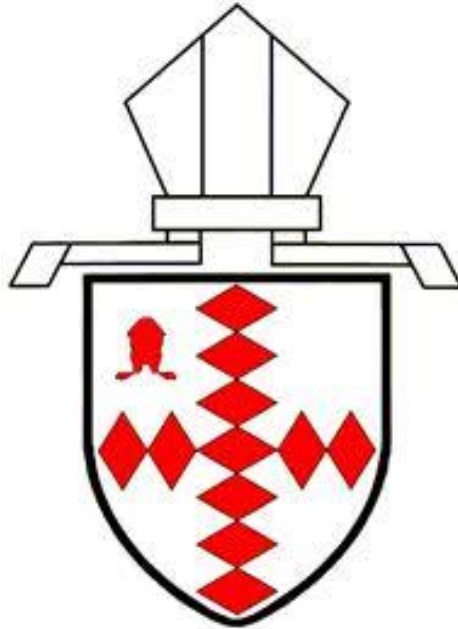


'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' (John 10:10)

*'In Christ, there is no difference between Jew and Greek.
There is no difference between male and female.
You are all the same in Christ Jesus.'*
(Gal 3:28)



Southwark Diocese

An Access Appraisal of Church Buildings

*A guide to making a basic assessment of the
accessibility of churches, halls, and other premises.*



The Church of England serving the people of
South London and East Surrey

As children of God, we have a new dignity and God calls us to fullness of life.
(Introduction to the Common Worship Rite of Baptism 2006)

An access appraisal of church buildings.

This document contains some practical advice on ways in which churches might assess their buildings and facilities in order to create a better environment for people with disabilities.

It is recommended that the Church Council appoints a small group of people to carry out the appraisal and that a formal report is made to the council from which action may be taken.

Those who are asked to undertake the appraisal should read the whole document before starting, work through the pages carefully (it may be valuable to use a separate copy for the hall or another building) and to make a full report to the church council – with pictures if possible.

It must be stressed that undertaking an access appraisal as suggested by this document is an informal procedure. If you are considering any major changes to your buildings, undertaking building works, or making other developments, it may be advisable to have a full Access Audit. If you are planning new building works it may be advisable to seek the advice of an access consultant as well as an architect.

It is important that everyone should be given a warm welcome into the House of the Lord, there should be no barriers to the worship of God, but sometimes our churches can appear to be less-than-welcoming to disabled people. As Christians we are horrified at the suggestion that we are not welcoming but sometimes our church life and buildings can appear to be “unfriendly” to people with disabilities. This is not a deliberate policy but can occur through a failure to think through our approach to disability. Churches very rarely discriminate intentionally but may fall into a trap of unwitting discrimination.

Think about your church does it have steps at the entrance?

Can everybody read your weekly news-sheet?

Does everyone use the microphone?

For people with disabilities these things are important; getting things wrong can create problems.

As a response to the Equality Act and to offer the best possible welcome it is advised, though not mandatory, that every church undertake an appraisal of its buildings, practices, and attitudes to see how good they are for people with disabilities.

Encourage members of the congregation to participate in the access appraisal of your buildings, especially those who have mobility issues or sight and hearing impairment and who can therefore draw attention to particular areas of concern.

This document consists of a number of sections which will assist you in making an access appraisal of your buildings. Starting with arrival at the building and moving through to look at some specific aspects of disability, the nine sections each has some comment on the likely requirements of people with disabilities, some questions which you may wish to ask in assessing the suitability of your premises, and then a prompt to help set out some recommendations for such action is necessary.

At the end of each section (where applicable) there is a brief summary of the access standards for which you should aim. These are based on BS 8300 which is the Code of Practice that sets out the requirements for good accessibility.

Introduction - an access appraisal

It is advised that the church be inspected by at least two people who will walk around all public areas and make notes under the subject headings found in this booklet. As well as looking at the buildings it is important to look at the 'practises' of the church, especially events that take place

away from the main church building (in the church hall, the vicarage, people's homes).

The appraisal process should result in a report on the accessibility of the church as a whole, for 'access' is not just about buildings - it includes the whole life of the church. The concept of 'access' involves more than just the physical circulation in a building and this is why the needs of people with a wide range of disabilities are included. It can be very useful to take photographs of particular areas in order that those who assess the report may fully understand the matters being raised.

Once the appraisal report is completed it will be possible to make recommendations to improve the quality of your access and your welcome; some will be simple to implement but others may be costly, may challenge the aesthetics of the building, or may simply be impractical. Other recommendations will be achievable in the course of time. The parochial church council should take careful note of the appraisal report and then classify each recommendation under one of the following headings:

1. Straightforward: Matters which can be implemented with little delay and might include the provision of large-print pew sheets and hymnbooks, elimination of a small step, painting a contrast colour line on steps, replacement of worn doormats, etc. (Do remember that the advice of the Archdeacon and DAC must be sought in respect of any changes of a permanent nature – including lines on steps.)

2. Achievable: Matters which can be implemented in the short term – perhaps when money becomes available or when a re-ordering takes place. Such matters might include the provision of a hearing-aid induction loop or the provision of a permanent ramp for wheelchairs, or handrails on steps. (Remember to seek advice.)

3. Unreasonable: Matters which are felt to be quite beyond the capacity of the church. Major alterations to a historic building may be aesthetically unacceptable. Some provisions may cost a fortune. It is important to carefully document the reasons why a matter has been deemed

'unreasonable' as this may provide useful evidence should legal action be taken against the church.

The PCC should formally record its decisions, implement the 'reasonable' matters and plan for the 'achievable' ones. It is recommended that the appraisal be reviewed every two years as new members of the congregation may present new issues. The PCC would then have discharged its duty under the Equality Act which requires churches as "providers of goods and services" to make "reasonable provision" for the needs of people with disabilities.

In the following pages the 'standards' that are given on each page are based on BS8300 "Designs of Buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people – Code of Practice.

1. Getting to the building

People who have mobility impairments may need to get their car close to a venue, have plenty of room to park and to open car doors so that they can get into a wheelchair from the car. Any kerbs on the route to the building should have a dropped section for wheelchair-users.

It is very difficult to propel a wheelchair or to walk with crutches on a pathway that has a loose surface so a firm, well-drained surface is preferable; low planting along the path edge helps to define the route (this is especially important for people with a visual impairment).

Handrails and side kerbs should where possible be fitted to all ramps, gradients should not exceed 1-in-12.

Outward-opening doors and windows in walls alongside the path should where possible be protected by rails but not in a way that reduces the width of the path.

All pathways should be kept clean and be regularly treated to prevent the build-up of slippery substances.

Assessment:

Describe the approach routes to all buildings; how closely do they match the standards set out below?

What action should be taken to improve the routes?

Make a list of your recommendations for this section.

The standards for which you should aim:

At least two dedicated car parking spaces should be provided, these should have hard surfaces and be a minimum of 3200mm wide by 4800mm deep; they should be marked both on the ground and by a signpost and have a barrier-free route into the building.

Dropped kerbs should have a minimum width of 1200mm and maximum gradient of 1-in-12, surfaces must be flush to both the road and the pathway and no drainage gratings should obstruct the crossover.

Tactile paving should be used to indicate a dropped kerb. Routes to the building should have a smooth hard surface with tactile edgings and have a preferred width of 1800mm (and a minimum of 900mm).

2. Changes in level

a) Ramps:

Ramps for people who have difficulty in walking or who use wheelchairs should where possible be provided at any change of level. It is important that steps and ramps should have handrails as it may be necessary to have something to grip as one ascends or descends.

b) Steps:

Some people have difficulty with ramps and so steps are still important; sometimes it is not possible to replace all the steps around a building with ramps and so it is vital that all steps are as safe and convenient as possible.

Handrails should be provided where possible to all steps and ramps. In many churches there are existing steps which cannot be replaced by a ramp; every effort should be made to provide handrails on such steps

but this should be done with consideration for the aesthetics of the building.

As an absolute minimum on short flights of steps (one or two risers), where no other handrail is possible, a vertical handgrip should be provided.

Assessment:

Describe any methods of changing level both outside and inside the building.

How closely do steps and ramps match the standards set out overleaf?

What action might be taken to improve the situation?

Make a list of your recommendations for this section.

The standards for which you should aim:

A ramp should have a minimum width of 1200mm, have a maximum gradient of 1-in-12, and have a maximum sloping length of 5000mm. Any longer ramp should have a level area every 5000mm; this should be a minimum of 1500mm in length.

A ramp with a gradient of less than 1-in-12 can be a maximum of 10,000mm in length and have a level area every 10,000mm. If the change in level is more than two metres some system other than a ramp should be provided. All ramps that raise the route by more than 500mm should have steps as an alternative.

Handrails should be provided on each side of a ramp or steps to leave a clear space of 1000mm between them; handrails should be between 900mm and 1000mm high with a circular rail of maximum diameter of 50mm.

Handrails should project horizontally for a minimum of 300mm beyond the end of the ramp or steps and be carried across respite levels and turns. The rail itself should be a minimum of 100mm from any adjacent wall.

Handrails should be 50mm in diameter, supported from beneath, and in a contrast colour to its surroundings. Risers on steps should be a maximum of 150mm high and treads a minimum of 280mm deep.

Step nosings should be distinguished in a contrasting colour on both horizontal and vertical edges. Step handrails should be as above.

A flight of steps should have a maximum rise of 1200mm; longer flights should have a landing every 1200mm; stair handrails should be as above.

A vertical handrail should be circular, with a maximum diameter of 50mm, a wall clearance of 100mm, be mounted and of sufficient length to be easily reached from both top and bottom of the steps, and be in a contrast colour to its surroundings.

3. Movement inside the building

a) Corridors:

In order to assist people who use wheelchairs, crutches, or walking sticks passageways should where possible be wide enough to allow people to move freely.

Obstructions such as fire extinguishers or other equipment should be recessed and must be clearly marked.

Floor coverings should be non-slip and have no loose edges. A recessed doormat should be flush with the floor, doormats which sit on the floor surface should be slim, have tapered edges and be in a contrast colour to their surroundings; old doormats with ragged edges should be discarded.

Some floor surfaces have patterns which present difficulties to people with visual impairment and should be avoided.

b) Doors:

It is important that people who use wheelchairs can easily pass through all doors; the average wheelchair is about 700mm wide. If there is a double-leaved door, both leaves must always be free to open.

Door handles should be lever-style and in a contrast colour to their surroundings. Doors should be glazed so that one can see through whether standing or seated.

Door closers should be set to allow the door to open with a gentle pull. Be aware that doors that are constructed entirely or primarily of glass can present real problems to people with impaired vision and so should have bold markings on the glass at eye levels for both seated and standing people.

Etched markings are hard to see and should be avoided. It is important that the edges of glass doors are marked so that they can be seen when open.

All-glass doors should be avoided.

In an emergency it is vital that people with disabilities have the same opportunity to escape as everyone else.

All designated fire escape routes should be wheelchair-accessible; if this is not possible, areas that are protected from fire (such as enclosed staircases) should be marked as refuges for people who cannot use the stairs.

In creating a refuge it is important that fire escape routes are not blocked. The advice of the local fire officer should be sought in every instance.

Assessment:

Are all corridors wide enough for wheelchair and crutch users?

Are there any projecting obstructions which may be a hazard, especially to people with visual impairment?

Are floor surfaces in good condition?

Do any carpets present hazards to people with disabilities?

Are all doors wide enough?

Are both leaves of double doors always unlocked?

Do doors have adequate glazing to enable people to see through?

Do glass doors and panels have bold visible markings?

Can doors be easily opened by lever handles with a gentle pull?

Are all fire escapes suitable for people with disabilities?

Make a list of your recommendations for this section.

The standards for which you should aim:

Corridors should have a minimum clear width of 1200mm. All doors should provide a minimum opening width of 750mm, have lever furniture and glazed vision panels. Floor surfaces and items in corridors should not be hazardous.

Fire escapes, when leaving the building, should be to a level platform; if there are steps, a refuge should be provided clear of any escape path, this can allow a wheelchair to be parked without blocking the escape route.

All buildings of more than one storey should have a clearly-signed refuge on each floor.

4. Toilets

The first questions that wheelchair-users ask when they are invited to a building is “Can I get in?” and “Can I use the toilet?” If there are no toilets in a building then everyone is in the same boat but if there is toilet provision then it is important that at least one cubicle is wheelchair-accessible.

If the toilets are of a single cubicle design then it may be possible to designate all of them as ‘Toilet’ (rather than ‘Ladies’ and ‘Gents’) and to convert one to be wheelchair-accessible. It is important to have a unisex toilet because some people may need help in the toilet from a spouse, parent, or carer of the other gender.

The design standards for a wheelchair-accessible toilet are very precise and the positioning of all equipment must be exact; advice is available from the church's inspecting architect or surveyor about the layout of such toilets.

Wheelchair-accessible toilets **must** be kept free of obstruction and **not** used as storage areas. An alarm should be fitted to all accessible toilets and people should know how to respond to alarm calls.

Toilets should be clearly signed with pictograms – it is important that signs are read and understood by everyone.

Floors should be of a non-slip material and in good condition. All toilet fittings should be of a contrasting colour to the surroundings as some people have limited colour vision.

Toilet cubicles should be of sufficient size to allow users to enter, sit and rise without difficulty. All door locks should be fitted with a coin-release indicator bolt.

It is valuable to offer facilities for baby-changing; sometimes these are included in the unisex toilet; this should only occur if no other space is available. A sign may be necessary to suggest that baby-changing facilities must be folded away after use

All toilets should be serviced on a regular basis.

Assessment:

Are the toilets in the building suitable for people with disabilities?

Is there unisex provision?

Is there wheelchair-accessible provision?

Are toilets used for storage? How can this be avoided?

Are all toilets properly signposted?

Are the colours in a toilet confusing?

Can door locks be opened from outside in an emergency?

Make a list of your recommendations for this section.

The standards for which you should aim:

Specific design standards exist for accessible toilets; these should be consulted before any adaptations are made; toilets should follow the guidance in BS 8300:2009 or the Building Regulations (Approved Document M).

Where possible, buildings should provide one unisex accessible toilet; wheelchair-accessible cubicles in gender-exclusive toilets are only acceptable if there is also unisex provision.

5. Seating areas

When people are in church much of their time is spent in seating areas; it is therefore preferable that seats are suitable for everyone.

When looking at what type of chairs are appropriate, it is worth reminding that some people require a firm support (chair or pew) in front to pull themselves up on rather than needing arms on chairs.

Pews can create real isolation for people who use wheelchairs. Where fixed seats or pews are provided there should be a number of spaces within the seating area for wheelchair users.

It is preferable if wheelchair spaces offer a choice of positions and allow one's companions to sit alongside.

Wheelchair spaces should not be just at the front or rear of a seating area. Some people have difficulty in rising from a seat and so some seating should be provided with arms.

Some people with hearing impairment will lip-read a speaker; it is important, therefore, that places from which people speak can be clearly seen, are well-lit, and are not silhouetted by a window from behind.

Seating should be located to avoid glare; lighting should be at a good level and flicker-free.

Assessment:***Are there spaces for wheelchair-users in any area of seating?******Do some seats have arms?******Are seats located so that speakers can be easily seen and lip-read?******Make a list of your recommendations for this section:*****6. Hearing impairment**

Many people who use hearing aids can switch their aid so that it listens only to specific sounds from a microphone; this cuts out background noise. In order to use this facility an 'induction-loop system' is required; these are usually fitted permanently to a building although portable systems are available.

It is enormously helpful if all meeting and reception areas are fitted with an induction loop system that is constantly in use and is clearly signposted at the main entrances to the building. Everyone who speaks to groups in the building should be required to use the system. All systems should be tested at least once a month.

The requirement for an induction loop applies to both the church and the hall. It is crucial that all people who speak use the microphones - even if they do have loud voices!

Some profoundly-deaf people use sign-language; if sign-language interpreters are in use they should be located in a position that is clearly visible from the seating area and in good lighting.

Speakers should be encouraged to speak in a way that is sympathetic to the interpreter's task and to provide notes in advance of the event.

In general, everyone who uses a microphone in the building should be trained in the correct use of the equipment which should be switched on whenever a meeting takes place.

Some floor and wall surfaces create echoes which lead to difficulties for people with hearing impairment; surfaces should be finished in such a way as to avoid confusing noises or loud bangs.

Some machinery (such as an organ blower) might create noises which present difficulties for people with hearing impairment.

Assessment:

Are main meeting areas fitted with an induction-loop system?

Is the system in use at all times?

Is the system regularly tested?

Are all speakers required to use the system?

Is it possible to clearly see sign-language interpreters from all parts of the auditorium?

Does the building have any unfortunate echoes or background noises?

Make a list of your recommendations for this section.

7. Visual impairment

People with visual impairment do not just have 'poor sight'; often they see things differently, are sensitive to bright light, have difficulty in distinguishing colour or low-contrast, and have severely reduced vision in the dark.

Lighting in all areas should be of high quality and set in such a way to avoid glare or silhouetting. Natural lighting should be shaded where glare occurs and reinforced where dim.

All floor and wall surfaces should be of sympathetic colours; there should be differences in floor, wall and ceiling colours in order that partially-sighted people can assess the dimensions of a room. It can be useful to take a black-and-white photograph of a room or area to enable an assessment of the quality of colour contrast; reduce the contrast of the photograph a little and you will obtain a good indication of any areas which require attention.

Signs should be in contrasting colours and always in upper and lower case lettering; signs in all capitals are difficult to read for everyone.

Visual signs should be supplemented by tactile signs; a tactile map of the building can be very useful, especially if your building attracts tourists.

Literature should be available, as a routine alternative, in large print or electronic format. Many people who have only slight visual impairment will appreciate a larger print version of service and notice sheets.

Large print material should be printed in black on lemon-yellow paper.

Many people with more-severe visual impairment have computer programmes that convert written material into speech; it can be very valuable if literature for general use is available on computer disc or by e-mail so that it can be used on such a system. The sound from a computer can then be recorded onto audio tape for use with a portable tape player.

Very few people read Braille and versions of books in this medium are expensive and not appropriate to everyone.

It is important that everyone is able to read the information that is given to them. Literature for use by everyone should be printed in type that is no smaller than 12-point, of a sans-serif (plain) style, and on paper which provides a good contrast to the lettering; deep-tint papers with black printing are hard to read and of little use.

Assessment:

Is the lighting in the building of good quality?

Are there areas of glare or darkness?

Are fixtures and fittings in the building of a contrast-colour to their surroundings?

Are all signs easy to read?

Is all written material routinely offered alternatively in large-print on appropriate paper?

Are electronic or audio versions of publications available on request?

Is all literature printed in legible formats?

Make a list of your recommendations for this section.

8. Learning disability

Learning disability is, perhaps, the most common area of severe disability and is a complex and challenging area which is sometimes hard to understand. People with learning disabilities do not usually require special physical facilities (unless they also have another type of disability) but can often feel unwelcome in a church.

People who have learning disabilities will often have difficulties in understanding information, may not remember the things that they are told, may behave in a different way in church, and may need some particular attention at times.

Some people fall into the trap of describing people with learning disabilities as “having a mental age of x”; this is wrong. People’s ages are based on the amount of time since they were born; everyone has a wealth of experiences and insights that have been collected over the years.

Sometimes people with learning disabilities are regarded as “children”; this too is wrong (unless they are a child). It is not right to treat an adult as if he or she is a child.

It is true that the way in which some people with learning disabilities react in society can appear to be childlike, but this is not a sign of immaturity; people with learning disabilities will simply do things in a different way to others.

Some people with learning disabilities will be of high intelligence, have considerable capacity to use information, but, at the same time, they not be able to join in with some activities of the church family or remember information from one week to another.

It is vital that the church community is welcoming to people with learning disabilities and their families.

In this area of disability there is no call to build ramps or install loops; rather it is our attitudes that are being challenged. When making an appraisal of our church and its approach to learning disability there is nothing physical which can be inspected; rather, there is a need to look at the way in which the church and its congregations welcome people who are different.

Do we understand that some people do not sit quietly all through the service?

Do we remember that not everyone understands the notices each week as they are given out either verbally or on paper?

Do we recognise that some people will not be able to remember the information about changes in the service that were announced last Sunday?

People with learning disabilities should be involved in all aspects of church life. It may not be possible for them to become members of the Church Council but their views should be sought when issues are under discussion.

There are many ways in which someone with a learning disability can contribute to the life of the church – perhaps by hosting a Bible study group in their home, helping with the choice of hymns, or assisting with general tasks; they can offer valuable help around the church if the correct level of support is given.

It is important to regard people with learning disabilities as Christians in their own right, to not patronise, and to ensure that everyone has a full place in our church life.

Assessment:

How does our church offer a welcome to people with learning disabilities?

Make a list of your recommendations for this section.

9. General considerations

People with disabilities will, generally, wish to join in the life of a church in as 'normal' a way as possible. This means that provisions which are made for people with disabilities should be seen as part of the every-day provision and not something that is brought out especially when certain people appear.

It is worth remembering that some disabilities can be 'invisible' (e.g. hearing difficulties or an inability to stand for extended periods).

Induction loops should be in use at all time; large-print literature should be routinely set out, if it is absolutely necessary to have a temporary wheelchair ramp it should be in place during the whole of the building's opening hours.

As a 'rule of thumb' it should be assumed that people with disabilities will wish to use the building on every occasion; indeed, the law requires that we should adopt this attitude.

It is important to remember that the life of the church is not just that which happens on a Sunday morning. In conducting this access appraisal it is important to look at the events that go on during the week and which take place at venues other than the church.

Meetings for Bible study, of the Church Council, and for other purposes often take place in people's homes and it is important that our practice in this respect does not exclude someone with a disability.

In some churches the children will leave the service at some point for their own instruction and this should take place in an accessible environment.

If someone with a disability is using the building it is useful if others are available to assist if necessary. However, one should always ask if assistance is required and listen carefully to any answer that is given; never assume that help is needed. It is a natural response to seek to help but always only do that when one is asked to do.

Never allow the desire to help to lead to lifting someone as this could result in injury to both parties.

Assessment:

Are all our facilities for people with disabilities available at all times?

Are our mid-week and off-site activities accessible?

Do we have a policy of encouraging people to ask if help is required and then listening to the answer?

Do we have a policy of never lifting someone?

Make a list of your recommendations for this section.

The Last Word

Some of the actions that a Church Council will decide to take as a result of this access appraisal may affect practices, some may affect attitudes, and some may affect the buildings themselves. Please be aware that, in every instance, there is assistance available as you seek to create a better welcome for people with disabilities.

The very nature of many of our church buildings can make it very difficult to implement physical changes to meet the needs of people with disabilities; this can be a real challenge to everyone in a church as we seek to offer a full welcome.

The cost of changes can be enormous and it is hard to balance the many calls that are made on a church's finances. In all of these challenges the vital factor is that of wanting to create inclusivity in every aspect of church life – if we really desire that our church is open to all then, with God's help, we will find ways and means.

If there are to be any alterations to the church building it is vital that your archdeacon and church architect are consulted at the very earliest stage and that the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches (DAC) is also consulted. Any permanent changes to the fabric of your church must have the permission of a faculty. Further advice on all aspects of accessibility is available from Trinity House.

If you wish for assistance in carrying out an appraisal or a full access audit it is possible for the Diocesan Disability Advisor to help in this area.

Some changes that might arise as the result of an appraisal may cost money and churches may need to look for grant-aid to complete a project.

Prayer for our Parishes

Heavenly Father, we ask your blessing on our churches.

May the doorways be wide enough to welcome all who need.

Your love and ours narrow enough to shut out evil and strife.

May the thresholds be smooth enough to present no stumbling blocks to children, nor barriers to those who are elderly and disabled.

May the doors be strong to turn back the tempter's power but open and inviting to those who are your guests.

May they be doorways to your eternal kingdom.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

Book list:

As you think about better ways of welcoming disabled people into your church you may find useful books from the following list:

Widening the eye of the needle *John Penton* – A church-based guide to ways of improving accessibility for disabled people. Church House Publishing (chpublishing.co.uk)

Access to the Historic Environment Donhead Publishing (www.donhead.com)

Easy Access to Historic Properties English Heritage (www.english-heritage.org.uk)

Disability Resource Pack The Methodist Church (www.methodist.org.uk)

Roofbreaker Guides Through the Roof (www.throughtheroof.org)

The National Trust and Disabled Visitors The National Trust
(www.nationaltrust.org.uk)

This document is available in large-print and by electronic means.
Further information on all matters of disability and access may be
obtained from the Diocesan Disability Advisor:

Rev Timothy Goode; tel 0208 660 4015; email revtimgoode@gmail.com