

Significant oversights

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Simone West identifies 10 often overlooked items in new developments that can dramatically affect ease of access and use

[Approved Document M: Access to and use of buildings \(AD M\)](#) and parts of [Approved Document K: Protection from collision, falling and impact \(AD K\)](#) provide important sources of information and guidance for designers or clients, in England. Some buildings may need a different approach to that set out in ADM Volume 2 ? Buildings other than dwellings, which should be in the access strategy.

Certain small items are often missing from finished designs. Some of these may be expensive to change at a later date, meaning that clients can face large potential costs; others are not expensive to rectify, but can still present problems because building owners may not be aware of them until someone complains or takes action against them.

1. Slopes considered level

Many designers fail to recognise that a gradient between 1:21 and 1:60 is required to have 'level landings ... introduced at each 500mm rise of the access ... in all cases', according to AD M Volume 2 ? Buildings other than dwellings.

2. Handrail termination

Handrails should always be closed at the ends otherwise they can catch on clothing or handbags. They must also extend 300mm horizontally beyond the top and bottom step or ramp to ensure the user is aware that they are at the start or end. Figure 1 shows a handrail neither closed nor sufficiently extended.



Figure 1: Handrail that isn't closed or sufficiently extended

3. Invisible manifestation

Manifestation of glazing often does not 'contrast visually with the background seen through the glass, both from inside and outside, in all lighting conditions', [ADK points out](#), leaving visually impaired people open to humiliation and injury. The common etched finish often fails to contrast visually because of complex backgrounds, as in figure 2. In many cases, a two-tone etched effect would be more effective.



Figure 2: Etched finish on glazing that fails to contrast visually

5. Refreshment facility counters

ADM requires that a worktop, bar or shared refreshment facility is not more than 850mm high to make it suitable for a wide range of users. However, this is rarely so, due to the standard heights of units and fittings beneath them. An alternative would be the provision of two different counter heights.

6. Visual contrast of switches and sockets

ADM states that 'switches, outlets and controls will satisfy Requirement M1 if ... front plates contrast visually with their backgrounds'. This will help everyone, particularly the visually impaired.

7. Colostomy shelf

The accessible toilet is important for a wide range of users, including those whose needs may cause embarrassment in more public facilities. This shelf is an important place to put the equipment needed to empty or replace a colostomy bag safely; however, a study by Jo-Anne Bichard found that only 3% of accessible toilets contain colostomy shelves.

8. Visual contrast in toilets

White finishes are often used for toilets, meaning some users have to feel their way around. ADM requires that: 'the surface finish of sanitary fittings and grab bars contrasts visually with background wall and floor finishes, and there is also visual contrast between wall and floor finishes'.

9. Pipes in the transfer space

If service or soil pipes run at the rear of the 750mm-long transfer space, this will reduce the available room, making it impossible for a wheelchair user to transfer on to the toilet from the side.

10. Toilet lobbies

Privacy for toilets can be achieved by the suitable placement of walls or screens, but if a lobby is required then it should fulfil the criteria set out in section 3.16 of ADM. Remember that access to toilets is required by people:

- carrying bags or luggage
- with small children and pushchairs
- who use a walking aid
- who have limited upper body strength
- who use wheelchairs and wish to go in with friends or use an ambulant facility.

All of these users will find access difficult where internal lobbies do not comply with minimum standards.

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Further information

- Image ? Simone West
- Related competencies include [Legal/regulatory compliance](#)
- This feature is taken from the RICS *Building control journal* (April/May 2016)