

Potential barriers such as gates, poor path surfaces and lack of information can easily be overcome to enable people with disabilities to enjoy the countryside independently or with their families.

Access to the amenities

Sufficient accessible parking spaces should be provided, together with accessible routes from those parking spaces to the entrance to the amenities (see Guidance Notes No 11 – External environment and No 12 – Car parking).

Facilities

Toilets

Where toilet facilities are provided for the public (and they should be provided where practicable), suitable provision should be made for disabled people (see Guidance Note No 5 – Accessible toilets).

Shelters

Where shelters are provided for the public (and they should be provided where practicable), they should have at least 2000mm clear headroom. Shelters are particularly useful at maps and viewpoints.

Information boards

Information boards should give clear information and be easily legible by people with impaired vision. A map of the amenities showing accessible routes should be provided.

Viewing points, rest areas and picnic areas

- Where guarding is needed, it should be 1100mm high.
- Seats should be provided, located so as not to cause obstruction to pathways. Seats should be 450mm to 520mm high. Fixed seats should have at least 225mm gap between the seat and any table. Wheelchair access to picnic tables should be provided. Seats with structural members linking them to tables are best avoided, for the convenience of ambulant disabled people.

Trails, tracks and walkways

- Alternative routes of varying length should be provided.
- Clear information boards should be provided at the start of the routes, indicating their length, approximate time taken to walk them, and their suitability for use by different users (e.g. those with buggies, wheelchair users, bicyclists, people with walking difficulties).
- Pathways should be clearly defined by signs along their lengths.
- Pathways should be at least 1200mm wide and preferably 1500mm wide, although, where necessary, occasional short constrictions down to 750mm wide will not cause undue inconvenience.

- Unless the pathways are 1500mm wide, they should be provided with frequent passing places at least 1500mm x 1500mm.
- 2100mm clear headroom should be provided to all pathways, although, where necessary, occasional obstructions could remain if they were very clearly marked.
- The surfaces of pathways should be firm, stable and preferably non-slip whether wet or dry. Hard surfaces such as concrete and macadam are best but may be inappropriate for environmentally sensitive areas where rolled stone may be more appropriate. Loose materials should be avoided.
- Pathways should be free draining or provided with cross-falls (about 1:50).
- A good level of inspection and maintenance should be provided, to ensure that pathways remain clear and in a good state of repair.

Gaps, gates and styles

- Gates and styles should be avoided where possible.
- Gaps should be at least 800mm wide.
- Gates should have at least 800mm clear opening width.
- Traditional kissing gates are inappropriate. Larger versions of kissing gates (which achieve the aim of restricting the passage of large livestock even while left unsecured, while allowing the passage of people) can be suitable, for example, by using a 1500mm wide gate restricted to swing no more than 90 degrees in total, together with a pen of 1700mm x 1700mm (or two, each 1000mm x 1600mm).
- Latch gates can be suitable, if the latch is easily grasped, located between 900mm and 1100mm above ground level, and needs minimal strength to operate.
- Self-closing gates can be suitable, although the closing force should not be excessive.

Ramps

See Design Note No 1 – Approaches and entrances for guidance on external ramps.

Steps

Every effort should be made to provide at least one route giving suitable level or ramped access to any unique features on the site.

See Design Note No 1 – Approaches and entrances for guidance on external stairways.

The constraints of the countryside will sometimes make it difficult if not impossible to achieve ideal access. Common sense should prevail. Any hazards, difficulties and inconveniences should be clearly apparent and marked where appropriate (particularly on a notice board at the entrance to amenities). It is better to have less than ideal access on a particular pathway than to ban all disabled visitors from using it at all, but it is important that people know what is ahead.

If it is impracticable to make a pathway suitable for wheelchair users, it is likely that it could be made suitable for the ambulant disabled, and this may be the appropriate

solution. The more closely the guidance can be followed, the greater the percentage of potential users that will be able to use the pathway.

Further information

BT Countryside for All Good Practice guide: A Good Practice Guide to Countryside Access for Disabled People, 2003 CD Edition, is available from:

Fieldfare Trust
7 Volunteer House
69 Crossgate
Cupar
Fife
KY15 5AS

Tel: 01334 657708
Email: info@fieldfare.org.uk

BS 5709: Gaps, gates and stiles – specifications is available from:

British Standards Institution
389 Chiswick High Road
London W4 4AL

Tel: 020 8996 9000
Web: www.bsi-global.com

<p>This guide is produced by the Access Officers of Brighton & Hove City Council, Eastbourne BC, Hastings BC, Lewes DC, Rother DC and Wealden DC</p>
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