



Derry City & Strabane
District Council

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DERRY CITY & STRABANE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (LDP) 2032



PLAN STRATEGY

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) – Access for All (Designing for an Accessible Environment) – DRAFT, August 2025

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DERRY CITY AND STRABANE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (LDP) 2032



Supplementary Planning Guidance

(SPG)

Access for All (Designing for an Accessible Environment)

August 2025 - DRAFT

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance has been produced to supplement policies of the Derry City and Strabane District Council (DCSDC) Local Development Plan (LDP) Plan Strategy 2032, relating to 'Access for All (Designing for an Accessible Environment)'. This SPG is part of a suite of Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). It applies to the Derry City and Strabane District Council area and is intended for use by developers, agents, the public and by planning officers in the preparation and assessment of planning applications.
- 1.2 SPG represents non-statutory planning guidance that supports, clarifies and/or illustrates by example, the policies included within the current planning policy framework, including development plans and regional planning guidance. The information set out in this SPG should therefore be read in conjunction with the existing planning policy framework, most notably the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) for Northern Ireland and the DCSDC LDP Plan Strategy 2032. It should also be read as complementary to other retained or emergent SPG, including Planning Practice Notes and design guides.
- 1.3 The guidance is intended to be of particular benefit to developers and applicants when taking account of the specific needs of people with disabilities and others whose mobility is impaired in the design of new development. This will facilitate access for all customers, visitors or employees using buildings and spaces. It includes the submission of Access Statements, where required. The guidance aims to enable developers, landowners, agents, members of the public and any other interested parties to understand how the Council considers relevant development proposals, and the standard of provision sought.

2. Policy Context

National (UK wide) guidance.

- 2.1 In accordance with the report by the Planning Appeals Commission into the Council's LDP Plan Strategy (recommendation RA 53) DfI Direction modification MOD 35 noted that the Council should consider the following publication as part of their SPG: The Department for Transport's publication '[Inclusive Mobility](#): A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure (December 2021)'. This is considered to be the most up-to-date guidance on all things mobility-related.

- 2.2 This document has been referred to in preparing this SPG. It contains very useful and detailed technical information and specifications so is a recommended reference for all developers and applicants. Note that it mainly applies to the public realm and buildings used for transport such as bus and railway stations but that the same principles could be applicable to other public buildings and their access routes.

Regional Planning Policy and Guidance

Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035

- 2.3 The Regional Development Strategy (RDS) 2035 provides an overarching strategic Planning framework to facilitate and guide the public and private sectors. The RDS contains guidance to provide policy direction in relation to the economy, society and environment and provides spatial guidance for Northern Ireland by topic. It sets the context in which to make policy and development decisions to achieve sustainable development throughout the region.
- 2.4 It emphasises the importance of creating sustainable, inclusive communities that cater for the diverse needs of the population, including the elderly and disabled. We should create places which are safe and inclusive and offer equality of opportunity. Specifically, Regional Guidance RG6 (Strengthen community cohesion) seeks to develop integrated services and facilities to enable people to meet and undertake shared activities whilst ensuring there are no barriers, perceived or physical, to access these places.

Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) for Northern Ireland (2015)

- 2.5 The Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) is a statement of the Department's (DfI) policy on important Planning matters that should be addressed across Northern Ireland. It has a statutory basis under Part 1 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011 which requires DfI to formulate and co-ordinate policy for securing the orderly and consistent development of land and the Planning of that development. Its provisions must be considered in the preparation of Local Development Plans (LDPs) and are material to all Planning decisions and appeals.
- 2.6 SPPS para 4.15 states that 'Planning authorities should utilise Development Planning, Regeneration and Development Management powers to contribute to the creation of an environment that: is accessible to all and enhances opportunities for shared communities; has a high standard of connectivity, and supports shared use of public realm...' and concludes that 'for these initiatives

to be fully successful, they should also seek to address the social and economic challenges of multiple deprivation and social exclusion’.

- 2.7 The SPPS includes objectives of promoting sustainable development and high-quality design. Para 4.24 states that design should encompass how buildings and places function in use and over the lifetime of a development. It encourages future-proofing developments for modern technology which can help minimise the need for expensive retrofitting.
- 2.8 Para 6.142 (bullet point 14) requires LDPs to set out ‘local design requirements’.
- 2.9 Para 6.297 sets out the regional strategic objectives for transportation and land-use Planning which include ensuring ‘accessibility for all, with the needs of people with disabilities and others whose mobility is impaired given particular consideration’.
- 2.10 Para 6.302 states that ‘in determining planning applications, it is important that due regard is given to the design and layout of the proposed development and the facilities provided to cater for the particular needs of people with disabilities. Relevant considerations will normally include user-friendly pedestrian routes, easy access to car parking reserved for disabled people and public transport facilities, and public buildings designed to provide suitable access for customers, visitors and employees’.

Local Planning Policy

- 2.11 The Derry City & Strabane District Council LDP Plan Strategy 2032 was adopted in July 2025 and provides the strategic planning policy framework for the District, across a range of topics. It sets out the vision for the area and the objectives and strategic policies required to deliver that vision including a suite of topic-based operational policies.
- 2.12 The main operational policy relating to ‘Access for All’ is in the Transport and Movement Chapter 11: Policy TAM 1 (Creating an Accessible Environment). This requires developers to take account of people with disabilities or impaired mobility in the design of new development. Where appropriate, layouts should incorporate facilities to aid access (e.g. drop kerbs and tactile paving and the removal of unnecessary obstacles. It promotes unhindered building approaches, pedestrian priority and easy access to reserved parking, public transport and taxi ranks. The policy is set out below:

TAM 1 Creating an Accessible Environment

Developers will be required to take account of the specific needs of people with disabilities and others whose mobility is impaired in the design of new development. Where appropriate, the external layout of development will be required to incorporate all or some of the following:

- facilities to aid accessibility e.g. provision of dropped kerbs and tactile paving etc, together with the removal of any unnecessary obstructions;
- convenient movement along pathways and an unhindered approach to buildings;
- pedestrian priority to facilitate pedestrian movement within and between land uses; and
- ease of access to reserved car parking, public transport facilities and taxi ranks.

The development of a new building open to the public, or to be used for employment or education purposes, will only be permitted where it is designed to provide suitable access for all, whether as customers, visitors or employees. In such cases the Council will operate a presumption in favour of a level approach from the boundary of the site to the building entrance and the use of steps, ramps or mechanical aids will only be permitted where it is demonstrated that these are unavoidable and can be facilitated from the public footway without overly impairing available width.

Development should be designed to facilitate ease of access for all pedestrians, including wheelchair users, not only to the building entrance but also to and from the pedestrian environment around the building. The Council will also seek to ensure that access to existing buildings and their surroundings is improved as opportunities arise through alterations, extensions and changes of use. The Council may require the submission of an Access Statement to accompany development proposals.

- 2.13 Buildings open to the public, used for employment or education must provide access for all customers, visitors or employees. There is a presumption in favour of a level approach to all buildings. Ramps, steps and mechanical aids will only be accepted where they are unavoidable and can be facilitated without impairing footway width. There should be easy access for pedestrians including wheelchair users to entrances and around buildings. The Council will seek to ensure access improvements to existing buildings are brought about as opportunities arise through alterations, extensions and change of use. Some developments may require the submission of an Access Statement.

- 2.14 The needs of disabled people are explicitly recognised in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). This legislation made it unlawful to discriminate against disabled people and service providers are obliged to make 'reasonable adjustments' to remove or overcome physical barriers to access.
- 2.15 Special attention should also be paid to areas outside buildings. The siting of buildings and the layout of associated car parking, vehicular access and circulation roads can often act as a barrier to convenient movement. Development should facilitate ease of access for all pedestrians and wheelchair users, to the building entrance and from the pedestrian environment, streets and spaces around buildings and where necessary provide for priority for such movement over vehicles.
- 2.16 It is recognised that many existing buildings were not designed with disabled people in mind. Accordingly, it may not always be possible for development involving the alteration or change of use of an existing building which is open to the public to provide level access. In such cases, there will be a presumption that suitable access for all should be incorporated as far as reasonably possible. Designing suitable access in these circumstances may call for imagination and creativity.
- 2.17 In the case of historic or listed buildings, it may be possible to plan suitable access for all without adversely impacting on the building's special architectural or historic interest. All proposed changes to a historic or listed building should be based on a clear understanding of the significance of the building, be of high-quality design, and use sympathetic materials, details and finishes, in keeping with the building's essential character.
- 2.18 Where appropriate, the Council may require the submission of an Access Statement to accompany a development proposal for buildings that are open to the public, or to be used for employment or education purposes. The preparation of such a statement helps create buildings and places which are accessible and inclusive.
- 2.19 Where an Access Statement is required to accompany a planning application, it should identify:
- The philosophy and approach to inclusive design;
 - The key issues of the particular scheme; and
 - The sources of advice and guidance used.

- 2.20 In the case of existing buildings, particularly historic buildings, such a Statement would enable a designer / developer to state why the proposed change is necessary, identify the constraints posed by the existing structure and its immediate environment and to explain how these have been overcome, through informed and high-quality design solutions. Design and Access Statements must accompany all Listed Building Consent applications.

3 Supplementary Planning Guidance.

- 3.1 The Council's Lifetime Homes SPG which applies to all residential development and provides good practice for Access for All to other buildings.
- 3.3 In Derry City & Strabane District, 23% of the population were disabled at that time of the 2011 Census (LDP Plan Strategy para 16.64). The 2021 census revealed that this has gone up to 27% so the District has a higher proportion of disabled people than other parts of Northern Ireland. Source: Table CT0313NI Census 2011 & Table MS-D02, Census 2021.
- 3.5 Disabilities can include a lack of mobility, sensory impairments, mental disabilities or others which are not so obvious, for example, heart disease or breathing difficulties. Many other people experience a temporary disability through accident or illness. A lack of accessibility can also present difficulties for the growing numbers of elderly people in our community and for people with prams. The Council therefore attaches great importance to the removal, as far as is reasonable and practicable, of barriers to access to new and existing development. Many obstructions to access can be avoided by careful design or by simple alterations. This SPG provides basic guidelines for developers.
- 3.6 In the provision of accessible buildings, developers should seek to ensure that a wheelchair can be erected and easily propelled from a parked car into the building. The concept of providing level clearways with unobstructed routes of adequate width meets the needs of many people with various forms of impaired mobility.
- 3.7 For planning applications for the development of publicly accessible buildings, the Council will consider the extent to which the provision of external facilities and access into the building for disabled people is provided. This aspect should be clarified in the Planning Statement that will accompany each planning application. In some cases an Access Statement will be required, as set out above. Normally it should be apparent from the layout and block plans

whether LDP Plan Strategy Policy TAM 1 has been complied-with. Where appropriate, conditions may be attached to the grant of Planning permission to ensure the development has a suitable access where elements cannot be shown on the approved plans.

- 3.8 Conditions on access for people with disabilities may be attached in appropriate cases to permissions which relate to more than one building, so that the means of access between buildings is covered by the permission - for example, external changes in level in multi-level shopping centres. Such conditions may also cover the means of access to the building from other parts of the development, such as external car parks, to ensure they are suitable for people with disabilities. The Council may also consider it appropriate for conditions on access to be attached to permissions for the change of use of buildings involving no structural or physical operations, where the new use would be one for which the public has access - especially where this was not the case previously or where existing arrangements do not meet current DDA standards. (It should be noted that all conditions on a planning permissions must meet the legal tests as set out in planning legislation and SPPS para 5.65.)

Parking

- 3.9 The Council recommends that where car parking provision is in excess of 50 spaces, 4% should be reserved specifically for people with disabilities. In smaller car parks, at least one space should be provided. For more detailed requirements for different types of development, see The Department for Transport's publication '[Inclusive Mobility](#): A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure (December 2021 section 8.2).
- 3.10 Where possible, reserved spaces should be provided within 50 metres of a point of entry to the development. A covered way should be considered where distances exceed 50 metres. Parking bays should be 3.6m wide (3.3m minimum) to allow transfer from car to a wheelchair. An economy of space can be achieved by combining such bays in pairs of 2.4 metres width with a common zone of transfer of 1.2 metres (10.9 metres minimum).
- 3.11 Reserved spaces should be clearly designated for use by people with disabilities and should be clearly signposted. The pedestrian route from the parking spaces to the point of entry should be clearly defined and well lit.

Pathways and access routes

- 3.11 Pathways should be a minimum width of 1.2m and if possible 1.8m, to allow wheelchairs to pass. A greater width may be required if large pedestrian flows are anticipated. Path edges should be clearly defined and slip resistant surfaces should be used. All pathways should be well lit. The use of colour contrasts can assist partially-sighted people.
- 3.12 The pathway system should where possible be designed to avoid crossing vehicular routes within the site. Where this is not practicable, use should be made of 'dropped kerbs' and textured surfaces so that the crossing point is suitable for both wheelchair users and people with visual impairments.
- 3.13 If it is unavoidable to use ramps, they should have a gradient of approximately 1:20 (maximum 1:12). Where ramps are steep (greater than 1:20), steps should also be made available. Long ramps require a level landing at 10 metre intervals. A level platform of adequate size should be provided at the entrance to the building and at the top and bottom of all ramps. Steps should have a maximum riser of 0.15 metres and a minimum tread of 0.28 metres. Handrails should be provided to both sides of ramps and steps. Intermediate handrails are necessary where the ramp or steps are wider than 2 metres. Handrails should extend beyond the top and bottom of the steps or ramp and should be provided with a positive safe end.
- 3.14 Street furniture should be located so that it does not obstruct pedestrian pathways. Where possible, such furniture should be at least one metre in height (0.8 metres minimum), with good colour contrast.

Other Legislation

- 3.15 In the design of buildings and their associated spaces, it will be important for the designers / applicants for planning permission to have regard to the specific requirements of any other relevant planning or other legislation, regulations and latest best-practice guidance with regard to disability accessibility.