

Weymouth & Portland Access Group

"Making Weymouth & Portland Accessible to All"

RTPI / RIBA South West Branches Conference Securing Good Design.

July 2017

Since 1989 Weymouth and Portland Access Group (a Registered Charity) has encouraged improvements in accessibility to goods, services, and the environment generally, for people with disabilities, for elderly people, and for those caring for young children. We find that we also have to continually campaign to safeguard existing services. We find that our efforts also help the public in general whether they are local residents or visitors.

We have close contact with Weymouth and Portland Borough Council and Dorset County Council and links with Weymouth Civic Society and the many Parks and Gardens Friends' Groups which work with and extend upon the work of the Borough Council's Parks Team. We are trying to achieve a more constructive rapport with the Weymouth and Portland Chamber of Commerce, Weymouth BID, and Weymouth and Portland Tourism Partnership

There are many other voluntary local groups and organisations working to help people with disabilities, and their carers. There are also some inspiring local initiatives to raise the independence and opportunity of people with disabilities. Given that this conference is being held at the National Sailing Academy it is particularly relevant to mention their "Sailability" course. As the base for the 2012 Sailing Olympics and Paralympics we applaud the National Sailing Academy for its efforts to increase accessibility to water sports.

As well as representing the interests of residents we work to improve accessibility for visitors. The Weymouth and Portland area receives a very large number of tourists and visitors, in part because of its central location on the Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Coast. The tourism profile of the Isle of Portland is increasing with the recent enlargement of Portland Port to receive more and larger cruise ship visits, the opening of a D-Day Visitor Experience, and the enlargement of the Portland Quarries Nature Park, in addition to its many established attractions. There are also plans for 2 major visitor attractions of national and international interest, the MEMO and Jurassica Projects.

Accessibility as a Material Planning Consideration

I have heard accessibility regarded as a "Building Regulations consideration". It clearly is, as set out in Part M, but is also a material planning consideration. Many councils, including Weymouth and Portland Borough Council, pushed for the provision of "Lifetime Homes" as proposed following studies by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Lifetime Homes were removed through the Housing Standards Review and consequently removed as a Main Modification to the adopted Local Plan in February 2015. Policy ENV12(ii) of the West Dorset, Weymouth and Portland Local Plan now states that "The Councils will work with stakeholders and the local community to develop an approach for adaptable and accessible homes in accordance with the latest Government Guidance". The Councils are currently reviewing the Plan and Chapter 23 of the Issues and Options Document asks questions on the local application of the enhanced national standards.

With such enhanced standards the aims are that homes would be more easily accessible. If the housebuilding industry were to gear itself widely to adopt specifications which improve accessibility and adaptability it should cost little if any more than existing housebuilding but

would save substantially on the considerable public and private funds spent when homes need to be adapted for occupancy by a disabled person. Also important is the concept of “visitability”, enabling people with disabilities to visit friends and family.

Air Quality

Poor air quality is harmful to health. Poor air quality particularly impacts on children, on the elderly, and people with disabilities, can be severely disabling, and can cause early deaths.

A recent RTPI report identified that funding and staff shortages are preventing councils from implementing strong air quality measures and policies. Better practice on this issue is apparent in Scotland. There is current discussion on the extent to which Indoor Air Quality may be a material planning consideration and there are proposals to include IAQ level requirements in the forthcoming London Plan.

Noise

Noise nuisance has long been recognised as a material planning consideration. Its adverse effects on living standards and human health can be debilitating and seriously harmful, and its impact is often greater on people with disabilities.

Some National Statistics

It has recently been estimated that there are about 13 million UK residents with disability. 1.8 million have an accessible housing need. (Habinteg)
Approximately 4.2 million people with some disability live in poverty.

Conclusions

There needs to be more awareness of the restrictions on access and independence for the growing number of people with disabilities, and for the value of easier access generally.

Local Authority Planners and Building Control Officers are clearly under huge pressure but need to keep in mind, and adequately liaise, on issues of accessibility. Where the Building Regulations are dealt with outside the control of Local Authorities the same considerations should be applied. The 2017 Government White Paper “Fixing our broken housing market” refers to the need for more understanding of the demand for accessible housing and the Neighbourhood Planning Act, 2017, requires local authorities to address housing needs that result from old age or disability.

The UK Government needs to step up to the mark in protecting its population and visitors from unacceptable levels of air pollution. The recent Government consultation in response to EU legislation was inadequate. The focus is on Nitrogen Dioxide from diesel emissions but there are a wide range of other pollutants in the atmosphere including petrol emissions and particulates from tyre and brake wear, plus causes that are not traffic related.

I recommend that you refer to the [Habinteg-accessible-housing-policy-update-2017](#).

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