

# Part M: stating your intentions

Some of the major implications of the revamped Part M seem to have enjoyed flavour of the month status since May 2004 when the 'new' Part M came into effect. However, the debate about Access Statements has been full of mis-information, writes Edna Jacobson, Access Officer for Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

The ODPM confirmed in March 2005 that Access Statements will be mandatory by the end of the year. Until such time they are a local planning condition, not a requirement from national Government. They will also, the ODPM indicate, remain a recommendation in terms of Building Regulations.

The DSA Guide to Part M indicates that if Part M is to be adhered to and achieved, there is no need to have an Access Statement, which is perhaps a lost opportunity, since developing the Access Statement can assist those in the design team to focus on exactly how they have managed to achieve inclusive design.

The issue of lifts has rumbled on, with some local authorities sticking rigorously to the position that lifts must be provided, others relaxing this requirement upon receipt of an Access Statement which can argue competently that 'reasonable provision' is being made, without a lift. Others seem to be looking over their shoulders to see what is happening within the world of the Approved Inspectors and whether they are enforcing provision of lifts as tightly as some other local authorities. Even the DSA Guide mentioned above indicates that each submission should be judged individually implying that blanket rules are simply untenable.

Doors have been a hot topic. The requirement to have no more than 20 Newtons opening force at the leading edge of the door is 'difficult' and rumours abound that this is to be changed to 30 Newtons. Again, there are discrepancies about the implementation of this requirement. Some local authorities have adopted a viewpoint that it is simply unfeasible, not just in terms of actually achieving it, but also in terms of BCO's going out and checking the opening force required of every door in particularly large developments.

Also (and whilst this may seem a picky point) many of those involved in the design process, BCO's included here, seem to have forgotten that weather protection (usually in the form of a canopy) is required where there are manually operated entrance doors. Potentially this could raise problems in planning, particularly with regard to listed buildings.

So amidst all the differences, the mis-information and uncertainty as to how the competition are treating Part M as it approaches its first anniversary, it may be pertinent to look at an issue which is well understood and known: toilets. But the reality is....confusion reigns here too.

There are certain aspects of toilet provision where the message does not seem to be getting through to architects and those involved in the design process. Yet they are important points.

The most significant is that there is a requirement wherever there is single sex toilet provision, to have an ambulant disabled persons toilet. (Yes, there is also a requirement to have a disabled persons accessible toilet, but that aspect of provision seems to have been accepted). The ambulant disabled persons toilet (as with all toilets) should have an outward opening door, or a door capable of being opened outwards, in case someone collapses behind the door. The ambulant disabled persons toilet should also be a minimum of 800 mm wide and comply with Diagram 21 in the Approved Document. The grabrails which are fitted therein should contrast with the walls and WC. So, even if there is only one cubicle for each sex, then this has to be an ambulant disabled persons toilet.

Where there are four or more cubicles in single sex accommodation then one of these should be an 'extra large' cubicle, to accommodate people who may have small children or luggage with them etc. Again this must comply with the specification in the Approved Document.

So, in a single sex toilet 'block' of four toilets, one should be for ambulant disabled people, one an extra large cubicle and two will be standard cubicles, all of which are complemented by the provision of a disabled persons' accessible toilet nearby.

If the building has a fire alarm then all toilets require a visual and audible indicator that the fire alarm is sounding. Generally there is a misconception that this is only required in the accessible toilet. However, deaf people are no more likely to be physically disabled than the rest of the general population i.e. the majority are not!

The final toilet issue relates to smaller developments which could well be a change of use/extension etc and this is when there is only one toilet provided. In this case, it must be 2200 mm x 2000 mm, in order to accommodate a standing height wash hand basin. This can have significant space implications in smaller developments, but is an issue that needs to be addressed. There are people for whom bending is difficult due to chronic or severe back problems. Whilst it may seem easy to just install a disabled persons accessible toilet on the grounds that "Anyone can use it", this may not always be the case and the Approved Document outlines how accessible toilets should be capable of accommodating a variable seat riser. The actual provision of the seat riser will be the responsibility of the service provider, but the provision of the standing height wash hand basin will ensure full and ease of access for

people with restricted mobility in terms of bending.

As Part M is now more than a year old (as of May 2005) in some ways it is disappointing that there are still discrepancies on interpretation and also that there is still confusion about the basics of toilet provision etc.

However, we have come a long way in terms of where we were 10 years ago if we look at design specification for inclusivity of design. But with the imminent extension of Disability Rights and greater responsibilities resting with local authorities to promote these rights, it seems as if there will be a long way to go before full inclusive design is achieved. Test cases are lining up in terms of the Disability Discrimination Act and they too will assist in focussing our minds on the exact requirements of Part M and its implementation. So the next year will potentially be even more interesting as Part M becomes 'tried and tested'. In other words, as the saying goes 'the best is yet to come'. For further details or comments, please email Edna Jacobson :

edna.jacobson@staffs Moorlands.gov.uk

*The ambulant disabled persons toilet (as with all toilets) should have an outward opening door in case someone collapses behind the door*

