

# Design and access statements

How to write, read and use them



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# Introduction

**In May 2006, the government introduced changes to the planning applications process. The circular *Guidance on changes to the development control system*, effective from 10 August 2006, sets out the formal requirements. This guide explains how the changes can help make sure we create high-quality places that are easy for everyone to use. It also shows how the process of making a planning application encourages everyone to think about how inclusive, practical and attractive a place will be once it is built.**

This guide is divided in three sections:

## **Part 1: Explaining the tools**

Explains what design and access statements are and how they work with both detailed and outline planning applications.

## **Part 2: Writing statements**

Shows people who are writing statements what to include, and the best way to explain their scheme. This section includes examples of good statements, explaining why they worked well.

## **Part 3: Reading statements**

Explains how local authority planners and councillors and anyone else considering a planning application can use statements to check if the proposal is good enough to approve. The section runs through each of the things a statement has to include, suggesting questions that would help determine how good the buildings and spaces would be once they were built.

This guide is intended as best practice guidance to accompany the circular *Guidance on changes to the development control system*. Its contents are therefore CABE's interpretation of government policy and should be considered best practice rather the statutory minimum.

To make it easier for you to find your way around this guide, a colour code has been used to link the related sections in parts 1, 2, and 3. The same colour code is used in the assessment crib sheet which can be found on the fold out flap inside the rear cover. You might find it useful to fold out the assessment crib sheet now to help navigate the guide.

Jennie Daly, who is director of planning at Harrow Estates, commented on a design and access statement presented by Taylor Young for a proposal at Ellesmere Port:

**'The design and access statement has, in this case, served as visible proof of the design evolution of the site having regard to best practice and guidance. In addition, it provides a tangible link, for all those interested in the development of the site, between the technical assessment of constraints and the "best scenario" design response to them.'**

# Part 1

## Explaining the tools

**Most development needs planning permission. This helps local authorities manage change in their areas for the benefit of the public. But they need to understand the likely effect of any proposals to make well-informed and balanced decisions. Design and access statements (statements for short) can help provide a lot of the information needed. They should help to make the planning applications system work more smoothly.**

### What are design and access statements?

Statements are documents that explain the design thinking behind a planning application. For example, they should show that the person applying for permission (the applicant) has thought carefully about how everyone, including disabled people, older people and very young children, will be able to use the places they want to build.

Statements should include a written description and justification of the planning application. Sometimes photos, maps and drawings may be needed to further illustrate the points made. They will be available alongside the application for anyone to see, so should avoid jargon or overly technical language. It is important that they are written specifically for the application they accompany. They need not be very long, but the amount of detail they contain should reflect how complex the application is. So, a statement for a major development is likely to be much longer than one for a single building.

### In summary, statements:

- accompany a planning application, but are not part of it
- are needed with most types of application, but not householder applications (except in designated areas) or material change of use (unless it also involves operational development)
- are also required for applications for listed building consent
- need to explain and justify what is being applied for, and
- can be linked to planning decisions by conditions if developers are to be required to follow them

The circular, *Guidance on changes to the development control system*, says that statements should 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 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 inform the access component and vice versa. Additionally, the approach to inclusive access should not be limited to the access part of the statement – it should infuse the whole document.

# Design

## **The process**

How the physical characteristics of the scheme have been informed by a rigorous process which should include the following steps:

- assessment
- involvement
- evaluation
- design.

## **Use**

What buildings and spaces will be used for.

## **Amount**

How much would be built on the site.

## **Layout**

How the buildings and public and private spaces will be arranged on the site, and the relationship between them and the buildings and spaces around the site.

## **Scale**

How big the buildings and spaces would be (their height, width and length).

## **Landscaping**

How open spaces will be treated to enhance and protect the character of a place.

## **Appearance**

What the building and spaces will look like, for example, building materials and architectural details.

# Access

The statement needs to include two potential aspects of access. That is not to say they are separate, and the statement should show that all access issues have been considered together.

## **Vehicular and transport links**

Why the access points and routes have been chosen, and how the site responds to road layout and public transport provision.

## **Inclusive access**

How everyone can get to and move through the place on equal terms regardless of age, disability, ethnicity or social grouping.

Statements should demonstrate how development can create accessible and safe environments, including addressing crime and disorder and fear of crime. These may be particularly relevant to address under layout and landscaping themes. Early consultation with police will help identify key issues in your local area, and measures to help address these. *Safer places - the planning system and crime prevention* (ODPM/Home Office, 2004) contains more information.

Statements may include other information as well, either because applicants think it is relevant or because local policies say they should, or because applicants want to include other information that they feel is relevant. For example, statements can explain the energy performance of buildings or whether they meet design standards such as Lifetime Homes or Building for Life Standards, or they may explain how the public has influenced the plan.

### Statements and outline planning applications

At the same time as a formal requirement for statements was introduced, the rules about outline applications were also changed so that they must include a minimum level of detail on:

- what the buildings will be used for
- how many buildings there will be
- roughly how they will be laid out
- minimum and maximum building sizes, and
- where entrances to the site will be.

The changes to the list of reserved matters, and the minimum information that now needs to be submitted at outline stage can be found in the circular, *Guidance on changes to the development control system* and the related regulations (statutory instrument 2006 no.1062).

For convenience, they are listed to the rear of this guide on page 31.

The statement accompanying the outline application should explain and justify the decisions taken so far but, very importantly, it must also explain the principles that will be followed when all the details are designed after permission is granted. The statement should set out the aims for the whole design, even if many of the details still have to be drawn up. The developer should keep within the parameters set out in the statement, and the outline permission may need to include conditions to make sure the ideas and aims in the statement are followed through as the design progresses.

So, unless a new statement is produced, the original one accompanying the outline application will be very important when reserved matters are drawn up and agreed. When reserved matters are approved, it may be appropriate to place further conditions on the permission that relate to detailed aspects of the statement submitted with the original outline application.

# Frequently asked questions

## What is the point of formally requiring statements?

Both design statements and access statements have been around for some time. But this is the first time a national requirement for them has been introduced – and the first time they have been combined into a single document. If used properly, they will help provide high-quality development, better-informed negotiation and decision-making, and more certainty for everyone. They should:

- make applicants think carefully about the quality of their planning proposal (this should improve the general quality of applications)
- give applicants the opportunity to explain and justify their plans to officers, councillors and the people they consult
- help people to negotiate changes to plans, as they can set out ideas for discussion
- control the way buildings are built, used and managed.

## When is a statement needed?

The circular *Guidance on changes to the development control system* explains when statements are needed but in general they must be provided with most planning applications except house extensions. Local authorities may also have their own requirements for statements with applications.

If a local authority receives a planning application, after 10 August 2006, that should have a statement but does not, it should 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.

## How do statements fit with the rest of the planning system?

Statements by themselves will not make good-quality, inclusive places. They need the back-up of appropriate planning policies that explain what local authorities will be looking for in any scheme. So, regional and local policies, including those in core strategies, area action plans or supplementary planning documents, need to set out the conditions for good design and inclusive access.

There is nothing to make developers actually build in line with the contents of a statement, unless the planning permission says they must. So, it is very important that local authorities include clear conditions with the permission, explaining which parts of the statement must be adhered to.

The statement may include a number of drawings. Although these should be accurate and based on the scheme being applied for, they should not replace the application drawings themselves. To make sure that the statement and application work well together, the statement may need to be updated if amended plans are presented with the application. If this

is not practical, the statement should be clearly dated and show the plan numbers it relates to.

## Can statements be used after planning permission has been granted?

Definitely. A scheme given permission is very rarely exactly the same as the scheme that is actually built. Things like building materials, security and landscaping often need to be approved by a condition on the planning permission. So, although these details can be agreed later on, they should be based on the relevant part of the statement, and conditions should make sure this happens. In particular, achieving and maintaining inclusivity will rely on decisions made after planning permission, and access conditions should continue to be enforced as the place is built, lived in and managed.

In cases of outline planning permission, as explained above, the statement will also be an important way of making sure that reserved matters are consistent with what the developers said they were going to do when they applied for planning permission.

## Are access statements the same as the new design and access statements that are now needed?

The Disability Rights Commission (DRC) has produced guidance on access statements (you can get the DRC guide from [www.drc-gb.org](http://www.drc-gb.org)). This explains how access should be considered from the start of the design process through to the building and final use and maintenance of the building or space. But the statements needed with planning applications should relate specifically to the planning stage of the development process. So, they will not be as far-reaching as access statements as described by the DRC, and having a statement with a planning application will not remove the need for a further access statement to inform building regulations, and help make sure those finally using the building have their needs met in keeping with the duties of the Disability Discrimination Act.

## Can I get more detailed advice on design and access statements?

Yes. The circular itself *Guidance on changes to the development control system* explains in detail when statements are needed and how they should be used. The Disability Rights Commission website ([www.drc-org.uk](http://www.drc-org.uk)) explains how access statements work and how they should be used. There is more information in *Planning and access for disabled people: a good practice guide* (ODPM, 2003) and *Safer places: the planning system and crime prevention* (ODPM/Home Office, 2004). The Urban Design Group has also produced detailed guidance called *Design and access statements for development frameworks*. You can get details from [www.udg.org.uk](http://www.udg.org.uk)



Portishead Docks, Bristol © Mark Ellis & Ashley Bingham, ICD Ltd.

# Part 2

## Writing statements

**‘We don’t knock out design statements just to cheer up the planners – they’re for us! We start them early in the programme to test, modify and organise our arguments; they form the basis of any planning discussions and...sometimes...they inform our appeal statements.’**

Friendly Architecture

*Guidance on changes to the development control system,* explains what a statement must contain, but to write a good statement you should also try to:

- keep it short and to the point
- write it for the application; don’t copy it from somewhere else
- start the statement when you start the scheme, and use it to help influence the design
- explain how the design has come about and what you are trying to achieve
- talk to people who could help as soon as you can. Consulting access specialists, local groups, planners and so on early on will help the statement hang together
- use statements as a negotiation tool, and allow them to change if the scheme changes
- use accurate and informative illustrations. Any maps, diagrams or artists’ impressions should be based on the application drawings.

The rest of this section runs through the process and the six elements that must be covered in the design part of the statement and what should be included in the access part.

Many local authorities have requirements which differ from the national minimum. So it is worth checking if other information is needed for any particular scheme. Not submitting a statement when required, or not providing the right information, will delay your application.

# The process

**The most important message to get across is that the application is based on a good understanding of local character and circumstances. That means a good statement will explain the design process that has been followed.**

**The circular, *Guidance on changes to the development control system*, recommends that applicants follow an assessment-involvement-evaluation-design process. This closely mirrors a good design process and means that the final design will be informed by the wider context of the site.**

## Assessment

You should demonstrate that you have looked at the context of the site and its surroundings. The size of the surrounding area to be surveyed and the detail with which this is done will depend on the sensitivity and scale of the development. Local context includes the physical, social and economic characteristics of the site and surroundings, as well as any existing planning policies:

**Physical** context means what the place looks like and the character that is derived from existing buildings, landscape features and movement routes. The statement should avoid going into too much detail – it is an opportunity to explain the scheme – not record local history.

**Social** context means how people in the locality will be affected by the development, including any aspirations they may have for the site.

**Economic** context means the contribution the development will have on the local economy. The value of the land and its effect on development options may also be discussed here.

**Planning policy** context means what policies and guidance exist to affect and shape the development of the site. There is no reason to reproduce planning policies word-for-word, but the applicant should draw attention to particularly relevant policies that exist.

## Involvement

You should clearly show what groups and people you have been, or will be, discussing the scheme with. Government guidance now encourages applicants to carry out professional consultations and community involvement at the earliest possible stage as this will help to avoid the potential pitfalls of not doing so until it is too late to change the scheme.

The statement should explore the findings of any consultations that have been carried out and explain how they have directed the decisions made by the applicant at this early stage in the scheme's development.

## Evaluation

Once the site's context has been properly assessed, the local community and the right professionals have been consulted; identifying options for development should be a fairly simple task. Here, you should evaluate the information collected in the previous two stages and identify opportunities and constraints that will inform the scheme. Evaluation may involve resolving any conflicting issues and the statement should clearly set out what decisions have been taken and why. This will give those reading the design statement an understanding of why elements of the scheme that they may not at first entirely agree with, have been decided on.

## Design

Once development options have been evaluated and any potential conflicts resolved, you can start designing the scheme guided by the information collected in the earlier stages and your evaluation of it. You should think of the statement as telling the story behind the scheme as it is presented in the planning application. Do not think of it as a chore, the statement is your opportunity to show that the decisions you have made are not guesswork but based on an understanding of the real world as it affects the application site. A good design statement will therefore increase support for your proposal.

**This section should be written during the early stages of the scheme's development. You should not try to write it after you have decided on the various aspects of the design – people reading the statement will be able to tell and it will undermine the effectiveness of the points made to justify your scheme.**

# Use

The planning application will need to say what the development would be used for. The statement needs to explain how this will fit in with the area and how it supports local aims, for example, how an application for a shop relates to existing shopping centres or parades or how schools, shops, sports facilities and other supporting amenities will be provided to support new housing provision.

## 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 much more complicated and the statement will need to show why the use would be acceptable.
- An explanation of how the uses will work well together, making the place more useful for the community and, where possible, allowing people to do more than one thing in the same area. Having a good mix of uses is a vital part of creating sustainable places. Many applications include more than one use, sometimes side by side and sometimes above one another.
- The statement should show that the applicant has understood the access needs of different uses 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 for all visitors.

## Writing statements 1

Land use and community facilities  
Carrington, Wire, Warrington  
statement

This statement explains in pictures and words how the development will make the most of surrounding land uses and facilities.

‘The situation of the site within a long-established neighbourhood means that there is a broad range of community facilities within a 10-minute walk. The location of the site close to established community, retail and open space facilities, adjacent to the town centre and close to public transport nodes are positive characteristics which need to be maximised through the provision of safe, direct, convenient and interesting pedestrian routes.’



# Amount

The planning application will say how much development is being applied for. The statement needs to explain why this is an appropriate amount. In small applications, the amount proposed may be obvious, for example one or two houses, 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.

## Writing statements 2

15/20 High Street, Hythe  
design statement

This short statement clearly explains why the amount of accommodation was thought to be right for the site.

'7.1 The proposals are for a 2½-storey building, i.e. two full floors with rooms in the roof space. This provides for the accommodation needed and offers views over Southampton Water from attractive living spaces.

7.2 Size relates to accommodation but it is important, also, because it allows a building of sufficient scale to hold its own with the surrounding buildings and make an impact on the Promenade – an important public space.'



© Friendly Architecture 2006

## What to include

- The statement should show that the amount of development planned takes into account how much development is suitable for the site. This should take account of the various restrictions identified in the site analysis and the aims of good urban design. The statement should not try to justify development that has already been decided on.
- Building amounts can be shown in many ways, and it can be useful to explain why measurement techniques have been used or even explain the amount in different ways. For example, the 'homes per hectare' figure can mean very different building amounts and numbers of residents, depending on the size of the homes, so providing floor-space figures as well may be useful.
- It is important to show how the scheme affects the way the area works. Factors include the number of people there will be around, as well as the quality of the buildings and spaces. So, it can be useful to give an idea of possible occupancy levels, whether for homes or workspaces, and footfall for shops and leisure uses.
- The application quite rightly relates to a specific site. But usage is not confined to site boundaries, and it is often the overall neighbourhood density that matters most in creating successful communities. So, for major developments, explaining how the amount of development planned will change the neighbourhood (for example, adding services and open space, supporting local businesses or placing more demand on local services) can help to show how appropriate the scheme would be.

# 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.

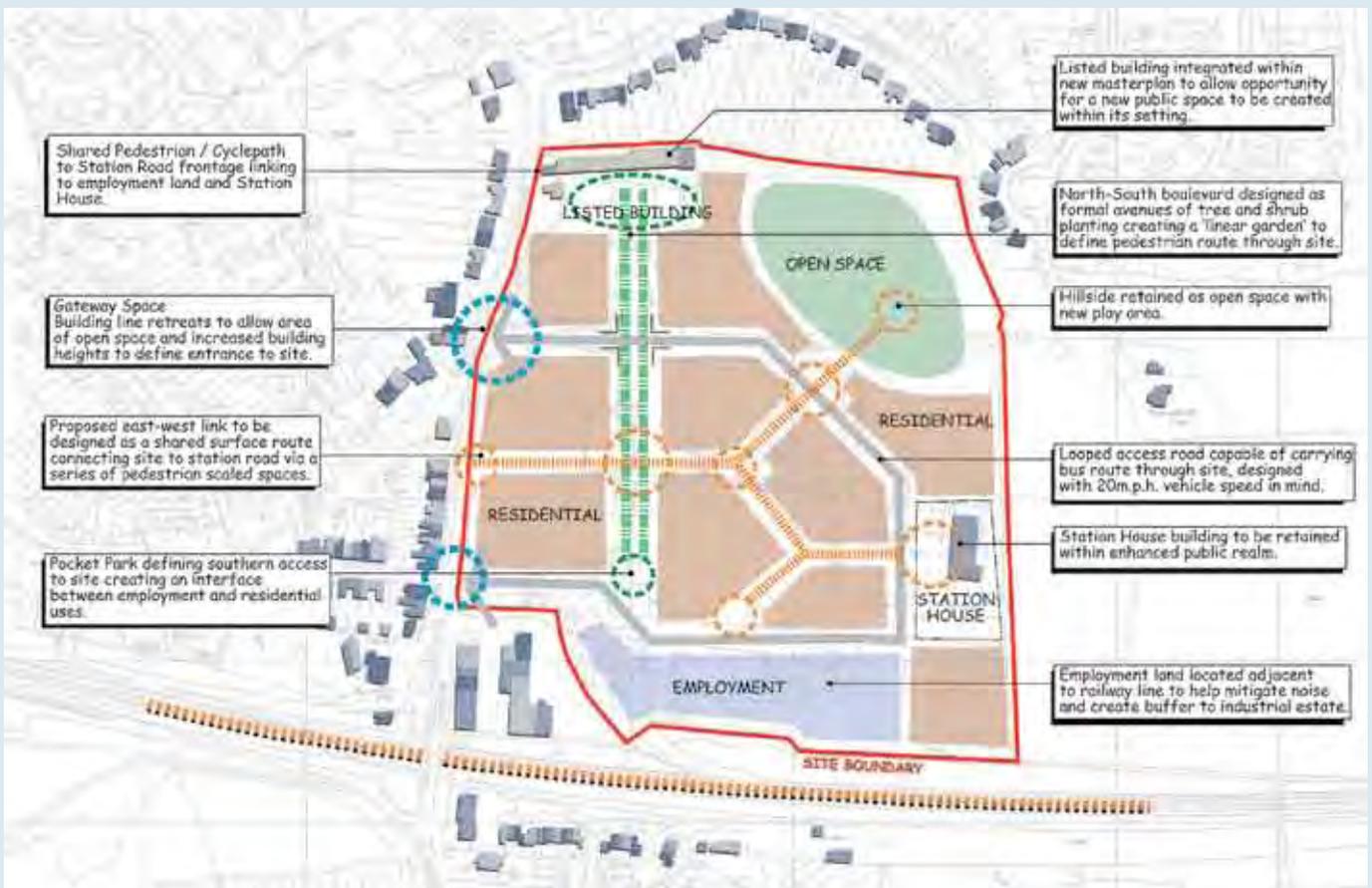
## What to include

- The statement should explain how the buildings and spaces in and around the site would work together. So, it may be worthwhile explaining why buildings face the way they do, why entrances are where they are and how these aspects relate to changes in levels, existing buildings, natural features and infrastructure.
- The statement should make clear how the layout will allow inclusive access to and through the site.
- It should explain how the layout contributes to making the place safer.
- It can be very useful to explain the purpose of different parts of the site and the placement of certain buildings or spaces.
- There are many potentially conflicting pressures on layout design, and it can be useful for the statement to explain what the applicant considers these to be and which ones have been given priority.
- Similarly, for complex sites, it can help negotiations to show how the design has developed and how different layouts and options have been considered but rejected.

## Writing statements 3

Concept diagram for St. Ivel design statement

This statement accompanying an outline application clearly sets out the principles that will influence the final layout.



# Scale

Scale means the size of buildings and spaces, and details will be set out in the planning application. The maximum and minimum sizes will need to be included in outline applications. 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

- Drawings that show the relationship between existing buildings on or around the site and those proposed will normally be very useful. For example, the statement could explain why a prominent site can successfully accommodate buildings larger than those surrounding it, while other sites may not be as flexible.
- The statement should show that the scale of the development takes account of the restrictions of the site and the need for good design. It should not try to justify fitting a predetermined amount of accommodation onto a site.
- It is important to get the three-dimensional aspect of scale across. Computer graphics or plans can often flatten or distort a view, and so mislead the people reading the statement. Pictures should also place the viewer where people would really be, and offer a realistic interpretation of the scale of open space as well as buildings.
- The scale of parts of a building and how they work together can be very important. So, the statement should explain how the design considers the balance of features such as doors, windows and detailing for example window sill heights and door widths.

## Writing statements 4

Photomontage  
St James Place statement

These pictures show the size of the planned building frontages superimposed on the existing street. This helps readers understand the scale planned.



# Landscaping

## Writing statements 5

### Path routes

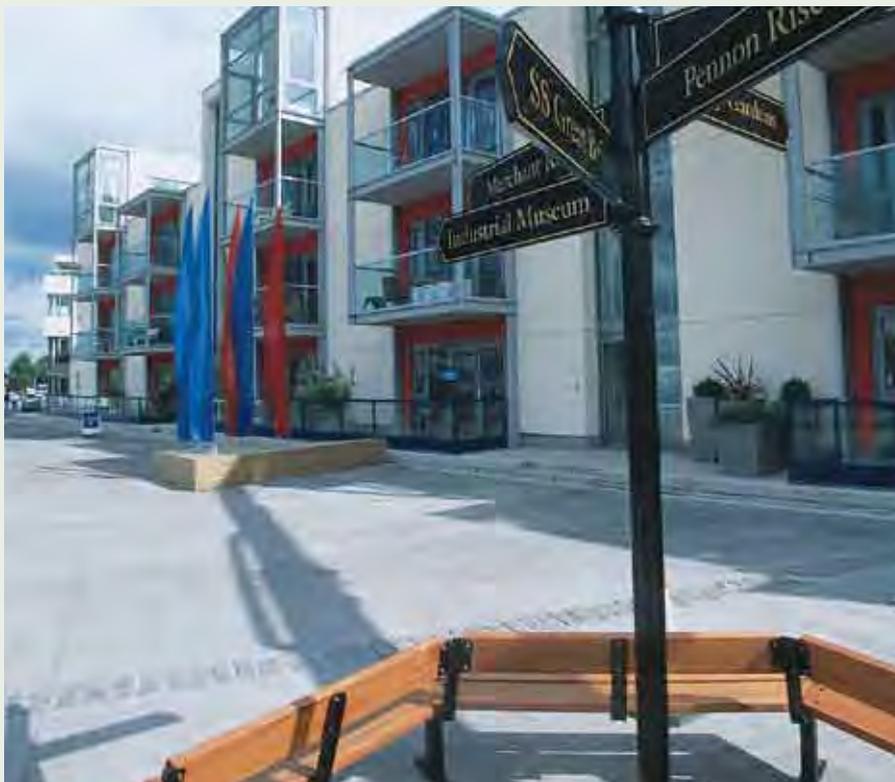
Building 9 Bristol Harbourside  
Vin Goodwin Access Consultant  
Consultant member of the  
National Register of Access  
Consultants

This statement explains how the hard landscaping of paths will help to make sure that everyone, including people with disabilities, can use them easily and safely.

### 'Path routes

Paving surfaces will be resin-bound aggregate to provide a smooth, even and well-laid surface to avoid tripping. The detailed design has not been developed at this stage though it is intended that the routes will incorporate the following features:

- Seating is provided at intervals along the Harbourside walk and in the central podium lawn to allow people to rest. Any seating will have arm and back rests and be located so not to obstruct routes
- Street furniture will be grouped to avoid obstructing routes
- Adequate lighting to assist visually impaired people.'



The Point, Bristol © Mark Ellis Associates

Landscape design is often seen as something to think about after planning permission has been granted. It is understandable that people applying for permission may not want to finalise the exact details of things like paving materials or plant species until they are sure the plan has been approved. 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. This means landscape decisions can be considered in tandem with all other design issues, which will help to create better places.

### What to include

- Landscape design is about much more than plants. It includes all treatments of outdoor spaces, including street furniture, water features and road materials. The statement should show how the design of outside spaces will make them attractive, safe, useful and environmentally responsible.
- Landscape details are an important part of design, and the statement should explain how its treatment will work with all other design decisions. For example, school playgrounds can be designed to extend teaching space and support active learning. If they are to be successful, their design needs to work well with the design of indoor spaces and the links between the two.
- The statement should show that the planned landscape design is based on a strategy for long-term maintenance and management.
- The statement should clearly explain the purpose of landscape design on the site, and how this will be achieved and maintained, for example, to create a natural habitat, support an existing green corridor or provide a sensory garden or play space.
- The statement should show how the needs of disabled or older people will be met, for example by using level surfaces, non slip materials and providing resting places.

# Appearance

What a place will look like is often mistakenly understood to mean its design. This in turn is often wrongly read to mean architectural style. But appearance is really the visual representation of all the decisions that went into the design. So, layout, scale and landscaping will all affect what a place looks like. 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

- The statement should set out the design rationale that underpins the proposal and how this has informed the detailed aspects of the scheme.
- The statement should explain how the appearance fits with other aims for the development. So, if the development is meant to create a new landmark, its appearance, scale and use should reflect this. If the development is designed to blend seamlessly with its surroundings, its design should take this into account.
- Pictures of what the scheme would look like can be useful, but these should be based on details either included in the application or set out in the statement. Pictures of detailing and materials that are unlikely to be used are misleading and can cause problems later on. So, if materials have not been finalised when the application is made, the statement might suggest a range of materials for the site to give a sense of the final appearance.
- The statement should also acknowledge that appearance changes throughout the day and across the seasons as light levels, weather conditions and vegetation change. It may not be possible to include lots of representational pictures, but the statement should explain how the person applying has considered the effects of time on the appearance of the scheme.

## Writing statements 6

Examples of local vernacular  
Former Silverdale Colliery  
statement

This statement shows that the designer has considered how the appearance of existing buildings should influence the plan.

'Apart from the church, there are a few vernacular architectural characteristics and details which can be incorporated in the detailed design like arched windows over the front door, grouping of three doors including access to alleyways, two doors including access to separate upper storey dwellings, use of pastel colours and rhythm of colours created by different colouring of front elevation, bay windows, front door frames and window frames' (see photos on right).



© Taylor Young, Urban Design

# Access

**A design and access statement will need to cover two potential aspects of access, vehicular and transport links, and inclusive access. That is not to say they are separate, and the statement should show that all access issues have been considered together.**

**This section should explain the movement pattern around and through the site. It should show how everyone can use the place comfortably, safely and easily. Readers may be looking for a variety of things, for example, highway engineers may read this section to help them check the safety of the planned road access, and access officers may be looking to see if there is appropriate wheelchair access or facilities for people with visual impairments. The statement shows how the design has considered all access issues together.**

## What to include

### Policy approach

The statement should set out the policy and approach that the applicant has adopted towards access, with particular reference to the inclusion of disabled people. This should include how relevant policies in local development documents have been taken account of. The policy approach set out in the design and access statement will inform decisions taken further down the line in the development process – for example decisions about the internal layout of the buildings which go beyond the level of information required with a planning application.

### Consultation

The statement should provide information on the results of any consultation carried out - or to be carried out - on access issues. Depending on the scale of the development proposal, this may include consultation with local communities and access groups. Technical advice can be sought from access, highway, and crime prevention and urban design specialists.

## How access will be achieved

- The statement should explain how surrounding roads, footpaths and sight lines will be linked. Lighting, views, signs and desire lines can help, but the layout needs to be right to provide practical access as well.
- 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.
- The inside of a building is not normally shown on a planning application but, unless the layout inside a building is considered, it will be very difficult to decide where entrances and fire exits should go. So, it may be useful for the statement to explain how internal access will be designed, provided and used as this can have an effect on how the place will eventually look and work.
- This part of the statement should cover the visibility of entrances and access to the buildings through entrance areas or front doors, as well as access to facilities such as toilets or conference rooms and shops or sports centres. It should also explain how levels change within public spaces, including pavements and dropped kerbs, bus stops, parking spaces including blue badge holders at train stations, and parks. It should show how using symbols and pictures can help people navigate.
- The statement should clearly show public and private space and explain how the design has helped make these areas safe.
- The statement should show that disabled people will not be segregated but will be able to move up and down in a building and use the same entrances, corridors and rooms as everyone else without detours.
- The statement should also explain how access for the emergency services will be provided. This may include areas for congregation in the event of an emergency which should include provision for disabled refuge points.





Highgate, Durham © David Millington Photography Ltd.

# Part 3

## Reading statements

Ask, 'Is the design good enough to approve?', not, 'Is it bad enough to refuse?'

### How do you know if a design and access statement is any good?

The most important question to ask is: Is the design any good? Paragraph 34 of *Planning policy statement 1: delivering sustainable communities* (ODPM, 2005) says that 'Design which is inappropriate in its context or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area should not be accepted'. PPS1 calls for high-quality design to create places that:

- are well-mixed
- have well-planned public space that brings people together
- function well and add to the overall character and quality of the area
- are safe and accessible
- support the effective use of resources
- address the needs of all in society and are accessible, useable and easy to understand
- are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, urban design and landscaping.

These are the things to look for when reading a statement and assessing a planning application.

Some people might put a lot of time and money into producing a detailed, well-written statement, but that does not mean the scheme itself has been well designed. It is the quality of the place that will be built that is important, and people reading statements should be careful not to mistake a good statement for a good scheme.

Ask, 'Is the design good enough to approve?', not, 'Is it bad enough to refuse?'

The rest of this section explains how to identify good design. This includes how to assess the process and the six elements that must be covered in the design part of the statement and the access part. The assessment sheet at the end of the section is designed to help you use the statement to assess a planning application.

### Is the proposal good enough?

Checking to see if the design is good enough to approve means deciding whether the physical characteristics of the scheme (for example, where the buildings will sit, which way they will face, how high they will be, what they will look like, and so on) will lead to a successful place that works well. Statements and application drawings will give information on these physical characteristics, but assessing whether they are suitable can be difficult.

The following pages take each of the seven sections that must be covered in the statement in turn, and suggests a list of questions to ask to help check if the plan meets the design principles listed above. The assessment sheet at the end of the section summarises the questions to ask and could be reproduced and used to help assess all applications.

# The process

**Planning policy statement 1 makes it clear that designs which are inappropriate in their context should not be accepted. It is therefore important that an applicant demonstrates that their proposed development has emerged from a full assessment of a site's circumstances and characteristics.**

It will be clear from the drawings provided with many applications that the scheme is heavily influenced by the existing built character of the local area. But that does not permit a discussion about the wider, non-physical, context of a site which will also inform development proposals. So, a good design statement will demonstrate that an appropriate design process has been followed.

The circular, *Guidance on changes to the development control system*, recommends that applicants follow an **assessment-involvement-evaluation-design process**. This closely mirrors a good design process and means that the final design will be informed by the full context of the site.

## Assessment

The applicant should be able to clearly demonstrate through the statement that they have addressed the context of the site and its surroundings. How much of the surrounding area they look at will often depend on the sensitivity and scale of the development. The statement should show that the applicant has assessed the full context including, as necessary, the physical, social and economic characteristics of the site and surroundings, as well as any existing planning policies:

**Physical** context means what the place looks like and the character that is derived from existing buildings, landscape features and movement routes. A good statement will not go into too much detail – and explain what elements have informed the applicant's thinking.

**Social** context means how people in the locality will be affected by the development. The statement should demonstrate that the views and aspirations of local communities has been taken into account.

**Economic** context means the contribution the development will have on the local economy. The applicant should also be encouraged to explain how their own financial objectives have informed the scheme.

**Planning policy** context means what policies and guidance exist to affect and shape the development of the site. The statement should provide a clear reason for any departures from adopted policy.

## Involvement

The statement should clearly show what groups and people the applicant have been, or will be, discussing the scheme with. In many cases local authorities will have a role in helping applicants identify existing communities as well as providing advice on their own behalf. A good statement will be able to show that the applicant has spoken to local communities and sought professional advice at the earliest possible stage of the scheme's development.

## Evaluation

The statement should clearly demonstrate that the information collected in the previous two stages has helped to identify opportunities and constraints that will inform the later development of the scheme. The statement should set out how any conflicting issues have been resolved and what decisions have been taken and why.

## Design

A good statement will tell the story of how the scheme has reached application stage, including ideas that have been trialled but found not to work. Many applicants will use the statement to 'sell' you their scheme. Do not be put off by lots of text or unnecessary images, these are both methods of covering up a bad scheme. You should also watch out for applicants who try to use statements to justify predetermined design solutions – the statement must be relevant to both the context of the site, and the proposed development.

# Use

The statement should explain and justify what the buildings and spaces would be used for and where different uses will be placed on the site. This should be based on an analysis of the existing uses in the surrounding area. The statement should explain how the planned use will contribute to the character and image of the development and, where relevant, how different uses in the development will work together.

## Is the design good enough?

- Will the uses planned offer the things people need and want? Will they be able to adapt and change over time? And will everyone be able to get to them and use them easily? Having only one type of building use over a large area or only a few secondary uses such as small gyms within housing developments, rather than a real mix of accessible services and facilities, is unlikely to make a place successful.
- Does the statement clearly explain how the site fits in with surrounding uses? It is normally the mix of uses in a neighbourhood that is important to creating successful places, not the use on a single site.
- Will uses that attract the most people be in the most accessible spots? They should be because it helps make places work well. If shops, cafés and so on are put in quiet or out-of-the-way places, they may not be used.
- Could different uses disturb each other so those who eventually use the place will find it uncomfortable, dangerous or noisy? There are design solutions to mixing potentially conflicting uses that may need to be considered.

### What to look for 1 Mixing uses

Horsebridge Development,  
Whitstable

New flats and shops work with existing buildings and uses in the area, making it a vibrant and attractive place to use.



# Amount

The statement should explain and justify the amount of development planned, for example, how many houses or shops there will be. It should also explain how this will be distributed across the site and fit in with the surrounding area. In many cases, the amount of the development will be described as a density figure, such as the number of homes per hectare or floor-space figures, but scale, site coverage and how many people will be using the place may have more impact on the way a place works than density numbers. The statement should show that the amount of development would be suitable for the site.

## What to look for 2 Appropriate densities

Park Central, Zone 1,  
Birmingham

Building sizes and land coverage vary across this development, with more development along the main road.

### Is the design good enough?

- Will the number and size of buildings work well on the site, supporting local character and the way people use the area? Too much can be harmful but too little can be wasteful and will not support community facilities, shops or transport.
- Is it possible to tell from the information given how appropriate the amount of the development is? 'Habitable rooms per hectare' or 'dwellings per hectare' can show very different things, and neither can usefully explain mixed-use or neighbourhood development.
- Does the mix of unit sizes, whether homes, shops or offices, fit with local character and need?
- Are the facilities needed by the amount of development already in place, or is there a way that they can be supplied? (This is normally relevant for major schemes only.)



Gardener Stewart Architects

# Layout



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## What to look for 3 Making places work

Gainsborough Studios, London

Here, the layout, including new access decks along the canal, helps to ensure the development makes the best of the site and its surroundings.

The statement should explain and justify the way the buildings, routes and open spaces are set out. It should also explain why they face the way they do, and why entrances have been placed where they are. It should show that the person applying has surveyed the movement patterns and layouts of the surrounding area and that the scheme will therefore work well with the buildings and spaces surrounding the development.

### Is the design good enough?

- Will the place be easy to understand, maintain and adapt? A good place makes sense to the people using it; and layouts that are logical and have good visibility work best.
- Is the layout accessible? Will it be easy for everyone to use? Design should integrate the access needs of people with limited mobility, sight or hearing impairments and learning difficulties.
- Are spaces fit for their purpose? Too often poor design means spaces are just not up to what people will want them for. For example, narrow areas of open space on the north side of flats or on steep slopes are unlikely to be useful and may just disjoint the development.
- Does the layout use spaces to their best advantage? Some spaces might need to be very accessible, others private, and their design should reflect this.
- Will public spaces be safe, overlooked and convenient? Windows, doors, shop fronts and access routes should be used to overlook and help keep public places safe, but they should not jeopardise people's private spaces.
- Does the design address safety and crime prevention?

# Scale

The statement should explain and justify:

- the height, width and length of buildings
- the size of spaces in relation to each other and their surroundings, and
- the size of parts of a building or its details.

The statement should provide clear evidence that the planned scale has been influenced by the existing character of the local area or, where relevant, opportunities to improve that character.

## Is the design good enough?

- Will the scale of buildings support local character and relate well to their surroundings and, where relevant, the skyline? Good design does not mean copying what is already there or necessarily keeping to the same scale, but it does mean understanding and respecting it.
- Will the scale of building parts feel comfortable to the people using them?
- Is it easy to understand the relationship between the scale of the development and its surroundings? No-one will see the place at the scale shown on the drawings and computer-based images can often be misleading. It is important to understand how real users will consider sizes.



## What to look for 4 Getting the size right

Old Haymarket, Liverpool

This space may be small, but its scale has been decided on with reference to the scale of the buildings that surround it, and it is a useful area.

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# Landscaping

The statement should justify and explain the hard and soft landscaping of private and public spaces. It should explain the purpose of landscaping and its relationship to the surrounding area. The landscaping strategy, as set out in the statement, should show how the development responds to opportunities to improve the landscape character of the site.

## Is the design good enough?

- Has landscape design been considered throughout the design process? It should never be an add-on, but should be part of the design. Good landscape design can be vital to making a scheme acceptable.
- Will the landscape design support local character and image, and help define private and public spaces? Good landscape treatment can help make places safe, attractive and successful. Safety, security and business success rely on clear definitions of who can do what and where.
- Will the place support biodiversity and environmentally friendly drainage? Are there realistic plans for maintaining both hard and soft landscaping? Green chains, lungs and corridors and flood control sinks can all be supported by good landscaping, but arrangements must be made for their long-term maintenance.
- Will landscape decisions help to make sure there is inclusive access? For example, will the materials used, the design of ramps, lighting and visual contrast help everyone use and enjoy the space?



© Sue Jackson

## What to look for 5 Designing buildings and landscapes together

Jubilee Park, Canary Wharf

The landscaping is an important part of the overall design.

# Appearance

The statement should explain and justify the appearance of buildings and spaces, and show how they relate to their surroundings. It should cover architecture, materials, decoration, lighting, colour and texture. The best designs link all the parts of a scheme, and the statement should show how decisions on appearance relate to all other aspects of the scheme, reinforcing the main design.

## Is the design good enough?

- Will the appearance support local character and distinctiveness? This is not about taste or style, but how the design relates to what is valued about the area.
- Will the place look good? Will it delight and inspire people? Some places should be inconspicuous, while others should create new high-quality landmarks. But they should all look good, using the best possible materials, detailing and craftsmanship.
- Is the style appropriate for the site and the scheme? Different styles can achieve good design, but some styles can look better on plans than others. For example, ornate designs may look more intricate, but be out of proportion with the building as a whole when built. Window details or external add-ons like brick arches may be used to present a style on a plan, but the dimensions of the building might not carry this through. These buildings can often look worse than expected when they are finally built.
- Does the design make good use of materials to provide a safe and accessible place? Choosing colours that stand out, good lighting, logical placement and suitable signs can make a place easy to use. Similarly, using tactile materials can help people find their way around.
- Will changes to the place affect its long-term appearance? Elements such as bin stores or rainwater collectors should be included within the overall design wherever possible.



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## What to look for 6 Making it look good

Brewery Square, London

Colour, materials and detailing affect the appearance of this new building and the road as a whole.

# Access

**This part of the statement needs to cover two connected issues. One is the general movement to and through the site and its buildings. The other is how all members of society will be able to use the site (that is, where the roads, walkways, doors and so on will go, and then how accessible they will be in terms of levels, colours, lighting, markings, sizes, surface finishes, handrails and so on).**

**Access within buildings is dealt with under building regulations and does not have to be specifically covered in the statement. However, in some cases, it will be necessary to consider internal access at the planning stage to make sure it is properly achieved in the final building. The statement should show that this has been done.**

**Is the development accessible and inclusive?**

## **Policy approach**

Is it clear from the statement that the applicant has an identifiable policy and approach towards access? Does this make particular provision for the inclusion of disabled people? The statement should show how relevant policies in local development documents have been taken into account.

## **Consultation**

Does the statement include an explanation of the results of any consultation on access issues? Or does the statement clearly set out what consultations are to be carried out in the future? Depending on the scale of the development proposal, this may include consultation with local communities and access groups, and technical advice from access, highway and urban design specialists. Does the statement show that advice on access issues has helped to inform the scheme and make it more accessible and inclusive?

## **How access will be achieved**

- Will all potential users, no matter what their disability, age or sex, be able to enter the site, move around the area, enter the buildings and use the facilities? The statement should explain how consultation with potential users has influenced access arrangements.
- Will the place be logical, simple and obvious to use, fitting into and, where possible, improving surrounding movement networks, linking roads, footpaths and public spaces through and across the site?
- Will the movement network support convenient, safe and appropriate travel? Depending on the plan, this could be for heavy vehicles, cars, bicycles and pedestrians. In most cases, access arrangements should guarantee safety and convenience first for pedestrians, then for cyclists, and then for vehicles.
- Is the road and pathway design appropriate? Roads can be designed to reduce car speeds and allow people to walk, relax and play alongside or even on streets. Such designs should make sure that disabled people are not excluded or put at risk.
- Is there an appropriate balance between land used by roads and that used by buildings and other open spaces? Sometimes, too much of the site is given over to cars, making the place less user-friendly for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Will the building or spaces be flexible enough to accommodate changing access and travel demands?
- Does the development provide adequate access for emergency services? In some cases, this should include areas for congregation in the event of an emergency and provision for disabled refuge points



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# Glossary

<b>Biodiversity</b>	The spread of species that can be found in an area.
<b>Density</b>	The number of people or amount of building in any given area. Often expressed as dwellings per hectare, but floorspace figures, plot ratios or occupancy levels can also be used.
<b>Desire lines</b>	Normally the shortest route from one place to another, but can be the most convenient, easy to use or comfortable route.
<b>Footfall</b>	The number of people travelling past a place who will be able to stop there to use shops, seats or other facilities. This normally means people walking or cycling past.
<b>Green corridor</b>	Where open spaces and habitat areas that support certain species or provide visual or functional advantages physically link up.
<b>Householder applications</b>	A planning application for an extension or alteration to a single dwelling.
<b>Inclusive</b>	Making a place which everyone can use with comfort, dignity and convenience, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, disabilities or circumstances.
<b>Infrastructure</b>	The facilities people use every day, from sewers and telephone lines to parks and schools.
<b>Neighbourhood density</b>	The overall number of people or amount of building space provided in the area. This may be calculated at ward level or for an area within a given distance to a town centre or station.
<b>Reserved matters</b>	Issues not addressed within an outline planning application, but which will be approved at a later date.
<b>Sensory garden</b>	A place where plants, materials and features can be easily detected by senses other than sight. For example, where scented plants, wind chimes and textured surface treatments add to the quality and character of the area.
<b>Sight lines</b>	The ability to see directly from one place to another. This often helps people find their way around.
<b>Solar gain</b>	The energy used by a building that it takes directly from sunlight.
<b>Street furniture</b>	Seats, bins, lights, plant holders, signs, etc that are placed in public areas.
<b>Vernacular</b>	Local architectural styles, materials, details or traditions.

**As well as introducing a formal requirement for design and access statements, the government has made changes to the list of reserved matters and the minimum level of detail that must be submitted at outline application stage.**

**Reserved matters are now set out as:**

- **Layout** – the way in which buildings, routes and open spaces are provided within the development and their relationship to buildings and spaces outside the development.
- **Scale** – the height, width and length of each building proposed in relation to its surroundings.
- **Appearance** – the aspects of a building or place which determine the visual impression it makes. This includes the external built form of the development, its architecture, materials, decoration, lighting, colour and texture.
- **Access** – the accessibility to and within the site for vehicles, cycles and pedestrians in terms of the positioning and treatment of access and circulation routes and how these fit into the surrounding access network.
- **Landscaping** – this is the treatment of private and public space to enhance or protect the amenities of the site through hard and soft measures. This may include, for example, planting of trees or hedges, screening by fences or walls, the formation of banks or terraces, or the layout of gardens, courts or squares.

The changes now require an increased level of detail to be submitted with outline applications. As a minimum, applications will now include information on:

- **Use** – the use or uses proposed for the development and any distinct development zones within the site identified.
- **Amount of development** – the amount of development proposed for each use.
- **Indicative layout** – an indicative layout with the approximate location of buildings, routes and open spaces and, where appropriate, separate development zones proposed within the site boundary.
- **Scale parameters** – an indication of the upper and lower limits for height, width and length of each building within the site boundary.
- **Indicative access points** – an area or areas in which the access point or points to the site will be situated.

*Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure)(Amendment)(England) Order 2006* (statutory instrument no.1062), and *Guidance on changes to the development control system*, DCLG 2006.

# Assessment crib sheet

## Design

Design and access statements are required to provide information covering the **design process** and **physical characteristics** of the scheme. You can use this sheet as a starting point when checking the quality of a development scheme. You may find it useful to photocopy this sheet and keep it close at hand. You could then use a copy for each application you look at.

### The process

- Does the statement show that 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?

# Good design principles

There are characteristics successful places share. These are listed in *By design: urban design in the planning system – towards better practice* (Thomas Telford Ltd, 2000). This is the companion guide to PPS1 and it provides information and guidance on how to achieve high-quality outcomes with the planning system.

It contains seven qualities of successful places that are a good starting point when thinking about whether a planning application shows good design or not.

- **Character**  
a place should have its own identity
- **Continuity and enclosure**  
public and private spaces should be clearly distinguished
- **Quality of the public realm**  
a place should have attractive and successful outdoor areas
- **Ease of movement**  
a place should be easy to get to and move through
- **Legibility**  
a place should have a clear image and be easy to understand
- **Adaptability**  
a place should be able to change easily
- **Diversity**  
a place should have variety and choice.

Successful places also need to be accessible for everyone. CABE's document *The principles of inclusive design (they include you)* calls for places to be:

- **Inclusive**  
so everyone can use them safely, easily and with dignity
- **Responsive**  
taking account of what people say they need and want

- **Flexible**  
so different people can use them in different ways
- **Convenient**  
so everyone can use them without too much effort or separation
- **Accommodating**  
for all people, regardless of their age, gender, mobility, ethnicity or circumstances
- **Welcoming**  
with no disabling barriers that might exclude some people
- **Realistic**  
offering more than one solution to help balance everyone's needs and recognising that one solution may not work for all
- **Understandable**  
everyone knows where they are and can locate their destination.

*Safer places - the planning system and crime prevention* is a companion guide to PPS1 and sets out the seven attributes of safer places (ODPM/Home Office, 2004).

- **Access and movement**  
places with well-defined routes, spaces and entrances
- **Structure**  
places structured so that different uses do not cause conflict
- **Surveillance**  
all publicly accessible space is overlooked
- **Ownership**  
places that promote a sense of ownership, respect, territorial responsibility and community
- **Physical protection**  
places that include necessary, well-designed security features
- **Activity**  
activity appropriate to location, with reduced risk of crime and sense of safety
- **Management and maintenance**  
to discourage crime in the present and the future.

This short guide shows how to write and read design and access statements. It accompanies the government circular *Guidance on changes to the development control system* and provides practical advice on getting the best from statements to help deliver well-designed, inclusive places

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