



The clock is ticking . . .

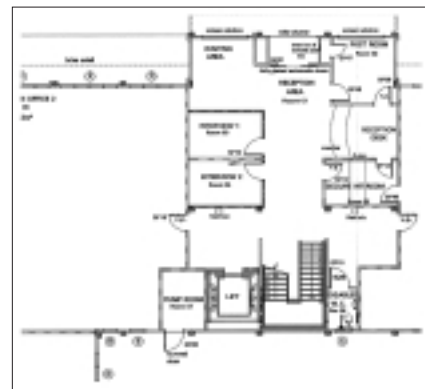
Anyone undertaking a construction project should want to ensure that their building will not fall foul of the duties imposed on Service Providers and Employers by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

All organizations offering a service to the public are required to remove or alter physical barriers that may impede access to a building. If this is not practical they will have to find a way of providing the service by other means. This is one of the more onerous duties of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 coming into force in October 2004.

At the moment, current building regulations fall short of providing for all the needs of people with disabilities. Just because a new building is constructed to current Building Regulations will not mean it is barrier free. This occurs particularly in design & build projects where many buildings are not being constructed to the Code of Practice BS8300: 2001 – ‘Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people’.

The Daniel Connal Partnership was commissioned by a local authority client to carry out a plan audit of a design and build contractor’s proposals for the construction of a new 2800m² local government building.

The client wanted to establish how the contractor was proposing to meet the Employer’s Requirements in providing a building with unrestricted access and ease of use by employees and visitors with a wide range of needs, including those with mobility and sensory impairments.



Reducing the likelihood of legal action

The audit survey was carried out comparing the design against criteria laid down in the British Standard *Design of Buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people* (BS 8300). The survey identified areas where the client might be put at risk from action by a disadvantaged user.

Once data was collected, a straightforward report was put together detailing the issues that needed to be addressed with advice on how these issues might be overcome.



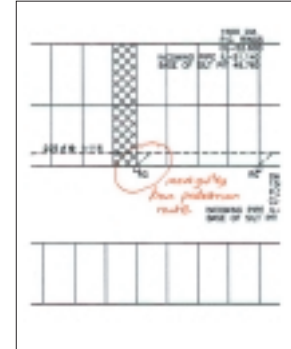
Just in Time Problem Solving

By examining the Contractors proposals a large number of potential problems were identified at design stage, enabling physical barriers to be designed out, rather than the prospect of them having to be removed retrospectively and resulting in unnecessary and extra cost.



Improving Health and Safety

The audit was also able to point out potential health and safety hazards to able-bodied persons, as well as to those with disabilities. For example, the location of a road gully adjacent to pedestrian routes in a car park. This was easily changed at design stage but would have been very expensive to re-locate after completion.

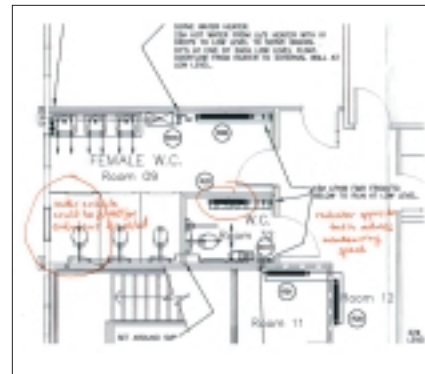


Increasing Asset Values

Getting it right first time has enabled the client to obtain a building that will be more attractive to potential occupiers. This in turn is likely to be reflected in its value for maximizing rental or sale potential and its asset valuation.

The Outcome

- The Contractor was able to incorporate improvements to the design of the building with minimal financial effect.
- The client was able to insist on certain features for compliance with the British Standard, avoiding expensive alterations later.
- The future occupiers and visitors will enjoy a fully accessible building with easily used facilities.
- The proposed managers of the new facility are to be made aware of the importance of good housekeeping and maintenance for continued accessibility and for the necessity of developing management plans to deal with certain disability issues.



Conclusion

Our approach to the audit embraces the principles the Practice adopts on all its projects:

- Pro-active advice
- Practical approach to problem solving
- Lateral thinking
- Commercial awareness
- Technical expertise
- Detailed knowledge

With the benefit of these principles the client was able to work out a strategy to reduce risks of legal action and improve the accessibility of their new building.

