

Don't multiply your problems

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Ian Streets counts the cost of defective design

Good design is important regardless of the property, the product or the people using it. The additional factor to consider when designing access for disabled people is the possible cost of rectifying any errors ? and of dealing with any discrimination claims that may result.

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A new construction project or major renovation can involve an army of experts all working towards the same end but not necessarily aware of the fine detail that can make or break the best-laid plans.

You might have a lead architect, someone looking after construction design and management, a fire engineer, a mechanical and electrical expert and a landscape architect. They are all specialists in their respective disciplines, but they may not necessarily anticipate the impact of their individual contributions on the accessibility of the wider project.

The general principle of a tenfold increase in the cost of an error for each stage of a process is particularly applicable to building design. For every ?1 you might spend remedying a problem at the concept and preparation phase, you can expect to spend ?10 if it is not resolved by the time you get to scoping a project, and ?100 at the planning and pre-construction stage. Add another zero if it remains at the point of application and construction, and be prepared for that initial ?1 to have multiplied to ?10,000 if the failure to act early leaves you making alterations once the property is occupied and in use.

Access consultant

By appointing an access consultant to the team, you can ensure you get things right first time, avoiding the delays and cost that result from having to revise the work of one specialist and then making sure it fits with the plans of all the others. The savings in time and money are such that the investment will typically pay for itself.

At our consultancy About Access, we conduct appraisals to ensure that inclusive design is achieved throughout the construction process. We study accessibility provision from the earliest stage, looking at the plans and giving our advice at a point where corrections and improvements can easily be accommodated.



We use our experience and understanding to make recommendations that will assist a design team in incorporating features to improve access, and we also help them save time and money by avoiding costly corrections once construction is under way or even complete.

Our advice could be as simple as suggesting the provision of a meeting room on the ground floor, but even that can be a significant saving in an environment where having just a little knowledge can prove dangerous and expensive.

Ramp installation

We were called in by one client to advise on installing a new ramp for an existing emergency exit, which was to become an entrance for a member of staff who uses a wheelchair.

The client had already had to arrange for the previous ramp to be removed, redesigned and rebuilt, all at the architect's expense, because it was not suitable. We reviewed the design and made recommendations, and also pointed out areas that had not even been considered. It was clear that, without our input, the same failings would have happened again.

Another client engaged us to give design guidance on an accessible toilet for an improvement programme at a small church. We offered our advice, but the builders failed to stick to the plan and their completed job required substantial and expensive modifications.

But there is more to accessibility than complying with the law and avoiding the discrimination

against disabled people that could leave your business vulnerable to a claim. Think also about the cost of the business lost when a disabled person and the other members of their party decide to shop, eat or stay elsewhere because your facilities do not extend the welcome and level of care that they are used to.

The Department for Work and Pensions refers to the 'purple pound' to indicate the spending power of a disabled person and others in their household. Citing the [Family Resources Survey for 2012?13](#) , it calculates that the 12.2m households in the UK that include a disabled person have a combined income, after housing costs, of ?212bn.

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Further information

- Image ? About Access
- This feature is taken from the RICS *Building control* journal (September/October 2016)