

LOCAL PLANNING GUIDANCE NOTE NO. 12: ACCESS FOR ALL

Background

Around 20% of Britain's adult population are categorised as disabled under the definition of 'disability' in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA, see Appendix 1.) Many more people, namely the elderly (an increasing proportion of our population), families with young children and carers, will benefit from improved access into buildings and to the public transport system. Whilst society and individuals have invested heavily in enabling people to manage their personal circumstances effectively (for example, in care for the elderly), many people remain unnecessarily impaired by ill-conceived environments. As a result, many people cannot take complete responsibility for themselves, and are prevented from contributing fully to society. The Government is committed to an inclusive society in which nobody is disadvantaged, and therefore it aims to break down unnecessary physical barriers and exclusions imposed on disabled people by poor design of buildings and places.

Taking account of the needs of disabled people should no longer be an afterthought, considered separately from the needs of others; instead, it should become an integral part of the design process from the very outset. Inclusive design should not be seen simply as a building regulations issue, to be considered after planning permission has been granted, not least because to do so can lead to the need for later amendments to a scheme (such as having to add on a ramp) which involve additional expense and a less satisfactory appearance. It is more cost-effective and better to design for inclusive access from the outset. All those involved in the development process, including local planning authorities (LPAs) and developers, should consider the access needs of disabled people, in order to deliver physical environments which can be used by everyone, regardless of age, gender or disability. The arrangements for **access to buildings can be a material planning consideration** and the arrangements for use by the public raises issues of public amenity that can also be a material consideration. **Failure by designers to meet appropriate access standards could lead to delays in the planning process, or refusal.**

Given the large number of people with some form of disability, there is a strong commercial argument – if one were needed – for developing an inclusive environment. Developments designed to be inclusive are likely to have an **enhanced market value** as occupiers and other purchasers of property become increasingly aware of the economic disadvantage of excluding disabled people.

The **purposes of preparing planning guidance on access for disabled people** in this note may be summarised as:

- To maintain and improve the quality of life for people with disabilities, and
- To assist and educate designers, the construction and building industry, road and landscape providers to design, build and provide an environment which enables people with disabilities to more fully participate in and contribute to life in their community.

Policy

The Disability Discrimination Act introduced legislation aimed at ending the discrimination from which disabled people suffer. It affects all providers of facilities, information and services to the general public, free or otherwise. The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) publication "**Planning Policy Wales**" (2002) establishes the policy context in Wales. Fostering social inclusion by securing a more accessible environment for everyone is a key policy objective (para 2.3.2), supported by para 2.9.5: "**Local planning authorities and developers should consider the issue of availability for all, including the needs of those with visual and hearing impairments and those with limited mobility such as wheelchair users, elderly people and people with young children, at an early stage in the design process.**" Ensuring that transport is accessible to all is another objective. (para 8.1.3)

Section 4.4 deals with ensuring access for all. **Disability Access Groups** should be consulted throughout the land use planning process. It is a requirement for developments to conform to the Disability Discrimination Act, and LPAs when granting planning permission have a duty to draw applicants' attention to their statutory obligations. **When a new building is proposed, an existing building is being altered, a change of use is proposed, or the design impacts upon external spaces and movement routes, developers should consider the needs of all users.** If there is a clear planning need to achieve provision for everyone, and it is uncertain that the developer's proposals will do so, it may be appropriate to impose a condition to ensure adequate accessibility for all.

The WAG document "**Technical Advice Note 12: Design**" provides more guidance, in paras 5.2 to 5.7 entitled "Inclusive Design". Changes which may be necessary include entrances to housing, with front doors widened to accommodate wheelchairs, to public transport infrastructure, to public leisure facilities, and indeed to every area of

development. It is not simply a matter of dimensions, but also perceptibility of information, low physical effort and tolerance for error. This approach is entirely compatible with sustainable objectives.

Planning policy content locally is at present limited to two policies of the **Flintshire Unitary Development Plan (UDP)**. **Policy GEN1 General Requirements for Development** provides a broad policy background against which schemes will be judged, the following extract being relevant here:

***“Development that requires planning permission and is in accordance with the Plan’s other policies, should be located on land, or within suitable buildings, which satisfies the following requirements:
e the development should provide, where appropriate, safe and convenient access for pedestrians, cyclists, persons with disabilities, and vehicles, together with adequate and suitably located parking spaces and servicing/manoeuvring space;”***

And, more specifically:

Policy AC1 Facilities for the Disabled:

“Development proposals will be permitted only if appropriate facilities are provided to meet the special needs of people with disabilities.”

Wider input by the Council

This guidance note aims principally to provide suitable guidance in connection with planning applications. For further advice at an early stage, intending applicants should contact the Development Control Section of Planning Services, in Shire Hall, Mold.

Approval under the **Building Regulations** will also be required. The position here is stipulated in part M (Access and Facilities for Disabled People) of Schedule 1 to the Building Regulations 1999, which specifies minimum standards. Further advice can be obtained from the Building Regulation Section, telephone 01352 703631. In summary, reasonable provision must be made for people with physical and sensory impairments to gain access to and use all non-domestic buildings and dwellings. The Regulations also specify fire precautions in a building.

The Council’s **Local Transport Plan** sets out proposals for delivering integrated transport over a five year period, taking into account the Unitary Development Plan, and including appropriate inclusive access policies.

The Council’s **Corporate Plan (2005-2009)** aims to ensure that services are provided fairly and equitably, respecting and understanding individual needs, and amongst its targets in this respect is its one specific reference to disabled people’s needs, namely to prioritise the existing Access to Buildings Programme for compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act by March 2005. (This deals with the matter of its own premises, which is indeed a corporate issue, but of course the Council also has a continuing duty through the exercise of its planning and building regulations powers to see that new private sector development complies appropriately on behalf of the wider community.)

Flintshire County Council’s **Assistant Policy Officer, Access** (internal telephone 2131) gives advice to Council officers regarding the Council’s own developments.

Flintshire Access (telephone 01352 755546) aims to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. They scrutinise planning applications to check for compliance, and carry out surveys in Flintshire checking for dropped kerbs and ramp access where applicable. The **Flintshire Disability Forum** (same telephone number) has a more general role to support all disabled people, and can provide advice on disability-related matters.

British Standard BS8300:2001

“Planning Policy Wales” cross-references to this Standard, **“Code of Practice for design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people”**, produced by the British Standards Institute. It gives recommendations which are used to assess the accessibility and usability of existing buildings and gives a basis for their improvement, although a flexible approach is needed, and should be an essential reference document for both designers and developers. BS8300 applies to the following buildings:

- Transport and industrial
- Health and welfare
- Religious
- Residential, including dwellings
- Administrative and commercial
- Catering, entertainment and recreational
- Educational, cultural and scientific

Buildings open to the public

Basically, buildings from the above list, whether used for employment, educational or other purposes, should **provide access suitable for employees, customers or visitors who are disabled people**. This involves suitable:

- Reserved extra-wide parking facilities with appropriate markings (see **Local Planning Guidance Note (LPG) 11 Parking Standards**)
- Approaches to, around and into buildings

- All facilities
- Fixtures and fittings
- Facilities for physical and sensory impaired groups

Historic buildings

Providing suitable accessibility for disabled people in historic buildings can be difficult to achieve. It should not be done if this means unduly affecting the special character of the building, but normally any new extensions to such buildings should themselves be fully accessible. Further advice is contained in “**Overcoming the Barriers**” (providing Physical Access to Historic Buildings), by Cadw, and information about listed buildings generally in Flintshire will be found in **Local Planning Guidance Note (LPG) 6 Listed Buildings** in this series.

Housing

Mobility housing is ordinary housing with minor modifications to make it accessible for disabled people. Where there is clear evidence of local need for mobility housing, this will be a material consideration in any proposals to adapt existing housing.

Parking and traffic management

Suitable provision for disabled people must be made in alterations to traffic schemes and in parking arrangements, with access routes for permit holders and public transport (buses and taxis) and suitable parking bays and setting down points. Dropped kerbs should be flush with the road surface.

For all non-residential development, applicants should keep in mind the Council’s requirements (see Appendix 3) as follows:

- Size, number and identification of reserved parking spaces
- Convenience of spaces in relation to buildings
- Access to and from parking areas
- Flat surfaces

General advice is available in **LPG 11 Parking Standards**.

Provision for disabled pedestrians

The aim should be to provide an accessible barrier-free environment, with suitably laid out and sized footways (at least 1.8 metres wide), appropriately positioned street furniture (with stable seats where waiting is likely), bins and lighting which do not obstruct footways, and level and even surfaces. Any proposal for pedestrianising streets should make provision for parking for Blue Badge Holders.

Inclusive design criteria

For meeting the needs of disabled people to access public services, and taking into account both the Disability Discrimination Act and the wisdom (and relative economy) of getting the design right from the outset, the following recommendations apply:

- External signage, which should have clear colour contrasts and symbols;
- Good outside lighting around car parks, bus stops, footways and entrances;
- Designated parking spaces with appropriate markings and signs at driver’s head height;
- Flush dropped kerbs (gradient with a maximum ratio of 1:10) to level well-maintained paths with clear signs;
- Ramped or level entrances;
- Surfaces, both internal and external, should be firm, non-slip and well-laid;
- Changes in level should be defined by means of a colour contrast, textured surface, kerb or low rail;
- Handrails on both sides of steep ramps, stairs and steps, which continue 300mm beyond the steps;
- An automatic door opening device at the main entrance;
- External doors with a level threshold and a minimum clear opening width of 800mm, with easy to grip handles at relevant height;
- Internal signage with clear colour contrasts and symbols;
- Wheelchair user friendly entrance doormat;
- Good lighting levels throughout the building;
- Sensible use of décor, for example with bold colours to pick out doors, light switches, handrails and stairs;
- Accessible reception desk/counter with low level area;
- Induction loop system at all reception points, training and meeting rooms;
- Fire alarms to include audio and visual information;
- Unisex accessible toilets with all fixtures and fittings and emergency pull cord;
- Facilities at suitable heights, including IT, telephones, work surfaces, notice boards;
- Lifts to all floors with audio and Braille instructions, with fixtures and fittings at appropriate heights;

- An accessible level or ramped ground floor fire exit, with clear signage and evacuation procedure, safe refuge points for all upper floors and signage.

Appendices 2 and 3 give more details.

Specialist advice

The **National Register of Access Consultants** (NRAC) is a resource for building owners, occupiers, developers or planners seeking advice on an inclusive environment. It helps them to select reputable consultants.

- NRAC, Nutmeg House, 60 Gainsford Street, London SE1 2NY (Telephone: 020 7234 0434; website:www.nrac.org.uk)

Appendix 1: The Disability Discrimination Act 1995

The **definition of disability** under the Act is fairly complex but in essence a person is regarded as disabled for the purposes of the Act if he or she has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to day activities.

The Act made it **unlawful for employers (with over 15 staff) and providers of services to the public to discriminate against disabled people** by treating them less favourably for a reason related to their disability, or by failing to comply with a duty to provide reasonable adjustments to the physical features of their premises to overcome physical barriers to access. In deciding what is reasonable, both the costs and the practicality of any adjustment and the financial resources of the employer or service provider would be considered.

Appendix 2: Recommended specifications to meet the needs of disabled people

General layout

Main facilities at main entrance level

Routes from entrances to reception desks, lifts, stairs and toilets should be clearly defined and unobstructed

Seating should be provided where waiting is likely, and be stable

Public telephones, counters and checkouts should be accessible and usable

Entrances, doors and lobbies

- Automatic doors
- Entrance doors to be clearly distinguished (by colour or details)
- Door closers adjusted to need minimum force
- Entrance lobbies light and spacious
- Space for wheelchair users at waiting areas
- Flush thresholds
- Double doors each to have opening minimum of 800mm external and 750mm internal
- Single doors to have a minimum clear opening width of 500mm, with 830mm preferred
- Avoid use of revolving and heavy doors
- Glazed doors should be easily distinguishable
- Vision panel to give minimum visible zone of 900mm from floor level

Corridors

- Width without passing bays 1.8 metres, with passing bays 1.5 metres
- Unobstructed space for approaching doors
- Splayed or rounded corners
- Where narrow or L-shaped, wheelchair turning circle of 1.5 metres diameter
- Recessed appliances and fittings
- Deep pile carpets and slippery tiles should be avoided

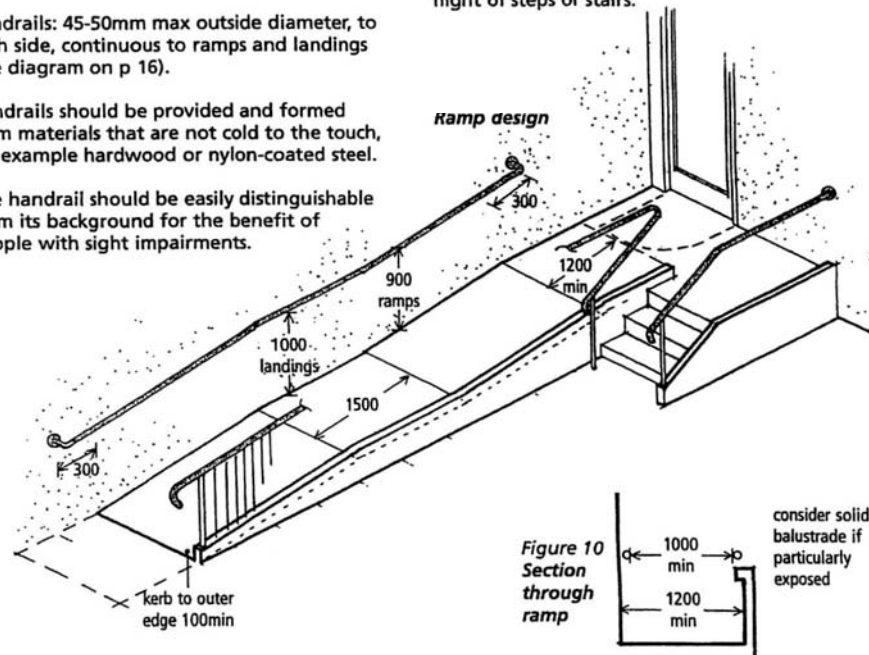
External ramps

To enable wheelchair and pushchair users to overcome changes of level, ramps and level access are required.

- Gradients: 1:20 is considered level and preferred; 1:15 is the maximum on ramps up to 10 metres long; 1:12 the maximum up to 5 metres long
- Length: 5-10 metres for a 1:15 to 1:20 gradient; less for a 1:12 to 1:15 gradient
- Width: 1.8 metres preferred; 1.2 metres minimum (1 metre unobstructed)
- Level platform 1.8 metres long at the beginning and end of the ramp
- On long ramps, a level platform of 1.5 metres minimum length at 10 metre intervals
- Non-slip surface
- Alignment of slopes straight, with turns on level landings
- Landings level, clear of any door swing
- Sides to have a raised kerb 100mm high where edges are open
- Handrails for ramps over 2 metres long: two levels, both sides, continuous; top of upper handrails 900mm above ramp surface and 1 metre above landing surface; top of lower handrails 650mm above ramp surface and 750mm above landing surface; to extend 300- 450mm beyond top/bottom of ramp with a closed end.

Figure 1 External Ramp

- Ramps are essential to enable wheelchair users and people with pushchairs to overcome level changes, but should be accompanied by steps for ambulant disabled people where steeper than 1:20.
- In Part M of the Building Regulations, a gradient of 1:20 is considered level, 1:15 is adequate and 1:12 is the absolute maximum. The preferred gradient is 1:15 or less. The steeper the ramp, the shorter the length between level landings (see *Figures 9 and 11*).
- Ensure 1000mm min clear width (see *Figure 10*).
- Handrails: 45-50mm max outside diameter, to each side, continuous to ramps and landings (see diagram on p 16).
- Handrails should be provided and formed from materials that are not cold to the touch, for example hardwood or nylon-coated steel.
- The handrail should be easily distinguishable from its background for the benefit of people with sight impairments.
- Avoid patterning which simulates steps, such as applied or inserted slip-resistant strips.
- Surface materials should be slip-resistant, firmly fixed and easy to maintain.
- In existing buildings where an extreme level change would require a long, circuitous ramp or where space is limited, a short-rise lift may be appropriate (see p 26 *Platform lifts*).
- It is not recommended to use corduroy tactile warnings to indicate ramps or lift, as these are properly used to indicate the start of a flight of steps or stairs.



External Ramps

- Recommended gradients 1:20 or 1:15 (only use 1:12 where it is not practicable to use preferred gradients)

Handrails

These must be securely fixed, and to help visually impaired people they should contrast strongly with their surroundings. See also under 'Ramps'.

- Minimum 45mm from side wall/obstacles
- 50mm above bracket
- Easy to grasp; avoid hard metal surfaces externally because of temperature change

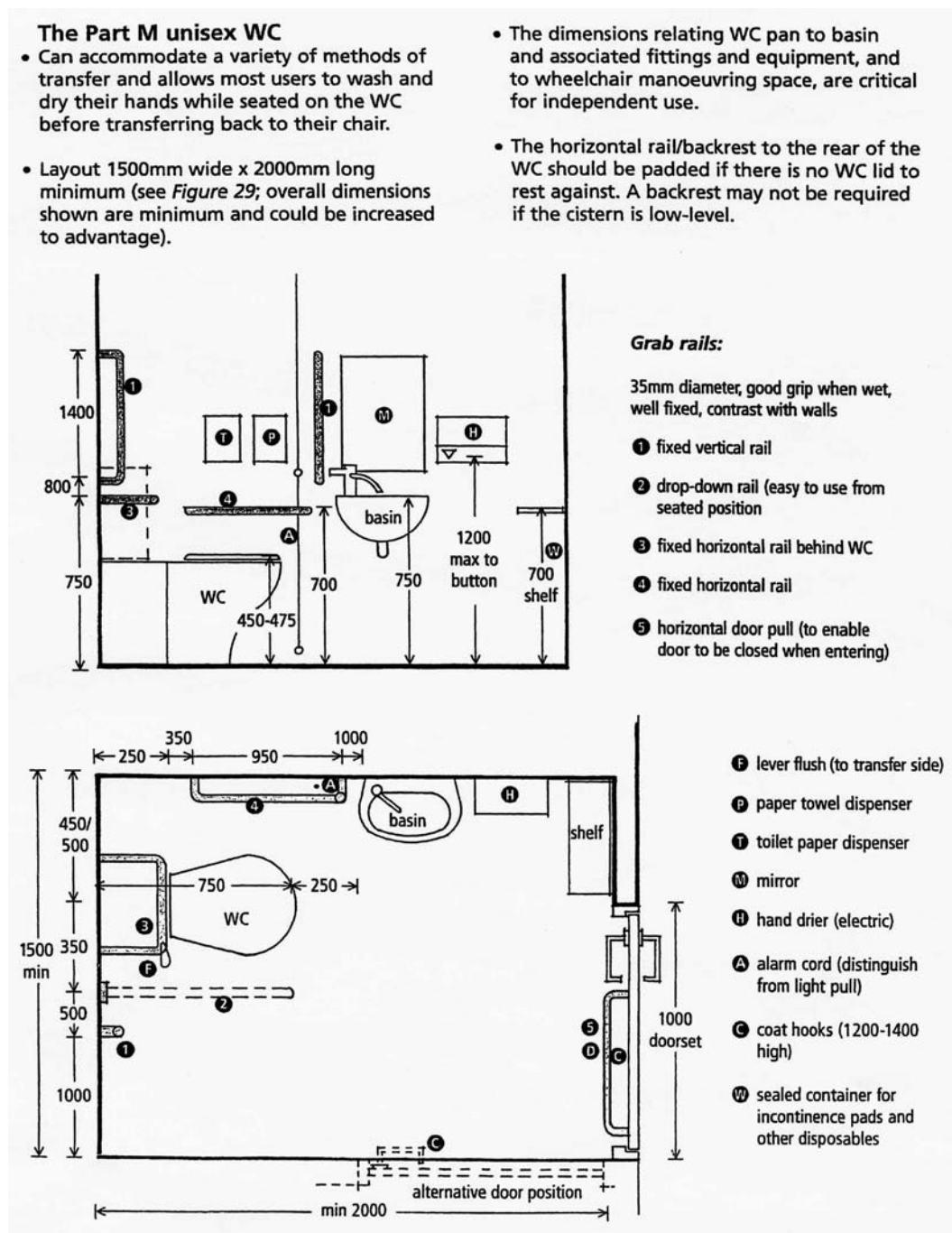
Toilets

They must be accessible, and dimensions within must be appropriate for independent use.

- Separate unisex toilet with minimum area of 1.5 metres x 2 metres
- Externally opening or sliding door with minimum width of 1 metre
- Emergency bell/alarm system including reset button
- Non-slip floor
- Unobstructed space of 750mm minimum alongside toilet for manoeuvring (from wall to edge of toilet pan)
- Colour contrasts between walls, main features, equipment and controls
- Located to provide the shortest, most direct route
- Provision at ground level and/or at the same level as other key facilities (entrances, receptions, waiting areas, refreshment facilities)

- Appropriate signing, with “disabled toilet” meaning one out of action and “accessible toilet” available for use by disabled people
- No baby feeding in toilets, for hygiene reasons

Figure 2 WC's



Lifts

- Minimum internal measurement of 1.1 metres wide by 1.4 metres deep
- Doors to have clear opening of 800mm minimum
- Controls halfway along side wall at 1.2 metres maximum height to the top button, with embossed digits desirable
- Braille and audio instructions regarding use of lift
- Adequate circulation space to lift door (approximately 1.5 metres turning circle or unobstructed space)

Steps

Width 1.2 metres minimum, preferably 1.8 metres

Goings of stairs minimum 280mm, risers a maximum 150mm

Edges clearly defined

Approaches clearly indicated

Hard-wearing and non-slip materials

Signposting

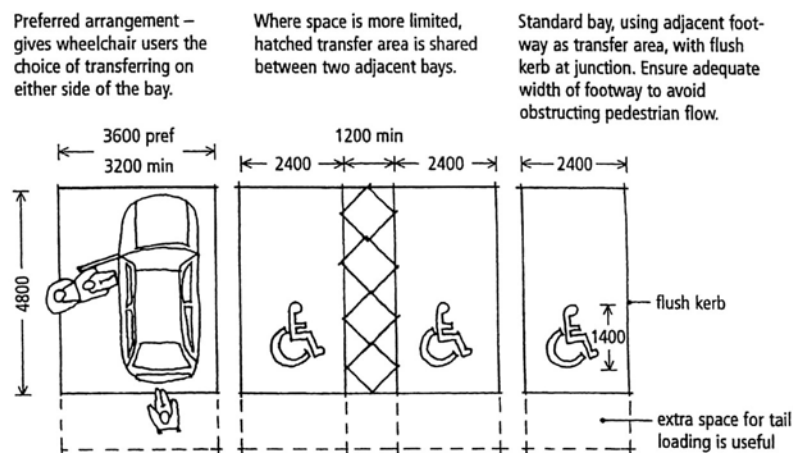
Information should be clear and unambiguous, sited at convenient heights and strongly contrasted so as to be easily distinguishable from the background.

Appendix 3: Car parking requirements for disabled people

Off-street parking:

- Provide larger parking bays which enable people with reduced mobility to get in and out of their vehicles with the minimum of effort, wide enough for car doors to be fully opened and long enough for tail loading
- Sign these accessible bays clearly from the car park entrance
- Site these bays close to the entrances, within 50metres if uncovered and 100metres if covered
- Identify these bays as being provided for disabled people only
- Kerbs should be dropped between the parking area and footways to buildings for wheelchair users
- Pedestrian routes should be level
- The car park surface should be smooth and even

Figure 3 Off-street Parking



Number of spaces recommended

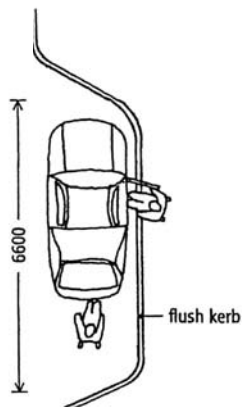
Where used for employees and visitors to **business premises**:

- In car parks with up to 200 bays, individual bays should be provided for each disabled employee plus 2 bays or 3% of the total capacity, whichever is the greater.
- In car parks exceeding 200 bays, 6 bays plus 2% of total capacity, should be provided for disabled people.
- Where used for **shopping, leisure and recreation**:
- In car parks up to 200 bays, 3 bays or 6%, whichever is the greater, should be provided for disabled people.
- In car parks exceeding 200 bays, 4 bays plus 4% of total capacity, should be provided for disabled people.

On-street parking:

Provide kerb-free level access parking bays with a transfer area defined by surfaces and/or textures, thus avoiding the need for painted lines on the road and pavement.

Figure 4 On-street Parking



Minimum recommended number of bays in off-street car parks		
Car park used for:	Car park size:	
	Up to 200 bays	Over 200 bays
Employees and visitors to business premises	Individual bays for each disabled employee plus 2 bays or 3% of total capacity, whichever is greater	6 bays plus 2% of total capacity
Shopping, recreation and leisure	3 bays or 6% of capacity whichever is greater	4 bays plus 4% of total capacity

(source: Reducing Mobility Handicaps, Institution of Highways and Transportation)

- Larger parking bays are required to allow people with reduced mobility to get into and out of their cars with the minimum of difficulty (see Figure 1).
- The location of accessible bays should be clearly signposted from the car park entrance.
- Bays should be identified as provision for disabled drivers or passengers only.
- Bays should be close to the entrances to the facilities the car park serves – within 50m if uncovered, 100m if covered.
- Bays need to be wide enough for car doors to be fully opened to allow disabled drivers and passengers to transfer to a wheelchair parked alongside and long enough to allow space for tail loading.
- Kerbs between the parking area and routes to buildings should be dropped to give access to wheelchair users.
- The car park surface should be smooth and even and free from loose stones.
- Layout of on-street parking bays is shown in Figure 2.
- All pedestrian routes within the car park should be level.

Grateful acknowledgement to Denbighshire County Council for figures 1 - 4