



# Design and Access Statements

(including changes to the planning application process)

## A GUIDANCE NOTE

August 2006

**This guidance note does not cover issues relating to DDA (Disability and Discrimination Act) and requirements under the Building Regulations. This advice is available from the Building Control Service.**

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In May 2006 the government introduced changes to the planning applications process. The formal requirements are contained in Circular 01/2006 'Guidance on changes to the development control system'. This introduced changes to the outline planning permission process including revision of the 'reserved matters'. Much more emphasis has now been placed on the need for high quality design for all development and integral to this is a requirement for the submission of Design and Access Statements with some planning applications. This guidance note gives a brief summary of the changes to the planning application process and gives more detailed guidance about Design and Access Statements. This includes information about when a Statement is needed, how to go about writing a good statement and the sort of detail that will be necessary.

## 2.0 CHANGES TO THE OUTLINE PLANNING PERMISSION PROCESS

- 2.1 Outline planning permission enables the principle of development to be agreed while conditioning 'reserved matters' for subsequent approval. Reserved Matters used to be siting, design, external appearance, means of access and landscaping. However, these have now changed to **Layout, Scale, Appearance, Access and Landscaping**.
- 2.2 There is now also a minimum amount of information that must be submitted with an outline application. This is as follows;
  - **Use** – details of the use or uses proposed and any distinct development zones
  - **Amount of development** – amount proposed for each use
  - **Indicative layout**
  - **Scale** – an indication of the upper and lower limits for height, width and length of each building
  - **Indicative access points** – an area or areas where the access point or points to the site will be situated

## 3.0 DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENTS

### What is a Design and Access Statement?

- 3.1 A design and access statement is a report accompanying and supporting a planning application which explains how the applicant has considered the proposal and understands what is appropriate and feasible for the site in its local context. It is an opportunity for the architect or developer to demonstrate a commitment to achieving good design and ensuring accessibility. A Statement should not be used as a substitute for drawings and other material normally submitted with a planning application.

- 3.2 A Statement needs to be prepared at the start of the development process and should evolve as the scheme is defined, from the outline stage through to the detailed scheme. As it is required to explain and justify why and how a particular proposal has been decided upon it should not be written as an afterthought, but rather as a precursor to an application. Early drafts of a Statement can be useful for pre-application discussion.

### **Do I need one Statement for design and one for access?**

- 3.3 The purpose of a Design and Access Statement is to explain the design principles and concepts that have informed the development and how access issues have been dealt with. So although there will be a **design** and an **access** component, you should not think of the statement as two separate documents. Much of the preliminary work that needs to be done for the design element will help inform the access component and vice versa.

### **How long does the Statement have to be?**

- 3.4 The length of a statement and the detail contained in it will depend on the scale and complexity of the application. For a straightforward application a page may be all that is required, whereas more complicated planning applications will require a detailed probably longer document and may include drawings and plans to illustrate issues that the scheme has responded to. Any illustrative material associated with a Design and Access Statement must not be seen as a substitute for adequate drawings normally submitted with a planning application.

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

- 3.5 A Design and Access Statement must accompany planning applications for both outline and full planning permissions. They are also required for listed building consent. However, not all types of planning application will require a statement.

If your proposal relates to either;

- A material change in the use of land or buildings (unless it involves operational development)
- Engineering or mining operations
- Development of an existing dwelling house or development within the curtilage of a dwelling house (i.e. householder applications such as extensions, garages or conservatories), unless it lies within a Conservation Area.'

then you will **not** need to submit a Statement.

Design and Access Statements are also **not** required for applications relating to advertisement control, tree preservation orders or storage of hazardous substances.

### **What happens if I don't submit a Statement?**

- 3.6 If we receive a planning application that should have a Statement, but does not, then we cannot register the application as valid. It will be held as invalid until a Statement has been received. Providing a Statement will not, however, guarantee that an application will be approved as the normal planning decision process will still apply.

### **What status does a Design and Access Statement have?**

- 3.7 The Design and Access Statement will accompany the planning application, but will not form part of it. A copy of the Statement will be placed on the public register with the planning application.

### **Design and Access Statements accompanying an Outline Application**

- 3.8 Design and Access Statements will play an important role in linking general development principles to final detailed designs. It should show how the design and access principles will be used to develop future details of the scheme. The Statement will then form a link between the outline permission and the consideration of the reserved matters.

The changes made to the outline planning permission process do not affect our ability as local planning authority to require further information. These powers enable us to direct an applicant to supply any further information deemed necessary in order to determine an application.

## **4.0 WRITING A DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT**

- 4.1 The following section aims to give advice on how to go about writing a Statement and what sort of information to include. Further detailed guidance can be found in the CABE document 'Design and access statements: How to write, read and use them'.

### **SITE APPRAISAL**

- 4.2 A Design and Access Statement must be able to show the steps taken to appraise the context of a proposed development – i.e. how it will sit within the local area. This will include the following four stages and should be done during the early part of the scheme's development.

## Assessment

- 4.3 You will need to show that you have looked at the context of the site and its surroundings. Local context will include the physical, social and economic characteristics of the site and surroundings as well as any relevant planning policies and may involve a desk top exercise as well as on site observations.
- **Physical Context** – Look at the site itself and the character of the area around it. Are there any particular landscape features? What overlooks the site? What defines the boundary?
  - **Social Context** – How will local people be affected by the development? Have local people other wishes for the site?
  - **Economic Context** – What contribution will the development have on the local economy?
  - **Planning Policy Context** – Are there any relevant planning policies that may effect the development of the site. The South Holland Local Plan 2006 will be relevant here.

## Involvement

- 4.4 You will need to show what groups and other people you have been, or will be, discussing the scheme with. This will include both professionals and community members, for example planners, conservation officers, community and access groups. The Statement should explore the findings of the consultations that have been carried out and how they have been taken account of when drawing up the proposal.

## Evaluation

- 4.5 This involves evaluating the information gathered in the previous two stages and identifying opportunities and constraints that will shape the scheme. This may include balancing conflicting issues and resolving problems in order to begin formulating the design and access principles.

## Design

- 4.6 This will use the assessment, involvement and evaluation of the information already collected to start designing the scheme. It is an opportunity to show that the design and access decisions have been made for a reason and with a good understanding of the issues affecting the site. It is important that the statement is not prepared retrospectively to try and justify an already prepared scheme.

## THE DESIGN COMPONENT

- 4.7 A Design and Access Statement should explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to particular aspects of the proposal – these are as follows;

### Use

- 4.8 This is the use or mix of uses proposed for the land or buildings and the statement needs to show how this will fit in with the area and how it supports local aims e.g. how a proposal for a new shop will relate to existing shopping areas or shopping centres. The use will have to be justified in relation to relevant planning policy and how it has been influenced by other existing uses in the area. **Use cannot be a reserved matter within an outline application.**
- 4.9 Design and Access Statements for both outline and detailed applications should explain the use or uses proposed, how they will be distributed across the site, the appropriateness of the access to and between them and their relationship to uses surrounding the site.

### Amount

- 4.10 This relates to how much development is proposed, for example, the number of houses planned or the amount of office floorspace. **Amount cannot be a reserved matter within an outline application.** The planning application will state the amount of development proposed, but it is the Statement that must explain why it is an appropriate amount, how it will be distributed across the site and how it relates to its surroundings. It should also show that accessibility for users to and between different parts of the site has been maximised.

### Layout

- 4.11 The planning application drawings will show the layout proposed for the site, or for outline applications this will be an indicative layout. The Design and Access Statement accompanying an outline application should explain the principles behind the choice of development areas or building plots and how these will inform the detailed layout later on.
- 4.12 A Statement for detailed applications, and outline applications where layout is not reserved, should explain why a particular layout has been chosen. It should explain the way in which the buildings, routes and open spaces, both private and public, have been placed in relation to each other and to buildings and spaces outside the site. It should also make clear how the layout will allow for inclusive access to and through the site.

## **Scale**

- 4.13 This means the size of buildings e.g. the height, length and width. If scale has been reserved at outline stage the application should still indicate the maximum and minimum size of each building. The Design and Access Statement will have to justify the principles behind choosing these sizes and how they will inform the final scale of the buildings.
- 4.14 For detailed applications, and outline applications that do not reserve scale, the Statement should explain why the sizes chosen are right for the site and how this will relate to the size of existing buildings in the area.

## **Landscaping**

- 4.15 Landscape design relates not just to planting, but includes all treatments of outdoor spaces including paving, road materials, street furniture and water features. It is an important part of the overall design and should not be an afterthought, but designed as an integral part of the scheme.
- 4.16 If landscaping is reserved at the outline stage then the outline planning application does not need to provide any specific landscaping information. However, the Design and Access Statement should still explain and justify the principles that will inform any future landscaping scheme. For detailed applications, and outline applications that do not reserve landscaping, the Statement should explain the purpose of the chosen landscape design including both public and private places and how it will be achieved and maintained long term. It should also show how the needs of disabled or older people will be met.

## **Appearance**

- 4.17 This relates to the visual impression that the finished development will make and should be a culmination of all the decisions that went into the design. It will include things like the architecture of the buildings, materials, lighting, colour and texture. If appearance is reserved at outline stage then the outline planning application will not need to provide any specific information on the issue. However, the Design and Access Statement should explain and justify the principles behind the intended appearance and how these will inform the final design.
- 4.18 For detailed applications, and outline applications that do not reserve appearance, the Statement should explain what decisions have been made and what design rationale has been used to inform the overall appearance of the development and how it will relate to the surrounding area. It should also indicate how decisions taken about the development's appearance have considered accessibility.

## THE ACCESS COMPONENT

- 4.19 The access component of a Design and Access Statement only relates to 'access to different parts of the development' and not to the internal access arrangements within individual buildings.
- 4.20 The Statement should address how access arrangements will ensure that users will have equal and convenient access to buildings and spaces and to the public transport network. Two elements to consider are:
- Policy – The Statement should set out the policy approach that has been adopted towards access with particular reference to the inclusion of disabled people. This should refer to Local Plan policies and how they have been taken account of.
  - Consultation – Information on the results of any consultation that has been, or will be, carried out on access issues should also be included in the Statement. The level of consultation will depend on the scale of the proposal, but may include local communities and access groups as well as technical advice from highway specialists.
- 4.21 Other points to consider about access are:
- The linkage of roads, footpaths and sight lines.
  - Circulation of people within and to the site both vehicular and pedestrian.
  - Visibility of entrances and access to buildings, changes of level e.g. dropped kerbs, materials
  - Show that disabled people will not be segregated i.e. they can use the same routes as every one else.
  - How access for the emergency services will be achieved including provision for a disabled refuge point.

## 5.0 STATEMENTS ACCOMPANYING APPLICATIONS FOR LISTED BUILDING CONSENT

- 5.1 Design and Access Statements will also be required for listed building consent and these will be similar to statements for planning applications. Where a planning application has been submitted in parallel to a listed building consent then a single combined statement will be adequate to address the requirements of both. The combined statement should address the elements required in relation to the planning application, as outlined above, and also the additional elements needed in relation to the listed building consent as set out below.
- 5.2 The Statement should explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the **scale, layout** and **appearance** of the



proposal and these will broadly follow the guidance set out in paragraphs 4.11, 4.13 and 4.17 above. Information on **use, amount and landscaping** is not needed for listed building consent design and access statements that do not also accompany a planning application.

- 5.3 In addition to the above Design and Access Statements for listed building consent should also include an explanation of how the design has taken account of PPG15 'Planning and 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 listed building
  - The building's setting
- 5.4 Where there is potentially an aspect of design that will impact on the buildings historic or architectural importance then the Statement should explain why this is necessary and what measures have been taken to minimise the impact.
- 5.5 The access component is similar to that for Statements accompanying planning applications but again with reference to the special considerations set out above. The Statement should also show how the approach to access has balanced any duties in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act against the significance of the listed building. Where the fabric of a structure may restrict the ability to meet minimum levels of accessibility then the Statement should provide solutions to reduce as much as possible the impact on disabled people and ensure that any services within the building are made available in other ways.

#### Sources

Circular 01/2006 'Guidance on changes to the development control system'  
Department for Communities and Local Government

Design and Access Statements: How to write, read and use them.  
Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE). Published 2006

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