



Access for disabled customers

How to apply for
planning permission



Do I need planning permission for improving access for disabled customers?

You may wish to improve access for disabled customers e.g. by widening an entrance or installing a ramp. Your local authority requires the property owner to obtain various consents in advance of doing the work.

This booklet will tell you how to obtain planning permission, listed building consent, meet building regulations and so on.

The guide is not intended as a substitute for getting a professional to make the required applications – but it tells you in plain English exactly what's involved.

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Modified Post Office® branches – if you are a modified branch whose premises are leased from Post Office Ltd or Royal Mail, you need to speak with Post Office® Property Holdings on 0870 850 1000 before making any changes to the property.

Directly managed branches – this guide does not apply to directly managed branches who should contact Post Office® Property Holdings for advice.

The information contained in this booklet is intended for guidance only. Subpostmasters are responsible for all Disability Discrimination Act and health and safety issues on their premises. No changes should be made without the consent of the owner of the property.

Reminder of your responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act

Your responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) are to make reasonable adjustments to anything which prevents disabled customers accessing our services. Examples of adjustments might include:

- providing level access
- fitting a handrail
- installing a ramp
- widening entrance doors
- fitting automatic opening doors

To evaluate what your branch needs to do you should refer to the 'Self Audit Pack'. You can get the pack from Swindon stores on 0845 6000 690, Item Misc 715.

Grant to help subpostmasters

If you need to make any physical changes you may be eligible for a grant. You can get more information about the DDA grant from NBSC on 0845 601 1022, selecting option 3.

Why do I need planning permission?

The planning system is there to make sure buildings are in keeping with their surroundings and that the environment is sustainable for future generations.

Every council has a development plan which provides the rules against which development will be permitted in their area. Planning permission makes sure that individual plans are in line with the council development plan.

Planning does not control how a building or a feature is constructed – that is done through the building regulations.

Planning permission is always required if the work materially affects the external appearance of the building.

It is also required for certain internal work (ask your local council's planning department for details).

If the building is classified as 'listed' or in a conservation area, then there are additional permissions that need to be obtained (this is covered in section 4).

For more information on the planning process:

- **England and Wales** visit the Government's planning website www.planningportal.gov.uk or contact your local council planning department.
- **Scotland and N. Ireland** contact your local planning department.



How do I apply for planning permission?

Before applying for planning permission you should always ensure you have the consent for the changes you are making from the owner of the property.

The application

The planning application is made on a planning application form provided by the council. The application must be accompanied by a plan of the site and details of any proposed works. Proof of ownership of the land is also necessary.

For the purposes of an application for planning permission – Post Office® branches are classified in the Town and Country Planning (use classes) Order 1987 as 'A1 Shops'.

It is advisable to send the planning department a draft application first and ask the planning office for their advice before making the formal application. This enhances the chances of success with most councils.

A planning officer is always available to give informal advice before the application is made.

How much will it cost?

A fee, set by the council but in line with the general provisions of planning laws, must be paid at the time of application.

Although the cost of architects/builders drawings and professional advice in drawing up the application are likely to be higher than the application fee, a typical charge for a small business planning application is £110. However, charges for changes that purely improve disabled access are likely to be free.

How long will it take?

The planning decision will be made within eight weeks.

What is the process?

When the application is made, the council will notify neighbours, other relevant bodies such as the parish or town council, place public notices and invite comments on the proposal.

In the event of permission being refused or the decision taking more than eight weeks, the applicant has the right of appeal to the Secretary of State, for which there is no fee charged. However costs may be imposed.

The details of the proposed works should include a disability 'access statement' – you may wish to use the words below:

Permission is being sought to improve access to this Post Office® branch for the following reasons:

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) requires businesses to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access. The DDA also states that it is unlawful to treat disabled people less favourably than other people for a reason related to their disability. The improvements are required to help disabled people access these premises.

Without these improvements this Post Office® branch may be less viable due to some customers being unable to enter the premises or being deterred from doing so regularly. This branch needs better access to fulfil its role in the local community.

The improvement will help all customers, including the elderly and those with shopping trolleys and parents with pushchairs.

The Disability Rights Commission has published a guide to 'access statements' which you may wish to consult.

Will I need any additional consents?

Application Checklist

1.

Make sure that all the forms and copies are correctly submitted and keep a copy

2.

Make sure you keep a diary of all key dates of any correspondence, phone calls etc.

3.

Make sure that it is clear in the application that your application is being made to improve access

The information on how to apply for planning permission on these pages is intended for guidance only.



Regardless of whether or not planning permission is required, other approvals may be necessary:

- Building regulations consent
- Listed building consent
- Conservation area consent
- Tree preservation orders/signs and advertisements consents
- Highway authority approval

Building Regulations

The planning system ensures that things are built in the right place but not how they are constructed – that is the function of the building regulations.

Part M of the Building Regulations 2002 covers the minimum standards of access and facilities for disabled people. There must be reasonable provision for access to, and use of buildings, by disabled people.

British Standard BS83000 covers accessible design and your architect/builder should be aware of this standard.

You have a statutory obligation to secure building regulation consent if applicable (your architect, builder or council will give advice).

You can seek consent by contacting your local authority's building control department or by using an approved inspector to review and approve or reject the proposed design.

Listed buildings consent – England and Wales

A 'designated' or 'listed building' is one which is formally declared to be of special architectural or historic interest and it enjoys a special protected status under planning law. The Planning Act 1990 (listed buildings and conservation areas) requires the Secretary of State for the National Heritage to compile and maintain the list of such buildings.

If you want to know if your building is listed, ask your local planning department.

Application for listed building consent is in addition to any planning permission needed.



Forms are obtainable from the local council; they process the application and consult with English Heritage and other appropriate groups.

CADW – Welsh Historic Monuments, has a statutory duty in Wales to protect and promote the heritage there. They publish an excellent guide 'Overcoming the Barriers' which has relevance elsewhere in the UK too.

The Department of National Heritage (now Media and Sport) and the Department of the Environment (now the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) published the Planning Policy Guidance Note in 1994 which covered conservation principles for work on historic buildings in conservation areas in England and Wales.

It sought to balance allowing 'dignified easy access' for disabled people with the need to preserve buildings' historical features. There are cases where planning permission and listed building consent for access improvements have been refused on conservation grounds.

English Heritage is always given the opportunity to comment on proposals affecting listed buildings in England and Wales.

Listed buildings consent – Scotland and N. Ireland

For the equivalent of listed building consent in Scotland and N. Ireland, contact your local council.

Conservation area consent

Consent for alterations to premises in a conservation area are dealt with on the same form as the listed building consent.

To find out if your branch is in a conservation area contact your local council.

Tree preservation orders/signs and advertisements consents

You are unlikely to need consent for these but you can check this out with your local planning department if trees or signage are involved.

Highway Authority

Where an improvement can only be achieved by adapting a public highway, say, by building a ramp on a pavement, the local Statutory Highway Authority (SHA) must be consulted. The local council planning department has an obligation to undertake a statutory consultation with the SHA.

Some councils provide guidance on acceptable ramp designs and on the procedures used to review them, but this cannot be guaranteed. Don't give up because the only solution seems to be building on the pavement, as this could be allowed and there may be other good solutions. If in any doubt, please talk to the planning department.



Royal Mail Group's Disability Action Centre (DAC)

Practical expertise in disability issues for employees and agents. DAC can give advice on employment and access to goods and service issues.

Monday to Friday 9.00am-5.00pm. Calls through Typetext and TextDirect are welcomed.

Telephone: 0114 241 4731 Fax: 0114 241 4534 Email: dac@royalmail.com

Disability related information can also be found at the DAC website: www.royalmailgroup.com/dac

Find your Council:

www.direct.gov.uk/QuickFind

The Government's Planning Portal for England and Wales

Planning Portal, The Planning Inspectorate, 3/20 Hawk Wing, Temple Quay House, 2 The Square, Temple Quay, Bristol, BS1 6PN www.planningportal.gov.uk

Planning Aid Scotland

Planning Aid Scotland, Bonnington Mill, 72 Newhaven Road, Edinburgh, EH6 5QG Telephone: 0131 555 1565 Fax: 0131 467 7830 www.planning-aid-scotland.org.uk

NI Planning Service

Planning Service Headquarters, Millennium House, 19-25 Great Victoria Street, Belfast, BT2 7BN Telephone: 028 9041 6700 Fax: 028 9041 6802 www.planningni.gov.uk

Listed Buildings

English Heritage, Customer Services Department, PO Box 569, Swindon, SN2 2YP www.english-heritage.org.uk

CADW

Plas Carew, Unit 5/7 Cefn Coed, Parc Nantgarw, Cardiff, CF15 7QQ Tel: 01443 33 6000 Fax: 01443 33 6001 www.cadw.wales.gov.uk

Information on individual list entries is found at the National Monuments Record Office – 01793 414 600, local council planning departments, county council offices, most local reference libraries, or by calling 020 7208 8221. For further information on the listing process, please see www.english-heritage.org.uk/designation

Disability Rights Commission:

DRC Helpline, FREEPOST MIDO 2164, Stratford-upon-Avon, CV37 9BR Telephone: 0845 7622633 – you can speak to an operator at any time between 8am and 8pm, Monday to Friday. Textphone: 08457 622 644 Fax: 08457 778 878 www.drc.gov.uk

06 Additional information

Scotland

In Scotland, the Scottish Executive maintains and develops statutory planning control and the Scottish Inquiry Reporters Unit handles appeals. The Scottish system is currently undergoing review.

Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Planning Office develops and administers planning under the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order 1991. Following the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly the Parliamentary Undersecretary of State at the Northern Ireland Assembly, has exercised the authority for all planning decisions.

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