

Foxton Parish Council

ACCESS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE POLICY

AS ADOPTED BY FOXTON PARISH COUNCIL ON 6 December 2021

ACCESS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

1.0. SUMMARY

1.1. This paper gives some context to the proposal for Foxton Parish Council (FPC) to use its authority, and influence, to improve access for disabled people to the built environment.

1.2. Specifically, that access for disabled people, to public buildings and new dwellings is improved as set out in 2.0, below.

2.0. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Foxton Parish Council (FPC) adopts a policy of promoting greater access for disabled people to the built environment.

2.2. That FPC uses its authority to improve disabled people's access to public buildings and new dwellings.

2.3. That FPC review annually what measures it can take, to improve access for disabled people to the built environment.

2.4. That FPC, initially, require new public buildings and new dwellings, to have level, or minimum upstand (up to 15mm), thresholds to all entrances and exits. All approaches should be level or gently sloping.

3.0. SCOPE

3.1. When people refer to disabled people, their first thoughts are of wheelchair users. The access needs of disabled people (wheelchair users form about 3%) are far wider, e.g., accessible information. For the purposes of this document, access refers to physical access for disabled people with mobility impairment.

3.2. It should be borne in mind that improved access to buildings is beneficial to all members of the community, e.g. people pushing prams. An inclusive community requires that all members of a community have fair and equal access to its resources and facilities.

3.3. People's needs alter, and what you may not need now, you may need in the future.

4.0. DEFINITION OF DISABILITY

4.1. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

4.2. The DDA 2005 amended the definition of disability. It removed the requirement that a mental illness should be 'clinically well-recognised'.

4.3. It also ensured that people with HIV, cancer and multiple sclerosis are deemed to be covered by the DDA effectively from the point of diagnosis, rather than from the point when the condition has some adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

5.0. BACKGROUND

5.1. THE BUILDING REGULATIONS

5.1.1. Currently the main legislation that controls access standards for disabled people is, PART M of the Building Regulations. Part M's requirements will be met if – 'Reasonable provision is made to ensure that buildings are accessible and usable.'

5.1.2. People, regardless of disability, age or gender should be able to

(a) Gain access to buildings and to gain access within buildings and use their facilities, both as visitors and people that live or work in them;

(b) Use sanitary conveniences in the principle storey of a new dwelling.

5.1.3. Part M applies to a new dwelling or new non-domestic building, and where an existing non-domestic building is extended, or undergoes a material change. Any extension should not make the building less accessible than before the alterations.

5.1.4. In reality this usually means that disabled people with limited mobility can expect the principle entrance to have a level threshold, to have an accessible toilet and to be able to move around the building, but only the principle storey of a domestic dwelling.

5.2. THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT

5.2.1. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 imposes a duty on service providers to take reasonable steps to remove, alter or provide a reasonable means of avoiding a physical feature of their premises which makes it unreasonably difficult or impossible for a disabled person to make use of their services.

5.2.2. The DDA 2004 amendment places a duty on public bodies to consider the needs of disabled people when planning services. In carrying out their functions, the Act says public authorities must "have due regard" to the needs of disabled people. This duty includes, eliminating discrimination and promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people.

6.0 CURRENT INITIATIVES

6.1. Lifetime Homes is a concept that has been around for at least 15 years. It is about designing homes to be flexible in accommodating adaptations that may be needed during the life of its occupants. There are 16 new design standards (APPENNDX 1), over and above Part M, that make up a lifetime home.

6.2.1. In February 2008, Barbara Flint, the Housing Minister said, 6.2.2. "Meeting the needs of an ageing population is one of the major challenges we are facing as a society. But whilst it's a big challenge, even a small change or adaption to a home can transform an older person's life."

6.2.3. "This is about giving all older people a better choice. The vast majority of people want to stay independent in a suitable home at they get older. We have a responsibility to support that desire by increasing the housing choices that are available."

6.2.4. To this end, she stated that to 'future proof' homes, "From 2013, we want new standards for all new homes meaning they are built to age friendly designs marking a fundamental change in the way we currently build homes. Sixteen key features make up the 'Lifetime Homes' standard and will mean that wider doors, improved design of bathrooms and staircases big enough to take stair lifts will be a feature of every new home - ending the need for costly adaptations."

6.2.5. " We will review take-up in 2010, with a view to bringing forward regulation in 2013 if take-up in the private sector has not matched market need or expectations. Research shows that better thought-out and more flexible design means these simple, common sense changes could be made without significant additional extra costs. To accelerate progress, from 2011, all new social housing to be built to the 'Lifetime Homes' standards - ensuring the public sector is leading the way in supporting older people."

7.0. COST 7.1. The Government estimates that additional costs are expected to lie between £545 and £1,615 a dwelling. An ageing population has encouraged the Government to move Lifetime Homes up the agenda.

7.2. In 1994, £350m was spent on providing adaptations for disabled people, of which £210m came from the taxpayers. Encouraging greater uptake of the Lifetime Homes standards from design stage will reduce the cost of adaptations, and also reduce care costs.

8.0. CONCLUSION

8.1. It is in everyone's interest to have buildings that are accessible to all the community. Current legislation focuses on accessing buildings and not on their usability. To improve disabled people's ability to use a building, it is necessary to build upon existing access standards.

8.2. Foxton Parish Council (FPC) can do this by agreeing the recommendations in paragraph 2.0. 8.3. If the recommendations are agreed, a simple policy statement and procedure for implementation can be agreed. Although FPC cannot demand greater access provision of developers than is legally required, it can make a clear statement and seek to influence improved access.

APPENDIX 1

The Lifetime Home Standards

Car Parking

1. Where car parking is adjacent to the home, it should be capable of enlargement to attain 3.3m width.

Access from Car Parking

2. The distance from the car parking space to the home should be kept to a minimum and should be level or gently sloping.

Approach

3. The approach to all entrances should be level or gently sloping.

External Entrances

4. All entrances should be illuminated, have level access over the threshold and have a covered main entrance.

Communal Stairs

5. Communal stairs should provide easy access and, where homes are reached by a lift, it should be fully accessible.

Doorways & Hallways

6. The width of internal doorways and hallways should conform to Part M, except that when the approach is not head on and the hallway width is 900mm, the clear opening width should be 900mm rather than 800mm. There should be 300mm nib or wall space to the side of the leading edge of the doors on entrance level.

Wheelchair Accessibility

7. There should be space for turning a wheelchair in dining areas and living rooms and adequate circulation space for wheelchairs elsewhere.

Living Room

8. The living room should be at entrance level. Two or more storey requirements

9. In houses of two or more storeys, there should be space on the entrance level that could be used as a convenient bed space.

WC

10. In houses with three bedrooms or more there should be a wheelchair accessible toilet at entrance level with drainage provision enabling a shower to be fitted in the future. In houses with two bedrooms the downstairs toilet should conform at least to Part M. Bathroom & WC

Walls

11. Walls in the bathroom and WC should be capable of taking adaptations such as handrails.

Lift Capability

12. The design should incorporate provision for a future stair lift and a suitably identified space for a through the floor lift from the ground floor to the first floor, for example to a bedroom next to the bathroom.

Main Bedroom

13. The design and specification should provide a reasonable route for a potential hoist from a main bedroom to the bathroom.

Bathroom Layout

14. The bathroom should be designed for ease of access to the bath, WC & wash basin.

Window Specification

15. Living room window glazing should begin no higher than 800mm from the floor level and windows should be easy to open/operate.

Fixtures & Fittings

16. Switches, sockets, ventilation and service controls should be at a height usable by all (i.e., between 450 and 1200mm from the floor).