

Guidance Note on Design and Access Statements

Background

In May 2006, the Government introduced changes to the planning applications process. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 amended the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 so as to provide that a statement covering design concepts and principles and access issues is submitted with applications for planning permission and listed building consent.

Government Circular 01/2006 *Guidance on changes to the development control system*, effective from 10 August 2006, sets out the formal requirements. The changes mean that a Local Planning Authority will be prohibited, from 10 August 2006, from entertaining an application unless it is accompanied by a design statement and an access statement, where required.

Please note that if an application is received on or after 10 August 2006 that should have a design and access statement, but does not, the Authority will not register or consider the application until a statement has been provided. Providing a statement does not, however, guarantee that an application will be approved. The normal planning decision process still applies.

What is a design and access statement?

A design and access statement (statement for short) is a short report accompanying and supporting an application to illustrate the process that has led to the development proposal, and to explain and justify the proposal in a structured way. It must not be used as a substitute for drawings and other material required to be submitted for determination as part of the planning application itself. They provide an opportunity for developers and designers to demonstrate their commitment to achieving good design and ensuring accessibility in the work they undertake, and to allow them to show how they are meeting, or will meet, the various obligations placed on them by legislation and policy.

The level of detail required in a statement will depend on the scale and complexity of the application, and the length of the statement will vary accordingly.

Statements should include a written description and justification of the application. Sometimes photos, maps and drawings may be needed to further illustrate the points made. Although there will be a design and an access component, you should not think of a design and access statement as two separate documents. Much of the preliminary work that needs to be done for the design component will help to inform the access component and vice versa.

When is a design and access statement required?

A design and access statement must accompany planning applications for both outline and full planning permissions. A statement will be required for all planning applications within Northumberland National Park except for:

- Applications for a material change in the use of land or buildings, unless it also involves building works;
- engineering or mining operations;

Design and access statements are not required for applications relating to advertisement control, tree preservation orders or storage of hazardous substances.

The design and access statement will be placed on the public register with the application to which it relates and will also be sent to consultees along with individual applications.

Presenting the information

For most straightforward planning applications, the statement may be only short - for some, only a page may be needed - whereas for more complicated planning applications, a more detailed format and, perhaps, a longer document is likely to be necessary.

Design and access statements may include, as appropriate, plans and elevations; photographs of the site and its surroundings; and any other relevant illustrations. Such illustrative materials must not, however, be used as a substitute for adequate drawings submitted with the planning application.

What is required in a design and access statement – the design component

A design and access statement should explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to particular aspects of the proposal – these are the use, amount, layout, scale, landscaping and appearance of the development.

1. Use

The planning application will need to say what the development would be used for and the statement needs to explain how this will fit in with the area and how it supports local aims.

What to include? A justification of the use in terms of land use policies, but also how it has been informed by existing uses in the area. If the application is for a new house in a residential street, this will be straightforward. If it is for a new restaurant in a residential area, it will be more complicated and the statement will need to show why the use would be acceptable. The statement should show that the applicant has understood the access needs of different users and made sure the design will allow for inclusive access. Uses open to the public, such as shops, hospitals or hotels, must be accessible to everyone, and homes must be accessible to all visitors.

2. Amount

The planning application will need to say how much development is being applied for and the statement needs to explain why this is an appropriate amount. In small applications, the amount proposed may be obvious, for example for one house, and the statement will not need to say much more than how this can be built on the site, but, for larger applications, explaining the development's density may become relevant.

What to include? Amount cannot be reserved within an outline application, although it is common to express the maximum amount of floorspace for each use in the planning application, and for this to be made the subject of a planning condition. The statement should show that the amount of development planned takes into account how much development is suitable for the site. The statement should justify 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.

3. Layout

The application drawings should show the layout on the site, or for outline applications, an indicative layout. The statement should explain why this layout has been chosen, and how it will work and fit with its surroundings. For small developments this may be very simple, for example, just saying that the building faces an existing road. But for larger plans, the layout may be balancing a variety of design features such as solar gain, crime prevention and accessibility. In these cases, statements should clearly explain the design decisions that have been made.

What to include? 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 provided. The statement should explain and justify the principles behind the choice of development zones and blocks or building plots proposed and explain how these principles, including the need for appropriate access will inform the detailed layout. The use of illustrative diagrams are encouraged to assist in explaining this.

For detailed applications, and outline applications where layout is not reserved, the statement should explain and justify 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 block and units in relation to any site topography to afford optimum accessibility.

Design and access statements for outline and detailed applications should 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).

4. Scale

Scale means the size of buildings and spaces, and details will be set out in the planning application. The statement needs to show why those sizes are right for the site, which often means explaining how the size of new buildings relates to the size of existing neighbouring ones. Size also affects whether new buildings and spaces will be economically viable, and the statement should explain why the scale proposed provides an appropriate level of accommodation.

What to include? 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 proposed, 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 and justify the principles behind these parameters and explain 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 and justify 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 and justify the size of building parts, particularly entrances and facades with regard to how they will relate to the human scale.

5. 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. Landscape design is often seen as something to think about after planning permission has been granted. But leaving landscaping to the end of the design process is not appropriate, so, the statement should explain the principles that will be used to draw up the landscape details. Statements should also explain how landscaping will be maintained.

What to include? 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 and justify 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 and justify the proposed landscaping scheme, explaining the purpose of landscaping private and public space and its relationship to the surrounding area. Where possible, a schedule of planting and proposed hard landscaping materials to be used is recommended.

6. 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. The statement needs to explain what the person applying for permission wants the place to look like and why. It also needs to explain how a good appearance will be achieved and maintained.

What to include? 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 and justify the principles behind the intended appearance and explain how these will inform the final design of the development.

For detailed applications, and outline applications that do not reserve appearance, the statement should explain and justify 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.

What is required in a design and access statement – 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 explain the policy adopted in relation to access and how relevant Council policies have been taken into account. The statement should also provide information on any consultation undertaken in relation to issues of access, (such as consultation with local communities and access groups, and technical advice from access, highways and urban design specialists) 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.

The statement should explain how surrounding roads, footpaths and sight lines will be linked. Diagrams showing how people can move to and through the place will be very useful. For some schemes, it may be good to show this for vehicles, bikes and pedestrians, showing how the priorities for different users have been worked through. Access for the emergency services should 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 locations 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.

Statements accompanying applications for Listed Building Consent

Design and access statements will be required for Listed Building Consent applications. Where there is a planning application 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.

The role of design and access statements in the decision making process

For local planning authorities, design and access statements would enable them to better understand the analysis which has underpinned the design and how it has led to the development of the scheme. Statements will allow local communities, access groups, amenity groups and other stakeholders to involve themselves more directly in the planning process without needing to interpret plans that can be technical and confusing.

Where can I get more detailed advice on design and access statements?

- Department for Communities and Local Government Circular 01/2006 : *Guidance on changes to the development control system* explains in detail when statements are needed and how they should be used.
- The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) has produced a comprehensive guide called Design and access statements: how to write, read and use them. Available at www.cabe.org.uk.
- The Disability Rights Commission website (www.drc-org.uk) explains how access statements work and how they should be used.
- Planning and access for disabled people: a good practice guide (ODPM, 2003)
- Safer places: the planning system and crime prevention (ODPM/Home Office, 2003).
- The Urban Design Group has produced detailed guidance called Design and access statements for development frameworks. Details from www.udg.org.uk.