

Grants for Access Improvement Projects

Wandsworth Council is committed to improving accessibility for people with disabilities, our planning policies encourage the provision of access and facilities in new developments and in existing buildings. In addition there is a significant need for accessibility improvements to existing buildings and facilities used by the public and operated by the voluntary sector.

There is often a lack of funding to carry out any access improvements and these schemes are generally not eligible for assistance under other grant schemes.

What sort of projects are eligible? Improvements to existing buildings which benefit people with any form of disability are eligible. These could include the provision of ramps - both internal and external; alterations to doors - e.g. widening of doors or the installation of automatic doors; the installation of a toilet which is fully accessible to people with disabilities; the installation of a lift; the provision of an induction loop; works to improve colour contrast to benefit people who are visually impaired.

All works must fully comply with Part M of the Building Regulations please see http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_buildreg/documents/page/odpm_breg_025494.hcsp and the Council's Access Guidelines Buildings and Spaces for People with Disabilities which can be accessed at <http://www.wandsworth.gov.uk/Home/EnvironmentandTransport/PlanningService/UnitaryDevelopmentPlan/plsupguidance.htm>

Improvement works which involve internal alterations will only be eligible if these are consistent and compatible with the external access arrangements for example proposals to carry out internal improvements for wheelchair users will only be eligible if the building is, or is made, accessible to such users.

Who can get a grant? Grants are available to voluntary non-profit making organisations in respect of their premises owned on a freehold or long lease basis with a minimum of five years left on the lease.

Grants are discretionary - your project is not automatically eligible for a grant simply because it proposes access improvements. Grant availability will depend on the number of schemes competing for the available budget.

Priority will be given to: a) cases where other sources of funding have been fully explored and/or schemes that are otherwise unlikely to be implemented; b) work which will complement and enhance the value of other measures to improve facilities for people with disabilities which have already been implemented; c) premises which attract a large number of users.

How do I apply?

It is a good idea to discuss your project with John Webb - Policy and Information Group Telephone 020 8871 6645 to see whether you may qualify.

It is also a good idea to discuss the proposed works with Eric Davies Building Control: Telephone 020 8871 7616 who will be able to offer advice on Part M of the Building Regulations and how best these regulations can be met.

If planning permission is required for the work you will need to obtain this before submitting your grant application. Once a suitable scheme has been put together you should obtain three competitive quotations for the works and submit these together with a copy of the planning permission and any other relevant approvals. If the access improvements are part of a wider scheme of building works, the costs for the access improvements should be separately identified.

When the three quotations and any necessary planning permissions have been obtained, the application form should be completed and sent together with plans, and photographs where relevant, showing the works to be carried out.

How much will the grant be? Normally you will be offered up to 50% of the "eligible costs" with a £25,000 maximum to the grant aid. Eligible costs are for the actual access improvement works and not routine maintenance, conversion, alteration or modernisation which may be going on at the same time. Fees are also included as eligible costs.

A formal offer of a grant will normally be made by letter within one month of receiving the application and full details. You should not start work until you have received and formally accepted this written offer. The grants are time limited for six months. If the approved works are not carried out within this period then the grant offer will lapse.

Grants are made to the applicant and not to contractors, and are usually paid when the work is satisfactorily completed. This normally takes ten working days after inspection of the works.

Who else can help? Grants for commercial premises are dealt with by the Council's Economic Development Office: Telephone John Ruske 020 8871 7031.

For advice on anything in this leaflet contact Policy and Information Group, Wandsworth Council, Borough Planner's Service, the Town Hall, Wandsworth High Street, London SW18 2PU, or ring 020 8871 6645.