

## **Introduction**

This is the tenth year of the award scheme. Its aim is to encourage good practice and give recognition to new developments or alterations to buildings or spaces which have given special consideration to the needs of disabled people.

Nominations were invited for schemes which had been completed during 2003. This was publicised through the local press, on the Council's website, the Wandsworth Access Association, the Council's Disablement Working Party, and Council planning and building control staff.

From the nominations received, nine were shortlisted for inspection. The assessments were carried out over two days by a panel of judges from Wandsworth Access Association, and planning and building control officers from the Council's Planning Service.

New non-residential buildings only merit an award where the requirements of Part M of the Building Regulations are exceeded. For alterations to existing buildings and small-scale improvements, the requirements of Part M should generally be met for an award to be given. Of the nine schemes inspected this year, two were for new buildings and seven were for alterations to existing buildings.

## **List of nominated schemes**

Alton Children's Centre, Ellisfield Drive, SW15  
Atkinson Morley Wing, St George's Hospital, SW17  
Barclays Bank, 376-8 Garratt Lane, SW18  
Patmore Estate, SW8  
National Opera Studio, 2 Chapel Yard, SW18  
Roehampton Library, Danebury Avenue, SW15  
Roehampton Base, Danebury Avenue, SW15  
St Cecilia's School, Sutherland Grove, SW18  
Swaffield School, Swaffield Road, SW18

## **Dates of the inspections**

The inspections were carried out on Thursday 22nd and Friday 23rd April 2004.

### **Assessment panel**

Fitzroy Beckford, Wandsworth Access Association  
Martin Ellacot, Wandsworth Access Association  
Jim South, Wandsworth Access Association  
Betty Price, Wandsworth Access Association  
Lionel Price, Wandsworth Access Association  
Zbig Blonski, Borough Planner's Service  
Steven Cox, Borough Planner's Service (22nd April)  
Johanna DeVilliers, Borough Planner's Service (23rd April)  
Sarah Dixey, Borough Planner's Service  
Bob Foulger, Building Control, Borough Planner's Service

## **Alton Children's Centre, Ellisfield Drive, SW15**

Access improvements mainly involve the installation of new ramps replacing steeper ones to facilitate access to the Centre and circulation around it, including to the children's playground. All users have to be registered before they can use the Centre. It is also used by Paddock and other special schools in the area for pre-booked sessions.

### **Access**

The ramp sloped gently and has been repositioned to lead up to the entrance of the building and to the playground. A swing in the playground is specifically designed for use by children in wheelchairs.

The Centre already offers level door thresholds, accessible toilet and a sensory playroom for children with disabilities. The nature of the client group means that children are accompanied all the time, including toilet visits. It was explained that overall, the facilities are geared towards children with behavioural rather than physical disabilities.

The toilet for disabled children had been installed some time ago, but it was found to be cluttered with usable space therefore being reduced. This could be overcome by re-thinking storage arrangements within the Centre.

The sensory playroom had also undergone refurbishment (although not part of the nominated work). Further training in its use is to be provided to staff, but the room already provides tactile surfaces, a musical waterbed, visual stimulation via lighting and fibre optic carpets. The main playroom offers flexible accommodation with different sized furniture.

There was no hearing loop or other means of hearing assistance. There was also no signage indicating facilities available for disabled people. Solutions to improve the fire exit were suggested.

### **Conclusion**

It is considered that the adaptation works merit an award and recognition for the Centre's efforts in providing play for children with special needs.

### **Atkinson Morley Wing, St George's Hospital, Blackshaw Road, SW17**

This comprises a new building to accommodate the relocated Atkinson Morley Hospital which provides neuroscience and cardiac services. As this is a new building, it should be fully compliant with the requirements of part M of the Building Regulations.

### **Access**

The threshold provides level access with contrasting paving tiles rather than tactile paving which can be uncomfortable for some ambulant disabled people. Outside seating is conveniently provided by the entrance. The entrance doors are clear glass set in the middle of a large glazed elevation. The panel considered that as it was difficult to distinguish the doors from the other glazing and there should be a sign to indicate that they are automatic doors. There was no other signage indicating facilities for disabled people either on the doors nor at the reception counter. There is no induction loop installed, although the hospital took advice on this and was told that this is not a requirement of Part M where the reception desk does not have a dividing screen. However there are plans in hand to provide an induction loop system. The reception counter was praised for providing a recessed area underneath which allows people in wheelchairs to manoeuvre right up to the counter. It was also noted that the fire evacuation arrangements and light switches had been placed at low level in the main reception area, and overall, there was good colour contrast with corners and handrails clearly defined. However, the public telephones in the reception, and throughout this wing, were not placed at a low enough level to be convenient for wheelchair users. This is a particularly important consideration in hospitals as mobile phones cannot be used.

Use of colour contrast was variable throughout this building - some waiting rooms had ticket machines and furniture which provided a clear contrast against the white wall, but this was not the case in other rooms. Most of the seating provided armrests which enable disabled people in getting up. The positioning of ticket and the queue numbering display was not conveniently placed in one instance. Throughout the hospital, most of the directional signs comprised a corporate colour scheme.

The food preparation and cooking therapy area included a cooker hob that was height adjustable.

The toilets presented no problems for wheelchair users, although it was noted that the pedal bin in one of them was foot operated, another of the toilets was commended by going beyond the requirements of Part M by providing a double swinging door.

The lift incorporated tactile buttons with audible announcements.

### **Conclusion**

Whilst high standards are expected in a new building, particularly one that is providing specialist healthcare to people with brain injuries and mobility problems, it is considered that, overall, the Atkinson Morley wing merits an award.

### **Barclays Bank, 376-8 Garratt Lane, SW18**

The works consist of internal alterations to provide a new automatic entrance door, internal lobby and internal ramp. Other adaptations (with induction loop) and low level console table with leaflets and paying in slips. A sign displaying facilities for partially sighted disabled people is displayed.

### **Access**

The automatic door was not working on the day of the visit but it was kept in the open position. The operating button was both tactile and conveniently sited. The door and ramp were both wide enough to allow for people passing. A different type of carpet had been laid on the ramp to assist the partially sighted. The ramp was guarded by handrails. There was good use of colour contrast in the choice of chairs, carpet and ramp colour. Thoughtful display of brochures at low level allows people in wheelchairs to reach them without assistance.

The general paying in counter is at a high level but in addition there is a separate low level counter.

It was felt that a bell was needed to attract attention to the low counter, as this is not staffed and the cashiers would not otherwise be looking in this direction.

The interview room was accessible and provided a portable induction loop, although some interference was experienced when tested. Though not in operation at the time of the site visit there is also a moving electronic display board with could be beneficial to some customers with a disability. There are two external cash machines (ATMs).

**Conclusion**

The assessment panel was impressed by the internal improvements to access. It was felt that ATMs could be improved, as these machines provide many functions outside normal banking hours. These should be placed at a lower level and recessed, but it was noted that the buttons were tactile and there was a facility to plug in headphones. It was also felt that the signs on the entrance pillar displaying facilities available for disabled people could be sited more prominently, separately to the banking facilities advertised. The provision of a ramp internally to overcome a change in levels and the manner in which it has been carried out is an excellent example of addressing this issue. Overall, the improvements carried out merit an award.

**Patmore Estate, SW8**

A new kitchen has been fitted to meet a wheelchair user's needs.

**Access**

The kitchen has completely redesigned to incorporate a low level sink, hob and work surface. The work surface is of a reduced depth which also enables everything to be within reach, including power switches which have been placed at low level. The taps are lever operated which are easier to use.

New open shelving means that food and utensils are within easy reach, whilst ensuring that the limited space is not compromised by open cupboard doors.

**Conclusion**

The adaptations have been carried out to meet the specific needs of the resident and demonstrate how simple adaptations and good creative thinking can make a real difference. Whilst a functional smoke alarm and low level switches, heating and boiler controls could have been installed at the same time with little extra effort, the works to the kitchen certainly merits an award.

**National Opera Studio, 2 Chapel Yard, SW18**

Total refurbishment of this building, originally a chapel and last used as a dance studio, to provide training and rehearsal facilities for opera students. Work began in 2002 and was completed in May 2003. The Arts Council, and Lottery which provide some funding for the operation of the facility, stipulate that premises should be accessible. A reserved parking space (non-enforceable) which is signed, is provided outside the entrance. The external change in level has been addressed by providing a continuous sloping forecourt with a flat platform outside the entrance door. Inside the building, the works include new doors, a platform lift, offices, rehearsal rooms, and toilets with showers, along with a common room and a library.

The studio employs six full time staff with visiting tutors, with twelve students and three pianists. The premises do not have a licence to hold public performances, although the main rehearsal hall has been used to host the Wandsworth Festival and local Chamber of Commerce events.

**Access**

The cobbles in Chapel Yard and immediately outside the entrance may be difficult for some disabled people to negotiate but this is part of the historic character and setting of the building. The solution of regrading the whole area to provide a gentle slope and a level entrance area rather than providing a ramp is appropriate to the character of the setting and the building. It was noted that the entryphone was at a high level, beyond the reach of most wheelchair users. However, the entrance door and lobby presented no problems, with flush access and plenty of manoeuvring space, including in front of the lift entrance.

Internal doors are all flush, with low level lever handles and wide enough to ensure that a wheelchair can pass through easily, although some doors are heavy. The accommodation, including office, library and rehearsal space could be negotiated easily in a wheelchair and there are low level light switches. Given the client group, no facilities for the hard of hearing have been provided. There are no specific facilities for the visually impaired, and decoration is generally monochrome with no colour contrast. The lift is particularly commendable. The hall is situated on the first floor. It was recognised that the constraints of the building would not enable an internal lift shaft of a conventional lift and this provides an exemplary example of providing lift access within the constraints of an existing building. Similarly, the toilet with shower provided for wheelchair users was good, and could be manoeuvred into easily.

**Conclusion**

The refurbishment works are impressive, given the constraints of the building and the site, and merit an award. This is an excellent example of the adaptation of an old building enabling ready access to all floors.

Consideration, however, should be given to lowering of the entryphone system.

**Roehampton Base, Danebury Avenue, SW15**

A former bank premises has most recently been converted to provide a resource centre for young people. Roehampton Base provides computers and internet access, careers and other advice, space for training and

information sessions, a juice bar and informal seating. There is an interview room on the ground floor and a toilet for wheelchair users provided on a half landing which involved providing the stairlifts.

### **Access**

The entrance doors are flush and of sufficient width. However, the juice bar was too high to be used by people in wheelchairs, and the bar stools did not have arm rests.

Use of colour contrast was good throughout the building with different areas defined by different floor finishes. However, the freestanding chairs around the computer tables did not have armrests which can assist a disabled person to stand. None of the tables were adjustable in height and a wheelchair user could not achieve comfortable access.

Though staff said that they had not had any disabled users it was surprising that they were not aware of what an induction loop was, despite a sign on the interview room door indicating that one had been installed. Nor were they trained in the operation of the stairlift.

### **Conclusion**

It was decided that the building did not merit an award despite high quality adaptations such as two stairlifts, and an overall high standard of facilities. The lack of training in the use of these and the induction loop, and the design and arrangement of the facilities did not offer full and convenient access and use of facilities by disabled people.

### **Roehampton Library, Danebury Avenue, SW15**

Whilst there was already level access to the library, work has been carried out to provide automatic doors at the entrance and between the adult and children's libraries, a low-level reception counter, induction loops, low bookshelves, new computers and desks, redecoration and a new toilet for people with disabilities.

### **Access**

There is a change in paving type outside the entrance can serve as a warning to visually impaired people that they are approaching a doorway. Signs had been placed on the entrance door, to indicate an automatic door and a warning sign that is glass. However, there was no signage indicating that induction loops or other facilities for disabled people are available.

The reception counter was low enough to be convenient for people in wheelchairs. But its accessibility is impaired by omitting a recessed area underneath which would have allowed a wheelchair user to sit flush to the desk. Provision is made for viewing text in a very large size and a special easy to use mouse is also provided.

Induction loops are provided at the counter in both the adult and children's libraries.

It was disappointing to find some staff were not trained in the use of induction loops and some appeared not to know that they existed. It was found that the computer monitors which were not of the flat screen type caused interference with the induction loop at the reception desk in the children's library.

Good colour contrast is demonstrated by the use of bright colours at the end of the bookshelves. Generally there is a good circulation space around the library, and the seating areas are generally well arranged with contrasting seating. However, not all chairs had armrests, which can assist some disabled people to stand.

None of the fire exits have level access, and as such the building may be considered to be inaccessible to wheelchair users because evacuation would rely on assistance. Suggestions to overcome this were offered to the librarian, and include the provision of an internal ramp, which is achievable in the given space. It is unfortunate that this was not addressed in the refurbishment work.

The computer area included one new desk that was height adjustable, which enables convenient use of a terminal by someone in a wheelchair.

The new toilet was difficult to access due to the design of the approach which is a narrow curved corridor. The inward opening of the access door to the toilets made it extremely difficult for a wheelchair to pass through easily. This could be overcome by rehanging the door to open on the other side, or open outwards. The toilet door handle is higher than that required under part M of the Building Regulations and the Council's Access Guidelines. Similarly, the toilet assistance rail is of the old type meaning that it cannot be pulled down easily, rather than the new type now required under part M. The hand dryer was not conveniently sited, although it was noted that the internal size and use of colour contrast is good. Overall, it was considered that the toilet had not been thought out properly in terms of its users. It is also of an inappropriate shape making it difficult to use. The location of a grab rail on the door made this difficult to use as well.

A public telephone for contacting Council services is provided in the entrance area. Its height was not adjusted during the refurbishment works and it is not readily accessible for a wheelchair user.

## **Conclusion**

The refurbishment works deserve an award as they do improve access for disabled people and overall provide an excellent example of the principles to the layout and facilities for disabled people. However the assessment panel recommend that the issues raised in its assessment are addressed.

### **St Cecilia's School, Sutherland Grove, SW18**

A new building to accommodate a secondary school for 11-18 year olds, with some outside recreational space and a car park. The building is mainly two storey with the main public areas such as the assembly/sports hall, drama studio and reception on the ground floor. The second floor will house non-teaching accommodation for the sixth form. The school's intake, which is currently only one year group, is primarily selective but with some local intake and includes ten pupils with physical or other impairment. Currently there are 250 children on the roll, but this will grow to 900 when fully occupied. The school's policy is that children with disabilities are always accompanied throughout the building. As a new building completed recently, the works must be fully compliant with Part M of the Building Regulations. With this in mind, the assessment panel were also looking for adaptations or other examples of good practice that had gone beyond these requirements.

## **Access**

The parking area had been well laid out with colour contrasting kerbs and dedicated parking bays closest to the entrance.

The entrance was flush and the reception areas allowed plenty of room for wheelchairs to manoeuvre, including in front of the lift. The reception desk was at low level, but unfortunately did not have a recess underneath to enable wheelchair users to position close enough to the desk to sign anything, including the visitor record. There was no induction loop, either in the reception or in the public hall. Although this is not a requirement of Part M, it could be conceived that some visitors or parents visiting the school could be hearing aid wearers who would benefit from this.

Throughout the school a decision has been taken not to include any signage. Whilst pupils may quickly learn to orientate themselves, this makes the building difficult to negotiate for visitors, who would visit the building to see performances or for parents' evenings. Orientation is not helped by the uniform colour scheme throughout the school. There could have been signs by the lift or reception for example.

There was impressive use of colour contrast, including the carpet edge, corners and corridor handrails, as well as the railings in the recreational area which can assist visually impaired people move around the building.

Although the internal doors are the minimum width required under Part M, they could have been improved by a better choice of hinge which would have allowed an extra 10cm of clearance. These doors are not automatic and are operated by a swipe card.

All fire escapes on the ground floor have level access.

The lift is satisfactory, but could have been bigger to enable a wheelchair to turn round rather than have to enter or leave backwards. It also required the door opening button to be continually depressed to avoid the doors closing whilst a person is manoeuvring in and out, which makes it awkward to use. The stairwell and staircase provided good colour contrast.

Although the school does not have a lunch break, the refectory provides a large room to relax and eat in, in the shorter breaks, with flexible seating arrangements and freestanding furniture.

The sports hall is intended to become the main hall and performance area and has been acoustically treated to accommodate public address and music performances. A public address system is to be installed. Currently school assemblies take place in the drama studio, which is not yet fully equipped. This has freestanding chairs, but without armrests which can assist disabled children, and has a ramp with railings leading to the upper level.

The toilets, showers and changing rooms were of a satisfactory standard, although it was considered that better use of colour contrast could have been made.

The science room, craft and the food technology (kitchen) teaching areas were disappointing in that the facilities could not be used by wheelchair users as the desks, work surfaces and sinks were not adjustable in height. The use of personal laptops and projectors in the standard classrooms could benefit children with a visual impairment through adjustment of the font type and size.

## **Conclusion**

It was felt that an award should be given in recognition of the potential benefits that are available to disabled people in this building. However, there was some disappointment that important aspects, which are included as good practice in the Council's Access Guidelines, had been overlooked.

### **Soundfield System example installed in Swaffield School, Swaffield Road SW18**

The Soundfield is a wireless, lightweight amplification system for use in classrooms and other spaces for pupils/users. The teacher wears a wireless microphone and the sound is amplified via speakers placed on all four sides of the room. A beneficial spin off is that the system improves the "acoustics" of the space for the benefit of all users and reduces teacher stress as they do not have to keep raising their voice to overcome unsatisfactory acoustics. All primary schools with the exception of one (which is due to be carried out shortly) have had systems installed. In the early phases of the programme systems are installed in 4 to 6 classrooms at a time. The long-term objective is to have a system in every teaching space. Two secondary schools will also receive systems for their halls.

### **Access**

In the last year, the Swaffield School provided two classrooms with the System which provides amplification to children with hearing impairments. It has more recently been installed in the hall and reception classroom. The staff explained that the system is targeted at children with glue ear, and that the amplified system allows children to hear the teacher clearly from all parts of the room. Its main benefit will be as a teaching aid. One teacher has specific responsibilities for access issues, including this system, and training for teachers in use of this system is due to begin imminently.

Whilst the system does not cut out background noise, and is not targeted at hearing aid wearers, the amplification enables children with glue ear, or similar impairments to feel included as they are free to circulate away from the source of the sound. It can also be seen to be beneficial in old school buildings which tend to have high ceilings.

There is no induction loop installed.

### **Conclusion**

The installation of the Soundfield System and the efforts made by staff to implement it throughout the school should be applauded. Its main purpose however appears to be as a general teaching aid and there is no clear benefit specifically for pupils with a hearing impairment. As such an award is not considered appropriate.