

Facilitating Disabled Access - 27/02/2013

Workshop Summary

Part One - Introduction to disability/impairment

Who are people with disabilities?

- Wheelchair users
- Ambulant people with mobility impairments
- People with visual impairments
- People with hearing impairments
- People with learning difficulties / disabilities
- People with speech impairments

Diversity of Need

- People with disabilities are very diverse and should not be considered as a single entity.
- The range of abilities and needs is enormous.
- It is accepted that it is impossible to cater for every need in every situation.
- However, there is always some scope to do whatever is possible at every site, in the knowledge that some people with disabilities will benefit from improvements.

Definitions of disability

Impairment

- A loss of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function.

Disability

- A restriction which may result in an impairment which can affect the ability to perform any daily activity.

Social model of disability

- Proposes that barriers and negative attitudes promote exclusion by society (purposefully or inadvertently). These influence the factors that define who is disabled and who is not in a particular society. It recognises that whilst people may have physical, sensory, intellectual or psychological differences which may sometimes limit the persons' ability to function, these do not lead to a disability unless society fails to take account of individual differences.

Example :- A person who has had both legs amputated.

- Their **impairment** is the loss of their legs.
- Their **disability** could be not being able to walk.
- Their **social disability** may arise from the level of accessibility at countryside site.

People with or without disabilities go out into the countryside for :-

- Peace and quiet - Refreshment and recreation- Activity and challenge- To unwind

Potential barriers to inclusion

Barriers which prevent people with disabilities from participating countryside recreation can be :

- **Man-made:** With our control. Design of gates, stiles, seats, drains, paths, car parks, toilets and signs etc.
- **Natural barriers:** Vegetation, gradients, erosion, the weather, water and rough surfaces. Can to some extent be overcome by well designed items of 'furniture'.
- **Information:** Visitors need to know where they can go, obstacles etc. Information needs to be accessible to all. Large print, audio, Braille etc.
- **Expectations:** Participation rates in countryside recreation are not as high for people with disabilities as for more able bodied people. Site managers may have to work a bit harder in promoting opportunities.
- **Conflict with other users:** Some people with disabilities may find it harder to cope with situations because they cannot see or hear very well or are unsteady on their feet or use wheelchairs.

Inclusivity promotes autonomy

- Universal design means designing for everyone
- Conventional designs may exclude people with disabilities
- Designs which work for people with disabilities usually work for everyone
- Involve people with disabilities in planning and developing facilities etc.
- **The Least Restrictive principle** accepts that it's not always possible to achieve access for everybody across every type of terrain without compromising that terrain to an unacceptable extent.
- However it expects that whatever can be done will be done, to enable a reasonable proportion of people with easier access needs to explore most terrains.

Access For All - Who Benefits?

Studies have shown that all the groups below can benefit from barrier-free access:

- People with Disabilities - Older People - Parents with small children - People with temporary impairments e.g. a broken leg.

In total these groups make up around 42% of the population and at one time or other in our lives we will **all** fit into one of these categories.

Part Two - Countryside For All - Summary of basic accessibility standards

NB These guidelines apply to:

- urban landscapes (countryside areas with extensive man-made features)
- managed landscapes (countryside areas near towns)
- rural landscapes (farmland, woodland and rights of way)

They **do not** apply to open country, semi-wild or wild land.

The standards offer 12 measurable parameters :-

1. Path surfaces

- Loose material more than 10mm deep should be avoided
- To be fully accessible path surfaces must be compact, stable, non-slip and obstacle free

2. Path widths

- Greater than 1200mm
- The minimum measurement required for people to pass, or walk along side a wheelchair
- Enables people with visual impairment (using long canes or guide dogs)

3. Permissive Width restrictions

- Some restrictions to the widths of paths cannot be avoided (e.g. at gates or in areas which pass buildings, trees or walls)
- At least 815mm width is required for wheelchair access

4. Barriers

- There should be no steps, stiles and no fences, hedges or walls to restrict access
- Where barriers are required (i.e. for stock control) the least restrictive option should be incorporated

5. Ramp gradient

- provide both steps and ramps but if a choice has to be made provide ramps
- Gradients less than 1:20 (5%) are not considered ramps
- Max 1:12 (8.3%) rise

6. Height rise of ramp between landings

- Include flat rest areas (1200mm length / 1500mm width)
- Landings should be provided every 750mm of vertical climb on gradients steeper than 1:20 (5%)
- Every 9m on a 1:12 (8.3%)

7. Cross slope

- Wheelchair users, people with balance or coordination problems can find cross slopes difficult over any distance
- The maximum slope across a path is 1:50 (2%)
- With a central camber, slopes can be up to 1:35 (2.8%)

8. Step levels

- This applies wherever there are pot holes, cobbles or slabs, changes in path surfaces, and at the start of ramps and gates
- Max high gain 5mm

9. Surface Breaks

- The holes in drills, cross drains and the gaps between boardwalk decking should meet the standard
- Max 12mm along the line of the path

10. Clear walking tunnel

- Important for visually impaired people and other people who may have to concentrate on where they walk
- Likely to include overhanging branches or signs
- The space above a path needs be at least 2100mm high and 1200mm wide

11. Passing places

- Enable wheelchair users and families with pushchairs to pass
- Where the path width is less than 1500mm, passing places every 50m will allow two wheelchairs to pass each other

12. Resting places

- Rest areas should cater for all users and include at least one seat or perch
- Distance of no more than 100m between rest points
- Provide space for wheelchair users off the path

Other considerations....

- Latches - should be easily opened for either side and gates ideally should swing both ways
- Signage / interpretation - clear - concise and where possible include a tactile element
- Edge definition - where appropriate clear and obvious path edge definition can aid many users

NB These guidelines were created by the Fieldfare Trust Charity and there is a wealth of detailed countryside access information including further standards and guidelines on their website - www.fieldfare.org.uk