

Planning Guidance Note Design and Access Statements

Who needs to read this guidance note?

An applicant/developer who intends to make a planning or Listed Building Consent application. All planning and applications will require Statements except:

- Change of use applications
- Engineering or mining operations
- Householder applications (apart from sites in designated areas such as conservation Areas or where the house is Listed: in these cases a Statement is needed)
- Advertising applications, tree preservation order applications or applications for the storage of hazardous substances

A Statement must be submitted with all Listed Building Consent applications.

What does this guidance contain?

Information on how Design and Access Statements should be prepared and the information they should include.

Why are Design and Access Statements important in planning and Listed Building Consent applications?

There are several reasons including:

- Design and Access Statements are required to help ensure that development proposals are based on a thoughtful design process and a sustainable approach to access.
- They allow applicants to explain and justify their proposals
- They help the Local Planning Authority to assess the application and understand the design and access rationale that underpins it
- Statements should improve the quality of proposals.

Section 1 – Background: Government Guidance.

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development sets out policies for the delivery of development through the planning system. Good design is fundamental to this. PPS1 states:

‘Good design ensures attractive, usable, durable and adaptable places and is a key element in achieving sustainable development. Good design is indivisible from good planning. Planning authorities should plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider development schemes.

Good design should contribute positively to making places better for people. Design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted.’

In practical terms, this advice has been translated into the requirement to provide Design and Access Statements with applications. Statements are a short report to show how the proposal has been arrived at. Statements need to document the factors, which have been taken into account during the design process. They should show how the proposals are appropriate for their local context and how issues relating to access to and within the site have been dealt with.

Conditions will be attached to planning permissions requiring that the development is built in accordance with the statement or parts of it.

For outline applications, the statement will govern the future development of the site and reserved matters applications will need to stay within the parameters of the Statement.

Section 2 – Information you will need to submit with your planning application.

The Design and Access Statement must be included when you submit the application. **If this information is missing, the application will not be validated.**

Presenting the information

Statements should include a written description and justification of the planning application. This could be supplemented with drawings, plans, photographs and models of the proposal shown in their context, if needed.

Statements will be public documents, which will be seen by local communities, Councillors and consultees and so they should be clear and easy to understand: avoid jargon and technical language where possible.

Statements will also need to be easy to access by Officers at the outset so that applications can be validated. Please bear this in mind, make headings clear, show how the process has been followed and avoid unnecessary padding – Statements should not be increased in length purely in an effort to justify/cover up weaknesses in a development proposal.

The length and content of the Statement should be directly proportional to the scale and complexity of the proposals, so for example for the smallest scale applications, the statement could be as little as one or two sides of A4. The Council will however be looking for evidence that the Design and Access Statement process has been followed.

Statements will also be welcomed to support pre-application discussions, to show how proposals have been formulated.

Demonstrating the process

Statements must show that the following steps have been followed. Statements should not be produced retrospectively to try to justify a pre-

designed scheme: they are intended to be a working document which explains how the development's context has been understood **before** the design is drafted.

Step One: Assessment of the site's immediate and wider context, in terms of physical context (the character of existing buildings and spaces, landscaping and movement routes), social (how local people will be affected by the development) and economic (the contribution the development will make to the local economy) and relevant planning policies.

This will refer to physical features of the site and surroundings: gradients, trees and hedges, buildings, water features, access routes, existing use of the site and surrounding land uses (for an application for a single house, the assessment may only need to include details of what abuts the site). It may refer to details of access to local shops and services and public transport routes, to show that it is in a sustainable location.

Social context may include: how the loss of the existing site use/building will affect people, whether any nearby houses could be overlooked/overshadowed by a new development on the site, information about any current local service provision (such as availability of school places) or issues that could be addressed through a development on the site (such as the development supporting a local need).

Economic impact may include jobs provided, support for local businesses, or increasing the attractiveness of an area to potential investors.

For some small scale proposals, the impact on the social and economical context may be neutral or limited. If this is the case, this can be stated. For larger schemes, the Design and Access Statement should be used as a framework to pull together the strands of other statements which are required to be submitted with the application, for example traffic impact assessments, environmental impact assessments. These statements will also address the context of the site and should be cross referenced in the Design and Access Statement.

Relevant national and regional policies, Unitary Development Plan First Alteration policies and relevant supplementary planning guidance need to be referred to here. The policies do not need to be quoted in full.

Step Two: Involvement of community members (neighbours, councillors, local community groups) and professionals (planning, building control, conservation and design officers) undertaken or planned (for example consultation planned for a reserved matters application). The statement should indicate how this involvement has been taken into account on the proposal.

The Council's Statement of Community Involvement provides information on the process the Council has adopted for consulting on planning applications

and also gives a list of groups, which may be consulted on Local Development Documents.

Applicants may wish to engage with some of the groups listed to satisfy the requirements of the involvement stage.

The level of involvement required is dependent upon the scale and complexity of the development t proposed. For example, an application for a single house may need the involvement only of the immediate neighbours. Please remember that statements will be read by the public as part of the planning applications including the views of neighbours recorded in them.

Step Three: Evaluation of the information collected and identifying opportunities and constraints and formulating design and access principles. Conflicting issues may be identified and the evaluation should show how these are balanced.

The evaluation phase of the process should identify the comments made and indicate how they have been taken on board (i.e. by detailing how the scheme has been amended as a result) or the justification for why concerns have not been taken on board (i.e. the comments do not raise significant planning issues).

Objections received as a result of the involvement stage will not automatically mean that the application will be refused. Similarly support for an application does not necessarily mean that the application will be approved.

Step Four: Design of the scheme using the assessment, involvement and evaluation information collected.

This is a description of the final submitted scheme and the justification for it based on the information collected and the evaluation undertaken. The Statement should explain and justify why the following elements of a scheme are proposed:

- The use of the buildings and spaces
- The amount
- Layout
- Scale
- Landscaping
- Appearance

The Statement should include details of why access points and routes have been chosen and how accessibility for all sections of the community has been considered.

Amount: a justification of how much development is proposed and its distribution across the site, how it relates to surroundings and how accessibility is to be maximised between different parts of the development. For residential development this means the number of units. For all other development, this is the proposed floor space for each proposed use. Design

and Access Statements for outline applications should also explain and justify the amount of development proposed and its distribution across the site.

Layout: the way in which buildings, routes and open spaces are placed in relation to each other and neighbouring property. Accessibility factors should also be considered, such as travel distances and gradients and the orientation of blocks and units in relation to topography to maximise accessibility. Layout should also demonstrate how crime prevention measures have been considered in the design to create a safe, sustainable place. For outline applications where layout is reserved, the proposals should still provide information on the approximate location of buildings, routes and open spaces. The use of illustrative diagrams will be helpful.

Scale: a justification of the height, width and length of the building/buildings in relation to its surroundings, particularly entrances and facades in relation to the human scale. Outline applications where scale is reserved should still include details of the upper and lower limits of height; width and length of each building proposed and justify them.

Landscaping: a justification of the details of hard and soft landscaping of private and public spaces chosen to enhance or protect the amenities of the site and the area in which it is situated. Statements should also include details of how the landscaping will be maintained. If landscaping is reserved at outline stage, the Design and Access Statement still needs to explain and justify the landscaping principles which will be used to inform the final design.

Appearance: a justification of appearance of the external built form of the development: its architecture, materials, decoration, lighting, colour and texture and how this affects accessibility. If appearance is reserved at outline stage, the Statement still needs to explain and justify the landscaping principles which will be used to inform the final design.

Access Component

Access considerations should not be treated separately, but should be considered as part of the process set out above.

Details of the internal arrangements of buildings and how this affects access are not required, but Statements should explain how all users will have equal and convenient access into buildings and spaces and the public transport network. It should explain the policy adopted by the applicant in relation to access and how relevant local planning policies have been taken into account. It should also include details of any consultation undertaken and how this informed the design process.

Access for 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.

Section 3 – Information to submit with your Listed Building Consent application.

Where a planning application is submitted in parallel with an application for Listed Building Consent, a single combined statement should address the requirements of both. For Listed Building Statements only, information on use, amount and landscaping is not required. Statements should include details of layout, scale, appearance and access.

The statement should also take into account:

- The historic and special architectural importance of the building
- The particular physical features of the building that justify its designation as a listed building
- The building's setting

The Statement should make it clear how the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (to show how everyone will have equal and convenient access), is balanced with the historical; and architectural significance of the building: where justified to protect the special qualities of listed buildings, allowances can be made in the application of other policies.

Section 4 – What officers will look for when validating and assessing applications.

Validation: Looking for evidence that the process has been followed:

The Statement will be tested for validity by looking for the provision of an adequate level of information under the four steps of the process.

Example questions officers could ask when testing for validity of the application are:

- Does the Statement show that the site's context has been assessed, including physical, social and economic characteristics and relevant planning policies?
- Does the Statement show that community involvement has been taken into account? Have all the appropriate parties been involved?
- Does the statement demonstrate that the scheme comes from an assessment, involvement, evaluation and design process rather than written to fit a pre-designed scheme?
- Is the Statement internally consistent and consistent with the submitted plans?

Assessing the application:

Example questions officers could ask when assessing the application are:

Use:

- Will the application help create an appropriate mix of uses in the area?
- Will different uses work well together?

Amount:

- Is the density appropriate?

- Can the neighbourhood's services support the amount of development planned?

Layout:

- Do all spaces have a purpose?
- Will public space be practical, safe, overlooked and inclusive?
- Will private spaces be secure and usable?

Scale:

- Are the buildings appropriate to their surroundings?
- Will entrances and windows be of a comfortable scale for people?

Landscaping:

- Has landscaping been designed in from the start?
- Will it help to make the scheme work well?

Appearance:

- How will the scheme relate to its surroundings?
- Will it be attractive?

Section 5 – Sources of information

More information can be found from the following sources:

Guidance on Changes to the Development Control System DCLG Circular 01/2006. WWW.dclg.gov.uk

Safer Places – the Planning System and Crime Prevention ODPM/Home Office 2003.
www.communities.gov.uk/pub/724/saferplacestheplanningsystemandcrimepreventionPDF3168Kb_id1144724.pdf

Design and Access Statement: How to write, read and use them. CABE.
www.cabe.org.uk/AssetLibrary/8073.pdf

Disability Rights Commission Website provides guidance on access statements
www.drc-gb.org.uk

Details of national planning policy can be found at: www.communities.gov.uk

Details of regional spatial strategy can be found at:
www.gos.gov.uk/goyh/plan/regplan/

The Selby District Council Local Plan and Supplementary Planning guidance can be found at:
www.selby.gov.uk