

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENTS – GUIDANCE FOR APPLICANTS AND AGENTS – NON-HOUSEHOLDER APPLICATIONS

What is a Design Statement?

A Design Statement enables applicants and their agents to demonstrate how they have achieved good design in their development proposals. It should clearly demonstrate how the proposal fits the context of the site and its immediate surroundings and if appropriate how it relates to the wider areas of towns and villages.

Design and Access Statements are a statutory requirement. From 10 August 2006, most applications for planning permission¹ must be accompanied by a Design and Access Statement. Failure to submit one is likely to result in delay (because the application will not be registered without one) - or refusal of the application if it is not of sufficient standard.

The Statement must address both **design** and **access** and demonstrate how each informs the other.

This Guidance Note sets out what such Statements should address. It has been drawn up by Planning Officers across the whole of the historic county of Hampshire, including Southampton and Portsmouth, the Isle of Wight and also includes the New Forest National Park so as to provide consistency of approach for applicants and their agents.

A list of references is given at the end of the document, together with internet links.

Separate guidance notes deal with Design and Access Statements for Listed Buildings and Householder Planning Applications.

What do I need to do?

A design and access statement has five essential steps:

1. **Appraising the Context**

This should include:

- **Assessing** the character both of the site itself and its immediate surroundings. It should consider:
 - Physical, social and economic characteristics
 - Relevant planning policies.

¹ Design and Access Statements are required for all applications for planning permission except for those proposing engineering operations, changes of use with no operational development, and householder applications. However, Design and Access Statements are needed for householder applications where any part of the curtilage of the property lies in a Conservation Area, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), National Park, World Heritage Site or The Broads.

It 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.

- **Involving the community**, for example:
 - Consultation with local community and access groups
 - Meeting with planning, building control, conservation, design and access officers.

The statement should demonstrate how views have been taken into account and affected the proposal.

- **Evaluating the information** with a view to:
 - Identifying opportunities and constraints
 - Formulating design and access principles
 - Balancing any potentially conflicting issues
- Showing how the appropriate **use** or mix of uses for the land and buildings has been identified. Design and access statements for both outline and detailed applications should explain:
 - The use or uses proposed,
 - Their distribution across the site,
 - The appropriateness of the accessibility to and between them, and
 - Inter-relationship to uses surrounding the site.

Use cannot be reserved within an outline application

2. Identifying the Design Principles

An appreciation of the context provides the principles for arriving at the **design** principles and concepts that have been applied to particular aspects of the proposal. Applicants should avoid working retrospectively, trying to justify a pre-determined design through subsequent site assessment and evaluation.

The Statement needs to consider:

- **Amount.** For both outline and full applications:
 - Residential: the *number of proposed units* should be specified.
 - Non residential: the proposed *floor space* for each proposed use.

In either case the quantum should be:

- Explained and justified
- Shown how the distribution across the site has been arrived at
- Demonstrated how the proposal relates to the site's surroundings
- Shown how accessibility for users to and between parts of the development is maximised.

- **Layout.** This is the way in which buildings, routes and open spaces (both private and public) are provided and sited in relation both to each other and buildings and spaces surrounding the development.

For *outline* applications the Design and Access Statement should:

- Provide information on the approximate location of buildings, routes and open spaces.
- Explain and justify the principles behind the choice of development zones and blocks or building plots
- Explain how these principles, including the need for appropriate access, inform the detailed layout.

The use of illustrative diagrams is encouraged to assist in explaining this.

For *detailed* and *outline applications where layout is not reserved*, the design and access statement should:

- Explain and justify the layout in terms of the relationship between buildings and public and private spaces within and around the site,
- Show how these relationships will help to create safe, vibrant and successful places.
- Indicate the factors helping to make the site accessible for users, such as travel distances and gradients,
- Show the orientation of block and units in relation to any site topography and how this helps achieve accessibility.
- Demonstrate how the design incorporates crime prevention measures and the attributes of safe, sustainable places as set out in *Safer Places- the Planning System and Crime Prevention* (ODPM/Home Office, 2003)

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

Outline applications should:

- State the upper and lower limits of the height, width and length of each building proposed,
- Thereby establish a 3-dimensional building framework for the detailed design of the buildings will be constructed.
- Explain and justify the principles behind these parameters and explain how these will inform the final scale of the buildings.

For *detailed* and *outline applications where scale is not reserved*, the design and access statement should:

- Explain and justify how the proposed scale has been arrived at
- Demonstrate how this relates to the site's surroundings and the relevant skyline.
- Explain and justify the scale of building features, such as entrances and facades and show how they relate to human scale.

- **Landscaping.** This includes both the planted (soft) and built (hard) landscape elements in private and public spaces

Outline applications should:

- Explain and justify the principles that will inform any future landscaping scheme, but need not provide any specific information.

For *detailed* and *outline applications* where landscaping is not reserved, the design and access statement should:

- Explain the purpose of landscaping private and public spaces and how proposals relate to the surrounding area.
- Provide a schedule of planting and proposed hard landscaping materials.
- Explain how landscaping will be maintained.

- **Appearance.** This refers to the visual impression a place or building makes, including the external built form of the development, its architecture, materials, decoration, lighting, colour and texture.

Outline applications should:

- explain and justify the principles that will inform the appearance and final design of the scheme, but need not provide any specific information

For detailed and outline applications where appearance is not reserved, the design and access statement should:

- Explain and justify the appearance of the scheme and how this relates to the appearance and character of its surroundings.
- Demonstrate how the decisions taken about appearance have considered accessibility. This may include:

Materials and textures, for example contrasts in tone and colour help define important accessibility features such as entrances, circulation routes or seating
Location and levels of lighting.

3. Identifying the Access Principles

The same process should be followed with regard to access. “Access” refers to “access to the development”, not just the internal aspects of individual buildings.

The statement should:

- Describe the site and the existing access arrangements, and
- Sustainability of the existing access arrangements.

For *outline* applications, where access is reserved, the application should:

- Indicate the location of points of access to the site.

- 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.

A checklist of topics that should be covered may include:

- Highway Access
- Pedestrian Access
- Public Transport Access
- Cycle Access
- Parking provision
- Sustainability (location)
- Emergency and service access

4. *Creating the Design Solution*

There may be several different design solutions for a site. The design solution should be based upon the design principles that have been established through the appraisal of the context and identification of design principles. Without going through these two stages the design solution is likely to be flawed.

5. *Creating the Access Solution*

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.
- Address the need for flexibility of the development and how it may adapt to changing needs.
- Explain how access for the emergency services can be achieved, including circulation routes round the site and egress from buildings in the event of emergency evacuation

Final Comments

CABE's publication *Design and Access Statements – How to write, read and use them* asks the question "Is the design good enough to approve?" not, "Is it bad enough to refuse?", and then explains how to identify good design, and sets out a Crib Sheet which it suggest should be used in assessing a proposal. This is set out below.

THE PROCESS

- Does the statement show the applicant has assessed the site's full context, including physical, social and economic characteristics and relevant planning policies?
- Has the applicant demonstrated how they have taken account of the results of any community involvement?

- Does the statement show that the scheme has emerged from a rigorous assessment-involvement-evaluation-design process rather than trying to justify retrospectively a pre-determined solution?

USE

- Would the application help to create an appropriate mix of uses in the area?
- Would different uses work together well, or would they cause unacceptable annoyance?

AMOUNT

- Is the density appropriate?
- Could the neighbourhood's services support the amount of development planned.

LAYOUT

- Do all spaces have a purpose?
- Will public spaces be practical, safe, overlooked and inclusive?
- Will private spaces be adaptable, secure and inviting?

SCALE

- Will the buildings sit comfortably with their surroundings?
- Will they, and parts like doors and windows, be of a comfortable scale for people?

LANDSCAPING

- Has landscaping been properly considered from the start?
- Will it help to make the place look good and work well, and will it meet any specific aims for the site?

APPEARANCE

- How will the development visually relate to its surroundings?
- Will it look attractive?

ACCESS

- Will the place be safe and easy for everyone to move around?
- Will it make the most of the surrounding movement network?
- Has the applicant clearly described their policy approach and consultation process, whether carried out or planned?

REFERENCES:

- CABE (2006) Design and Access Statements – How to write, read and use them, London www.cabe.org.uk/AssetLibrary/8073.pdf
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- Home Office/Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2003) Safer Places- the Planning System and Crime Prevention
www.communities.gov.uk/pub/724/SaferplacestheplanningsystemandcrimepreventionPDF3168Kb_id1144724.pdf
- ODPM (2005) Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development, London www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1143804