

Improving Disability Access

Top Tips from the Mid Suffolk Access Group

Access to buildings influences the way people live and gives them the choice and right to equal opportunities in social, work and educational activities. It's really important that access for disabled people is considered at the earliest possible moment and is not seen to be the minimum standard needed to comply with building regulations, but as a commitment to provide for the needs of all people using a building.

The following top tips are not exhaustive but simply provide a starting point. There are other points that will need to be taken into consideration in the design and management of a building and its environment:

Top tips to provide good access for disabled people:

1. **Car parking** arrangements for disabled people. Spaces should be as close as possible to the main entrance and there should be sufficient spaces for the size of the car park. The surface should also be level and firm.
2. **The external environment** to the main entrance, including gradient and width of any path. If there is a ramp to the main entrance, there should be a level turning space at the top of the ramp.
3. The accessibility of the **main entrance** and width of doors. You should make sure that if there are double doors, only one door needs to be open to allow a wheelchair user to get through easily. Consideration should be given to installing automatic doors and ensuring the entrance is protected from the weather.
4. **Physical movement around the building.** To enable easy movement in a building you need to consider the width of corridors, turning circles, door widths, strength of door closers, vision panels, type and position of door furniture, and non-slip flooring.



5. The heights of reception and other **public counters**. Is there a low counter to enable a wheelchair user to use it or another suitable area they can use?

6. **Accessible toilet facilities** should preferably be provided to a larger specification than Part M to allow for sufficient turning space and to accommodate larger wheelchairs. There will preferably be separate facilities provided for child changing.

7. If there is more than one floor, **lift access** should be provided to first and any other floors. This should be wheelchair accessible and also incorporate facilities to assist people with visual impairments in pressing the right buttons.

8. Think about the procedures for **evacuating the building** in the case of fire or other emergency, ensuring that all fire exits are wide enough and have flush thresholds, and that egress away from the building is possible.

9. Think about the audibility and visibility of **fire alarms** (particularly in toilets or areas where people may be alone).

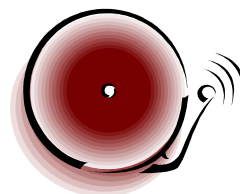
10. There should be **facilities for people who are hard of hearing**, including permanent induction loops to meeting rooms, interview rooms and reception counters.

11. There should be **facilities for visually impaired people**, including good lighting, tactile signs, contrast nosings on steps and tactile paving to mark any crossings.

12. All **signs** should be clear, with good colour contrast to assist people with visual impairments.

13. Any **furniture** should be movable e.g. tables and chairs in cafés should not be fixed.

14. Take care with the **internal décor** so that it is not confusing or disorientating for people with visual impairments.



For more information please contact Optua on 01473 836777.