscaping**

Landscaping is the treatment of private and public spaces to enhance or protect the amenities of the site and the area in which it is situated through hard and soft landscaping measures. Statements should also explain the function of the landscaping, for instance for sustainable drainage purposes, providing shading or other climate change adaptation purposes, and explain how it will be maintained.

If landscaping is reserved at the outline stage, the outline application does not need to provide any specific landscaping information. However, the design and access statement should still explain the principles that will inform any future landscaping scheme for the site.

For detailed applications, and outline applications that do not reserve landscaping, the design and access statement should explain the proposed landscaping scheme, explaining the purpose of landscaping private and public spaces and its relationship to the surrounding area. Where possible, a schedule of planting and proposed hard landscaping materials to be used is recommended.

Some development proposals (for example, alterations to an existing building) may include no landscaping element. For such proposals, this section of the design and access statement would simply need to state why landscaping is not relevant to the application.

## **Appearance**

Appearance is the aspect of a place or building that determines the visual impression it makes, including the external built form of the development, its architecture, materials, decoration, lighting, colour and texture.

If appearance is reserved at the outline stage, the outline application does not need to provide any specific information on the issue. In such cases the design and access statement should explain the principles behind the intended appearance and how these will inform the final design of the development.

For detailed applications, and outline applications that do not reserve appearance, the design and access statement should explain the appearance of the place or buildings proposed including how this will relate to the appearance and character of the development's surroundings. It should explain how the decisions taken about appearance have considered accessibility. The choice of particular materials and textures will have a significant impact upon a development's accessibility. Judicious

use of materials that contrast in tone and colour to define important features such as entrances, circulation routes or seating for example will greatly enhance access for everyone. Similarly early consideration of the location and levels of lighting will be critical to the standard of accessibility ultimately achieved.

## **Appraising the Context**

Development proposals that are not based on a good understanding of the local physical, economic and social context are often unsympathetic and poorly designed, and can lead to the exclusion of particular communities. An important part of a design and access statement is the explanation of how local context has influenced the design. Context should be discussed in relation to the scheme as a whole, rather than specifically in relation to the five sub-components of amount, layout, scale, landscaping and appearance.

A design and access statement should demonstrate the steps taken to appraise the context of the proposed development. It is important that an applicant should understand the context in which their proposal will sit, and use this understanding to draw up the application. To gain a good understanding of context and to use it appropriately applicants should follow a design process which includes

- Assessment of the site's immediate and wider context in terms of physical, social and economic characteristics and relevant planning policies. This may include both a desk survey and on-site observations and access audit. The extent of the area to be surveyed will depend on the nature, scale and sensitivity of the development.
- Involvement of both community members and professionals. Depending on the scale, nature and sensitivity of the proposed development, this might include, for example, consultation with local community and access groups and planning, building control, conservation, design and access officers. The statement should indicate how the findings of any consultation have been taken into account for the proposed development and how this has affected the proposal.
- Evaluation of the information collected on the site's immediate and wider context, identifying opportunities and constraints and formulating design and access principles for the development. Evaluation may involve balancing any potentially conflicting issues that have been identified.
- Design of the scheme using the assessment, involvement, and evaluation information collected. Understanding a development's context is vital to producing good design and inclusive access and applicants should avoid working retrospectively, trying to justify a pre-determined design through subsequent site assessment and evaluation.

## **Use**

A design and access statement should explain how this understanding of the context has been considered in relation to its proposed use. The use is the use or mix of uses proposed for land and buildings. Use cannot be reserved within an outline application. Design and access statements for both outline and detailed applications should explain

the proposed use or uses, their distribution across the site, the appropriateness of the accessibility to and between them, and their relationship to uses surrounding the site.

## **Climate Change**

The PPS on climate change (December 2007) is a supplement to PPS1. As such, climate change considerations are integral to the planning system, including in the design of new developments. The PPS reminds applicants of the need to consider how their schemes can help to mitigate climate change and adapt to the climate that the development is likely to experience over the course of its expected lifetime. Design and access statements for outline and detailed planning applications should therefore demonstrate how climate change mitigation (through the minimisation of energy consumption, efficient use of energy, and the supply of types of energy including from low-carbon and renewable sources to help reduce overall carbon emissions) and adaptation measures (to provide resilience to future climate impacts) have been considered in the design of the proposal. These measures may be of particular relevance under the topic headings of amount, layout, scale, landscaping, context or access, depending on the nature of the proposed development and its anticipated impacts on the surrounding area. Applicants should refer to paragraphs 41 and 42 of the PPS1 Climate Change Supplement for further details.

## **The Access Component:**

It is important to note that the requirement for the access component of the statement relates only to “access to the development” and therefore does not extend to internal aspects of individual buildings.

Statements should explain how access arrangements will ensure that all users will have equal and convenient access to buildings and spaces and the public transport network. The statement should address the need for flexibility of the development and how it may adapt to changing needs.

The design and access statement should also explain the policy adopted in relation to access and how relevant policies in local development documents have been taken into account. The statement should provide information on any consultation undertaken in relation to issues of access and how the outcome of this consultation has informed the development proposals. This should include, for example, a brief explanation of the applicant’s policy and approach to access, with particular reference to the inclusion of disabled people, and a description of how the sources of advice on design and accessibility and technical issues will be, or have been followed.

Access for the emergency services should also be explained where relevant. Such information may include circulation routes round the site and egress from buildings in the event of emergency evacuation.

For outline applications, where access is reserved, the application should still indicate the location of points of access to the site. Statements accompanying such applications should, however, clearly explain the principles which will be used to inform the access arrangements for the final development at all scales from neighbourhood movement patterns where appropriate to the treatment of individual access points to buildings.

The level of detail provided in the access component of the statement should be proportionate to the nature and scale of the access that will be required to the site. For proposals which will have no public access and only limited maintenance or operational access, the access component need not be long.

### **Design & Access Statements for Listed Building Consent**

Design and access statements are also required for listed building consent. They are similar to design and access statements for planning applications, especially in respect of the need for a proportionate approach, although there are some differences in content because of the differing nature of the application.

Where a planning application is submitted in parallel with an application for listed building consent, a single, combined statement should address the requirements of both. The combined statement should address the elements required in relation to a planning application in the normal way and the additional requirements in relation to listed building consent (see below).

The design and access statement should explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the scale, layout and appearance characteristics of a proposal. Scale, layout and appearance are broadly the same as outlined in previous paragraphs. (Information on use, amount and landscaping is not required for listed building consent design and access statements that do not also accompany a planning permission.)

In addition to following the broad approach described above, a design and access statement relating to listed building consent should include a brief explanation of how the design has taken account of the requirements of PPS5: "Planning for the Historic Environment" and in particular:

- the historic and special architectural importance of the building
- the particular physical features of the building that justify its designation as a listed building; and
- the building's setting.

The statement will need to explain the approach to ensuring that the historic and special architectural importance of the listed building is preserved or enhanced. Where an aspect of the design has the potential to affect this adversely, the statement should explain why it is necessary, and what measures have been taken to minimise its impact.

The access component is broadly the same as for design and access statements accompanying applications for planning permission, but again with reference to the special considerations set out in PPS5.

The statement should make clear how the approach to access has balanced the duties imposed by the Disability Discrimination Act, where the proposal is subject to those, and the particular historical and architectural significance of the building.. The statement should detail any specific issues that arise particularly with regard to the fact that the building is listed, the range of options considered and, where inclusive design has not been provided, the statement should explain why. For alterations to existing

buildings where the fabric of the structure restricts the ability to meet minimum levels of accessibility, details should be provided of the solutions that will be put in place to minimise the impact on disabled people and ensure that any services provided within the building are made available in other ways.

### **What does the Design and Access Statement mean?**

Whilst a Design and Access Statement is required to be submitted with an application it does not form part of that application and is simply an accompaniment supporting all other documentation. However applicants should be aware that the Borough Council may impose planning conditions to ensure that developments are built in accordance with the contents of the Design and Access Statement.

### **How should the Design and Access Statement be presented?**

The statement should be concise, including only the information which is relevant and important in understanding the rationale behind the design. Ideally the statement will be both visual and textual, with carefully selected illustrations which present simply but clearly the design principles of the scheme proposed.

**NOTE:** The statement will need to be understood by a wide range of people who may not necessarily be qualified or experienced in design matters and therefore it is important that information is presented clearly and that confusing technical 'jargon' is avoided.

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**For further assistance** please contact the Borough Council on 0845 9072244 and ask to speak to the Duty Planning Officer