

Opening Doors Across London

Access to Buildings: The Work of The City Bridge Trust



Introduction

‘Access for all’ is a modern idea in which everyone, regardless of age, race, religion, creed, or disability, has a right to belong and contribute towards society.

‘Access for all’ is an old idea that finds expression in the origins of The City Bridge Trust. Bridges across the Thames gave Londoners easy access to both sides of the river and transformed their lives.

Old and new are combined in The City Bridge Trust’s work on Access to Buildings, which forms part of its Access for Disabled People’s Programme. Through physical access to buildings, disabled people can obtain access to wider opportunities. What is good for disabled people is good for everyone, so that efforts to improve buildings help to transform society.

This publication is in two parts. The first records the achievements of people who have been through the process of making their buildings accessible for disabled people, and notes the difficulties they faced on the way. The second part is written for people who are going through the process of improving access to their buildings and makes suggestions about how they might reduce the difficulties.

The material reported here is based on an evaluation of The City Bridge Trust’s programme on Access to Buildings. We studied 22 of the 322 grants that the Trust has made since the beginning of the programme in 1995. It was clear that there was much to be learned from the programme that could be useful to other people who wanted to make their building accessible. The City Bridge Trust thought so too, and is making the learning from the programme public.

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Part 1 What can be achieved in making buildings accessible

Achievements of the grants

All the organisations that received grants from The City Bridge Trust reported significant improvements in access to their buildings. The improvements were appreciated by disabled people and other service users. In most cases disabled users now have access equal with non-disabled people to premises, and can participate with dignity in the activities provided. Some of the organisations received awards for their access design.

The 'wow' factor

Some people said that the improvements had transformed the organisation and they were really proud of their new building:

'The building really has a 'wow' factor...the ethos of the building is that this must always be a safe environment, and this has been achieved.' **Salvation Army**

'We are delighted with the building and the fact that the heritage value has been maintained. The plans were great – the vision for the project is really sound. When we show people around they go "Wow, that's amazing!".' **The Roundhouse**

'The Synagogue has become the "Jewel in Crown" in the Jewish community. We are seen as a leader in access: we are one of only two Synagogues in the country that has a lift that is compliant with the Sabbath.' **Barnet and District Affiliated Synagogue Charitable Trust**

'What we have ended up with is something we are incredibly proud of...the building project has allowed us to open the Centre to a more diverse audience group than ever before and heighten the qualitative enjoyment of each visit.' **Camden Arts Centre**

Many of the people who had made their buildings accessible felt that this was one of the best things that they had ever done.

Disabled people take part

We found that the new access arrangements enabled disabled people to take part. Here are two comments that were typical of many:

'We now have access for everyone through the main door... it is brilliant... All the groups like using the loo now.' **St Faiths Community Hall**

'We now have a very welcoming building that meets the needs of both staff and visitors.' **Bromley Voluntary Sector Trust**

Here is a striking example from the Unicorn Theatre. A staff member explained:

'Being in our own purpose-built and fully accessible building has allowed us to undertake significant development of our provision for children with sensory impairments. Unicorn Theatre is one of the first children's theatre to provide integrated BSL interpretation.'

'One of the problems with traditional interpretation is that the signer is at the side of the stage, which makes it difficult for the audience to watch the signer and actors at the same time. The Unicorn Theatre has started to bring the signer into the actual action of the show for its productions; the interpreter therefore becomes 'central to the performance'.'

The difference this makes is:

'Extraordinary. Signing becomes an integral part of the performance. There is also the huge benefit of raising the profile of BSL as a language amongst hearing children.'

Not all organisations kept good records of their users, which made it difficult for us to assess whether the building attracted new disabled users. All the people we interviewed said that the quality of participation by existing disabled users had improved.

'When the disability legislation came in, a lot of people said, "we don't need to improve access because we don't have disabled people using the building". But the response is "you don't have disabled people using the building because you don't have disability access". It doesn't mean that because you don't see them they are not there and in need of your services.'

Migrants Resource Centre

In the Furzedown Project for example, wheelchair users no longer had to go home during sessions to use their own toilet or suffer the indignity of being lifted onto the toilet in full view of fellow members. Burgh House wheelchair users no longer had to enter the building down a rear alley by the dustbins, and those at Camden Arts Centre did not have to endure being carried up a flight of stairs. The Good Shepherd Mission reported how a mother of a teenage daughter with limited mobility commented that the entrance ramp made the building welcoming to disabled people rather than making them feel they were just tolerated. She also noted how older people who were struggling with the stairs were now finding it much easier to move around the building.

A resource for all

What is good for disabled people is good for everyone:

'If you get (access) right for disabled people, you get it right for the community.'

'We have a safer building, users feel more comfortable.'

'Things being more accessible make it easier for all of us.' **Battersea Central Mission**

'Health and Safety is greatly improved.' **Barnet & District Affiliated Synagogue**

'A nasty route has now become a nice route.' **Burgh House Trust**

Organisations recognised benefits for themselves, whether it was in being able to plan their activities and taking access for granted, letting their premises out to other groups and being more attractive to their funders because they were available to the whole community, rather than just to sections of it.

Learning for non-disabled people

We found much evidence that learning about the needs of disabled people and adjusting policies accordingly came about as a direct result of improving access arrangements. Some projects described how they are much more aware of disabled access when planning, or in their day to day activities:

'When we are planning new projects we always have disabled users in mind. In our ICT suite we have made sure that at least one of the tables is a variable height table, in the science lab in the school there is also a variable height table.' **London Muslim Centre**

'The grant has... raised awareness at the LSO of all of the issues surrounding disability, impairment and access, and has really helped disability awareness to become something that is thought about by everyone in the organisation and not just by those who are directly affected by or involved in it.'
LSO, St Luke's

An advice centre reported how disability was much higher up the agenda for the organisation. Practices had changed as a result. As well as advice sessions set up by appointment, the centre ran an emergency drop in session four mornings and one evening each week. Staff were much more aware of making sure that disabled people, people with small children, and older people who could not queue were given priority.

What spoils access

People who had been through the process of improving their building told us that eight commonly occurring problems tended to make the building less accessible than they had hoped. These were:

- Poor advice on access arrangements
- Low quality of building work and architectural advice
- Poor decisions made about fixtures and fittings
- Problems with equipment suppliers
- Poor management of facilities
- Problems with maintaining access facilities
- Signage
- External problems that could not be resolved by the organisations themselves.

Poor advice on access arrangements To take poor quality access advice first, advice was so poor in two cases that the facilities introduced were unsafe. In one building the installation of tactile corduroy paving on a step in the middle of a flight gave rise to a potentially dangerous situation for someone with visual impairments. In another building, the access ramp was found to be too steep to be used easily and safely.

Sometimes, the improvements did not meet Building Regulations. One organisation had kitchen units installed at a slightly higher than the maximum level recommended by Building Regulations, and there is no space under any of the units for a wheelchair user to get close enough to the work surface when preparing food, again a feature recommended by Building Regulations. In another building, the ramps to the front entrance took up virtually the entire width of the pavement, so that other pavement users had to cross over to the opposite side of the road, and the gradient of one of the ramps was slightly steeper than that recommended by Building Regulations.

Poor quality of building work and architectural advice In one organisation, a back door was installed so that people could not automatically enter it, and had to call staff to open it from the inside. Another organisation found that it could not get wheelchairs through the main entrance at the front of the building, so

wheelchair users had to use the sports area. The architect did not identify this problem during the design or building stage.

‘The architect installed a curved staircase, as opposed to the square one originally envisaged.

Although more aesthetically pleasing, and space-saving, it had serious implications for people carrying things on the stairs, or for emergency evacuations. We had to absolutely override him.’

Barnet and District Affiliated Synagogue Charitable Trust

Poor decisions made about fixtures and fittings Recipients did not always make the best decisions about fixtures and fittings. Quite often, there was conflict between aesthetic design and accessibility. In one case for example, the taps looked ‘wonderful’ at the start but looked ‘shabby’ after three year’s use. Shaped as a lever, they were too short and pulled upwards so were difficult to turn off. This carried the risk of flooding and

water wastage. The floor to ceiling mirrors caused a problem for people with visual impairment until they were resolved with frosted circle lines. Similarly, the low level of lighting in the downstairs areas created problems for people with visual impairment. Certain doorways were very dark. Another organisation bought chairs for the clients’ waiting area all with the same height and none with armrests.

Problems with equipment suppliers Some organisations experienced problems with equipment suppliers. One organisation bought a stair lift only to discover that it could not accommodate electric wheelchairs weighing over 230kg, even though the specification detailed the need to carry electric wheelchairs. We found two occasions where electric wheelchair users were unable to get from downstairs back to the main exit.

Poor management of facilities We found examples of poor management of the access facilities. There was one case where an accessible WC was being used to store cleaning materials. In another, an emergency pull-cord in the WC was tied up out of reach of someone using a wheelchair. We considered this would make it impossible to reach if someone had fallen to the floor when transferring between his or her wheelchair to the toilet itself. And in a third case, there would be no one present or within earshot to hear WC alarm systems if activated.

Problems with maintaining access facilities Maintenance problems with equipment restricted access in some cases. In one organisation, space limitations allowed only a platform lift to be installed as opposed to a passenger one. The lift had doors that open outwards and very slowly, unlike the faster automatic sliding doors in passenger lifts. Users had a tendency to push the doors and break the mechanism, even though there were notices warning against this.

Signage Common problems with signs were about position, location, size and colour. Inevitably, organisations tended to postpone fitting signage until the building was re-opened for business (and were often following professional advice that they should do this), but then other priorities took over, or funding ran out, or the organisation simply did not get around to installing signs.

External problems that could not be resolved by the organisations themselves Some problems were outside the control of the organisation. An organisation may have resolved access issues inside the building, but disabled people may have found it difficult to get to the building in the first place. We found some instances where a lack of disabled access parking at or close to a building proved to be a real problem to users. In other cases the surrounding geography presented

‘The whole process was stressful. It is a lot of money to raise, a lot of money to spend, and you have to make sure that you have something that has quality and value at the end of it, that the finished product is serviceable, and you’ve put in place a programme that you had the vision for.’
The Salvation Army

problems, for example a steep gradient on the approach to the building. The heritage value of the local area sometimes gave rise to access problems, for example being sited on a cobbled street in a conservation area or being unable to install signage in the most appropriate place because of planning restrictions.

Help for these type of problems is at hand – in Part 2.



Camden Arts Centre

The Centre always did its best to welcome disabled people, but the layout of the building made it extremely difficult. The building was inaccessible to anyone in a wheelchair. These problems were solved by the refurbishment.

During the early stages of the refurbishment, things went well. The access audit was a 'useful exercise'. A senior management team was appointed to oversee the work, and included a 'project champion'. A building sub-committee was also formed comprising the chair, treasurer and two other trustees, one of whom was also a senior architect and the other an artist. Architects were appointed through competitive tender and this proved a good appointment despite 'disputes along the way about design and costs'.

Problems arose with the building contractors. They were subject to a takeover during the work and this affected their ability to deliver on time. This led to cost overruns and this was made worse by the discovery of structural problems in the building. The

project went over budget by £400,000 and took 18 months, rather than the year predicted by the contractors.

Happily, the project was well managed and this helped to contain the stress of it all:

'We had a committed group of trustees who kept an eye on the works, and were able to sort out problems. Having an architect as a trustee was especially useful as he understood the use of the building.'

It was crucial to have a project manager:

'It was a big undertaking, what a lot of people don't realise is that if you are carrying on your artistic programme, you are suddenly working in an area that is not your expertise, and doubling your workload.'

Reflecting on the process, the Centre recognised the importance of 'keeping up staff morale, keeping them busy, keeping the organisation visible, and planning for the re-opening'.

Looking back on what they had learned, the Centre said that it is always important to plan for contingencies and to always assume that budgets will be too small and work will take longer than you think. They also suggested an access audit at the end of the building project and to monitor how people use the spaces and facilities. Above, all they recommended to be open-minded and ready to adapt to whatever happens.

Part 2 For those who want to make their buildings accessible

So you've identified the need for improvements or refurbishments to your building to make access better for disabled people. You have an idea of what it will cost and maybe where the money is coming from. You might even have plans or drawings to tell you what it will look like.

But what is it really like to go through a building project? What are the problems and pitfalls? How do you avoid making a complete bollards of everything? Will it turn out like you thought?

In this publication we have put together advice, information, and stories from people who have actually been through the same process that you may be going through.

This isn't written by professionals. This isn't a clever report or a technical manual or a patronising 'how to do it' book. This is based on the experience of people like you, namely people who wanted to make their building accessible for disabled people. The people had successfully applied to the Access to Buildings Programme, which The City Bridge Trust has run since 1995.

We have sorted the learning into sections:

Planning the work

Managing the work

Legislation and regulation

People you need and people you meet

Common features

Pitfalls and positives

Support and advice

In reality, life – and building works – are never that logical so the sections are simply an attempt to put the information into some sort of order. We were going to label the sections: the vital bits, the boring bits the worrying bits and the fun bits, but soon realised that no bit was mutually exclusive of the other. So we didn't.

Section 1: Planning the work

or If it can go wrong it surely will...

Appointing people

Unless you are very lucky – or extremely clever – don't make the mistake of thinking that you can do this on your own.

It's likely that you will need an array of 'experts' – access auditor, architect, surveyor and project manager to name but a few. Some organisations are blessed with a board of trustees or a committee who between them have the requisite skills, but it is more likely that you will need to find people from outside your organisation to help you. You may already have a relationship with such a person or you may have to form a new relationship with someone unknown.

'It is important to have a good architect, though

I wasn't impressed by some of his subcontractors.'

Bromley Voluntary Sector Trust

Tender procedures

You may find that it can be difficult to attract contractors to do refurbishment work – especially if it is a relatively small or awkward job. Choose those you wish to invite to tender carefully. If possible seek recommendations from people who know or may have used them in the past. Contact them first before you send out the tender documentation to see if they are able and willing to submit a tender. Many builders simply do not respond to a tender invitation arriving out of the blue.

‘We put the works out for competitive tender, but the firm that won the bid had worked for us beforehand. They won it fairly and squarely but that again helped.’

The Good Shepherd Mission

Make sure the tender documentation is clear and concise but contains all of the information needed to enable them to submit an accurate and priced-up tender. Treat all of your tenderers the same – if you are having a viewing of the site it might be an idea to have all of the tenderers there at the same time so they all get exactly the same information as

each other. If that is not possible make sure any additional information you give to one tenderer is given to all. There is an alternative view that you should keep all tenderers separate from each other to avoid collusion and if you suspect that could be so then there may be a case for doing that. But you still need to ensure parity between them. For fairness and financial probity all tender documents should be returned to you in accordance with your set deadline. They should be in a suitably marked envelope, which should all be opened – and witnessed – at exactly the same time.

Risk assessment

You might like to think about doing your own risk assessment before the work begins. Think about all the potential things that may go wrong and how you would want to deal with them – and remember it's likely they will have an implication for cost and timescales. There may also be implications for Health and Safety.

Have Plan B ready. For example, what happens if hidden asbestos is discovered in your basement? What if your neighbour objects to noise or dirt or skips outside their building? What if your water needs to be turned off for a few days? What if suddenly you are at the centre of an archaeological find? Remember also that your insurance cover might be affected by the ongoing work so you should inform your insurance company and take out additional or amended insurance cover if necessary.

Contracts and specifications

Arguably, contracts are one of the most important things to get right. If you produce a good, clear, comprehensive and watertight contract – along with detailed specifications, you will avoid a lot of potential misunderstandings that might arise during the course of the work. You may of course need more than just one contract. You might need a contract with your architect, your project manager and your building contractors. Whatever the case, contracts must set out the respective roles and responsibilities of the parties: what is expected of each other, timescales, payments – and even penalties for breach of contract. The devil is in the detail.

‘There should be a clause written into any contract stating that architects and builders should be available for a year after completing the works. Otherwise, they are gone and leave you with all the problems to sort by yourself.’

The Furzedown Project

Specifications can be **general** in nature or **particular**.

General specifications can deal with standards and materials – for example: what kind of paint must be used, that electrical work must comply with the latest IEE (Institute of Electrical Engineers) Regulations, that gas fitting must be done by competent CORGI (The Council for Registered Gas Installers) registered fitters, etc.

Particular specifications can be tailored to fit exactly what your needs are – for example: contractors must not play the radio between 9 am and 5 pm, hazardous materials must be stored off site, tools must be cleared away at the end of each day, debris must be bagged and stored in a certain location.

Never assume that people will ‘use common sense’, never fall into the trap of thinking simply ‘that would never happen’. Better to think ‘If it can happen, it will happen’. If you have thought about it, and catered for it, you will be able to deal with it – even though it might seem petty at the time.



Bromley Voluntary Sector Trust

The premises were dingy, would not allow wheelchair access, and the only toilets were down steps. Now the ‘quality of life for staff, volunteers and clients has improved out of all recognition’. A regular client, who uses a wheelchair, now has no difficulty in getting into and around the offices, whereas previously she had to leave her chair outside. It is easier to attract volunteers.

Although the outcome was good, it was hard work and took 18 months. A problem that emerged almost immediately the works had started was the discovery of asbestos.

‘One would question how thoroughly the preparation work was carried out by the professionals who ought to know what they were looking for, since one would assume that buildings of this age have some asbestos in them.’

There were also problems in the quality of the electrical work, which cost £30,000 to put right. In addition, snagging problems, which should have been dealt with within the first six months after the refurbishment, took almost two years. It was very difficult to get the contractors to come back on site.

Soundproofed rooms were not done properly and doors and ceilings had to be replaced.

A big problem was the lift. Since it was made in Spain, whenever problems emerged, the Spanish engineers had to come over.

Despite these problems the refurbishment worked, and one of the reasons it did was that one of the trustees took responsibility for the day-to-day management of the refurbishment. He was on site almost every day.

One of the outcomes was that the building won a conservation award with Bromley Council.

Section 2: Managing the work

or If there is a hard way to do something somebody will find it...

Deadlines

Have you ever seen signs at the side of a road which say 'Road repairs completed six weeks ahead of schedule'? Yes? That's because it is so rare that people want to boast about it. No? That's because it is so rare that you don't see many of them.

The point is that the two biggest problems in getting work done is time and cost. So always be ultra-realistic about how long something will take. Then add a bit more.

Someone said that to forecast how long a piece of building work will really take, first get an estimate from a professional, double the first figure, and then change the unit of time to the next biggest one. So if someone tells you three hours, it will take six days. If someone tells you four weeks it will be eight months. Now, whilst that is probably an exaggeration, it does tell you that any work is likely to take longer than you think. Contractors are optimistic because they want to be off site and on the next job as quickly as possible. You are the client: it is your duty to be pessimistic! You may want to think about having a deadline for contractors and then a 'real' deadline for trustees or board members, which is later than the contractor's deadline.

Contractors on site

And by 'contractors' we do not just mean builders, plumbers and electricians, we also include 'professionals' too.

They may be wonderful, co-operative, flexible, considerate and charming. On the other hand they may be rude, uncooperative, intimidating, noisy and unreliable. It's a relationship that you have to develop and manage from the minute they appear to the minute they leave – and sometimes even after that. One thing

is for certain – you will not be able to ignore them, or at least you do so at your peril.

'The timescale was, with hindsight, optimistic.

Visits to exhibitions, researching, meetings with suppliers, asking for quotes, then making the decision. It all took a long time.'

Canal Museum Trust

To them your job is just another piece of work in a long list of projects. Don't automatically assume that they will necessarily be in tune with what your organisation does; they may not have worked with a community or voluntary sector-type organisation before. They may not appreciate the culture in which

you work nor the issues that concern your users or client groups. They primarily see a building site. You see a disruption to your service provision. Somewhere between the two you need to establish common ground and a common appreciation of each other's perspectives.

'For the most part, the relationship with the architect worked well, though there were tensions. We had a very good site manager who had a very straightforward way of dealing with all of us, but inevitably there were tensions.'

The Roundhouse

Keeping services going

You may be in the enviable position where you can suspend services, close the building during refurbishment and go on several weeks paid leave while it is all sorted out. Envidable but unlikely. More probably you need to keep everything going – one way or another – throughout the refurbishment work. You will need to manage this carefully. And there will come a time when you have to rely on the goodwill, loyalty or sense of duty of the staff in the building to keep going. Maybe it's to clear up a mess that a builder has left before you can open the building to the public. Maybe it's to ask staff to work in less than ideal conditions for a while, or maybe it's to temporarily relocate them to different premises.

Whatever it is, bear in mind that your organisation still has responsibilities for such things as health and safety, employment legislation, and staff welfare – these things don't go away just because there is building works going on!

'Keeping open was necessary to maintain the museum's reputation, customer base, and income. Closure was not an option. The main problem was during the installation of the lift. This involved a lot of drills, a lot of dust and dirt and noise. This was a nightmare, a really miserable time. There were days when we didn't charge an entrance fee, because the noise was so bad.'

Canal Museum Trust

And it's not just staff that will be affected by any ongoing work. If you have tenants or subtenants make sure that they also are kept fully in the picture – along with user groups, members, clients, board members and all of your regular contacts and partners. You may well have reduced capacity to deliver services.

If you are planning to decant people into other buildings, you will find that this will cause some dislocation to services. People – staff and users – take a little while to get used to new things and it's vital that good lines of communication are created in addition to good publicity and clear signposting.

Security

There are a few issues to consider about security - and feel free to add in as many more as occur to you!

Firstly, with contractors on site security has to be viewed from both your angle and also from theirs.

You do not want to leave things lying around that you might normally do in an office. Handbags, purses, wallets and mobile phones are obvious items but also think about filing cabinets, files that may contain personal information about people, cash boxes, chequebooks, computers, and passwords. Also be aware of the Data Protection Act and who might see information displayed on computer screens. There needs to be clear guidelines given and secure practices put in place.

They do not want to have tools and materials lost or stolen while working so there needs to be clear agreement about what can be left where, and what access contractors have to specific areas of the building.

Staff need to feel and be safe and secure. Don't make anyone potentially vulnerable by putting him or her in an isolated room or building where they are cut off from colleagues.



London Symphony Orchestra / St Luke's the UBS and LSO Music Education Centre

The project has received national and local recognition which has raised the profile of the organisation. English Heritage, for example, highlighted the renovation as an example of good practice in their publication 'Easy Access to Historic Buildings'. The building has won the Civic Trust Special Award for Access and the ADAPT Award for Access. At Islington's Disability Access Awards, the building won top honours for the quality of the disabled access facilities.

This was a project to restore a dilapidated, unusable and unsafe Grade 1 listed church and transform it into a vibrant music education and community centre. The key decisions were inevitably prescribed by the architecture of the building: that it would be on three levels so lifts would be required; and there was no flat access. The Access to Buildings grant was used solely to ensure that the building was as accessible as possible to people with disabilities. Overall, the experience had many positive aspects but, of course, there were some learning points that are worth sharing.

The cost of construction rose substantially. This was due to the discovery of defects in the shell of the old church that were discovered part way through the process and could not possibly have been anticipated by the

building surveyors and architects. Also, a large number of corpses were discovered in the crypt under the church. They had to be exhumed and reburied at substantial cost.

The main difficulty was marrying the needs for access with the need for maintaining the heritage value of the church. English Heritage was concerned about the position of the lift. Another problem related to the external signage. Because Islington Borough Council owns the surrounding garden and railings, all external signage had to be approved.

The office space was originally designed for five people, and now there are nine staff using it.

A partition wall dividing the office space has been removed, opening up the space to

accommodate the additional staff. It is now more accessible and does not restrict the possibility of employing disabled staff.

People with different disabilities, however, have different access requirements:

'What might be fabulous for someone with a visual impairment may not be suitable for someone with a learning disability and vice versa.'

The range of requirements for disabled people is so huge that 'you simply cannot satisfy all the requirements for everyone all the time, so you have to make a judgment on which are going to benefit most people who come through the building.'

Section 3: Legislation and regulations

or Never assume that regulations work in harmony with each other

You have probably heard of all the following:

Planning Permission, Buildings Regulations, Conservation Area, Fire Regulations, English Heritage, Listed Building Consent, Disability Discrimination Act

You may – naively – think that they have all been carefully and cleverly designed to work in complete harmony with each other in an attempt to make your life easier and more pleasant. Or, in that unlikely event, that there is someone you will engage who will readily have a firm grasp of each one and all that it entails. Wrong! Wrong! Wrong! Oh you innocent little person. If there is such a being he or she is very shy and rarely ventures into the big bad world of access adaptations.

There again, you may be fortunate and find that your proposed work is relatively straightforward and has no added complications.

However, if you are (un)lucky enough to fall within the remit of some or all of the above you may require patience, skill, determination, diplomacy, fortitude and tact to end up with a workable project. Either that or be the world champion at the Rubik Cube (specifically the Behind-Your-Back-With-Your-Eyes-Shut Challenge Cup).

Plans drawn up to comply with The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 may fall foul of Buildings Regulations. Work that complies with Building Regulations may run counter to Fire Regulations. Fire Regulations may not be on all fours with Listed Building Consent.

Be prepared to learn as you go along. Be prepared to gain expertise in this. You will need to do some digging around BUT do not rely on any one person – be it architect, surveyor, buildings inspector or Merlin the magician – to sort this out for you. It doesn't seem to happen like that. However, fear not because it tends to be more frustrating than difficult.

So don't panic. Others have been here before you. It can be done. It will be done.

'The Migrants Resource Centre contacted the Fire Service to discuss the possibility of closing a fire exit. When the Fire Service came to view the site and were told 'by the way a lift will be installed', other problems were identified. Both the Fire Service and Building Inspectors introduced more requirements – notably on the fire escape. 'This made even more demands on the budget.'

Migrants Resource Centre

Section 4: People you need and people you meet

or Don't think that your architect/project manager does everything for you

You are either one of the following people, or will meet one, or will need one in the course of the work:

Board member, Access Auditor, Architect, Builders & Subcontractors, Project Manager, Local Authority staff, Funder.

Keep your friends close, but keep this lot closer still.

Board member We use this term loosely to include trustees, committee members, steering groups, subgroups, etc. If you are really fortunate they may have some skill or expertise in managing building works or project management. Obviously they need to be kept informed at all times and in all situations.

Access Auditor The key to a good job. It is probably best to get a recognised auditor who is on the approved register. The auditor will make recommendations for improved access across the board – not just ambulant disabilities but sensory disabilities too, as well as ensuring the needs of people with learning disabilities and those with mental health problems are also taken on board. Consider an access audit before and after the work. Disabled toilet facilities can be installed in the wrong position, textured paving has been laid in the wrong location before now, ramps have been known to be too steep to use.

'The advantage of having this firm doing the audit was that they understood building regulations, health and safety, and they employed an architect too, also they realised that there are competing interests when you are doing a building.'

London Muslim Centre

Architect A good one is worth their weight in gold, a not-so-good one may cost you their weight in gold. Many architects are concerned with design and aesthetics. Your organisation is there to fulfil a function and it must work after the architect has gone. Its not just about looks, it's also about light, heat, taps that work and doors that open – and having a building that works for you!

'A number of problems arose with the lift. Without the architect we would have been sunk. I didn't have the professional knowledge that was needed to ensure that things were done properly.'

The Good Shepherd Mission

Builders & Subcontractors Well, it's obvious that these have to have an impact on the work, otherwise it simply won't get done. Observe the earlier comments on contracts, specifications, communication and relationships and remember who is paying to get the work done. And who wants payment for doing the work!

Project Manager A bit like the architect: a good one is good, a bad one is to be avoided. If it's a member of staff who is appointed to be project manager – and generally that is on top of, or alongside, his or her normal duties – this will significantly impact on their workload. Never underestimate the amount of time that can be involved with this role. It is pretty well impossible to do this while holding down other work, especially if the project is of any significant size. Think carefully about this. It may very well be worthwhile buying-in the skill and experience rather than assuming it can be done in-house. And even though the title is Project Manager, bear in mind that someone still needs to manage him or her!

Local Authority staff Again we use the term very loosely (and with apologies) to describe people in the Planning Department or Building Regulations or Fire Service etc. Like it or not you are going to have to deal with them. There is of course no reason why you should not have a good working relationship with them. Obviously, as long as you fully comply with everything that they tell you must be done!

Funders Wonderful people! What can we say? Salt of the earth. There should be more of them all over the place.

To keep funders sweet, i.e. in their natural condition, it is necessary to do a number of things. One is to tell them what is going on, both formally through the reporting mechanisms, but also informally by letting them know your progress. Organisations throughout the voluntary sector have a job to do to improve the stories they tell about how they used the money they got.

In the study we did, we sometimes found it quite hard to get basic information about the value of the work both to disabled people and others. So keep a journal of what happens through the grant and devise an evaluation scheme. Keep it simple, but do it, and if you don't know how, get some assistance on evaluation. There's lots of help around.

A London Advice Centre

A Centre converted a derelict building into an attractive and accessible community asset. Beforehand the building was 'nigh on impossible to use' for wheelchair users and 'deeply humiliating if they wanted to use the toilet'. The Centre is now accessible to wheelchair users, but: *'Wheelchair users represent a tiny percentage of disabled people. There is a huge range of other disabilities that we need to be more aware of.'*

To get this far, however, has been 'a nightmare'. Relationships between the architects, contractors and Centre were unclear. Neither the architects nor the contractors understood the context of working in a charity. One problem occurred because the Centre refused to pay a bill because the trustees were unhappy with the finished job. They discovered that the architects had signed off the job, and then the contractors tried to charge interest on late payment. Centre staff were surprised that the architects had the authority to sign off work without their approval.

Mistakes were made in the design of the facilities. For example, the intercom system is still not connected to the office space on the first floor and would cost an extra £3,000 to put right. People coming for appointment in the afternoon when the drop-in sessions are closed cannot use the intercom to contact staff upstairs:

'We have to tell clients to walk round to the side door and rattle the letter box.'

The project had an effect on the trustees:

'They are worn out with the process of fundraising for the works and then overseeing the project.'

There is still work to do:

'Now we have got wheelchair access so therefore we are friendly to disabled people... to me that is not enough. It needs a lot more work telling people we are here, and helping them get to us. But the disabled access is a good start, without that there is no point in telling disabled people to come along. They wouldn't be able to get in.'

Section 5: Common features

or Avoid thinking 'That'll never happen to me'

You have probably heard of all the following:

Delays will happen. It's an unwritten law. It's already been mentioned in Deadlines earlier. If you don't experience delays then a) you are very lucky b) you have entered into a pact with an unknown (and probably slightly scary) being or c) you have planned the work extremely well, picked competent professionals and contractors, organised the workflows, chased up suppliers and kept everyone informed calm and enthusiastic. You fully deserve to be promoted. And can you run the country (or at least public transport) for a while...

Costs rise. See above, the same things apply, only substitute 'rising costs' for 'delays'.

It is therefore essential that your **Budgets** have been thoroughly thought through [contrived alliteration number 142] and if possible potential variations in prices and charges built in for the duration of the project. Contingency costs should be included at 5% to 10% of cost. Obtain good advice on the VAT position. Some work may be VAT free but mostly it will not be and at 17.5% it is not something you can treat lightly in your budget. Remember funding problems could leave trustees vulnerable to personal liability. See above, the same things apply, only substitute 'rising costs' for 'delays'.

Marketing Many organisations jump to the conclusion that because their building has been significantly improved people will know about it and users will flock to it. That is simply not the case. The building must be promoted if it is to prove successful. The new facilities need to be marketed, potential users need to be

told about them. You should have a strategy to do this. It may include a formal launch, publicity, outreach work, mail shots or open days. But do not rest on your laurels. Arguably you now have to justify what you have done and why it was necessary. You may have to demonstrate increased usage or some other outcome to your funder or other partners. You will only do this by being successful. That success will depend on how your building functions as a result of the work carried out and how it is viewed by the people who use it.

'Just because you have put a lift in a building, it doesn't necessarily mean that disabled people are going to arrive. The follow up work has to be done, the outreach work and the publicity.'

Migrants Resource Centre

One consideration is **Transport**. It's all very well having the perfect building but if people have difficulty getting to it, has all the work been in vain? As part of the work, you may need to think about things like on site parking, off road parking, disabled bays, turning circles and local public transport facilities. All can have a significant impact on the success of a building. The attraction of having good disabled access may be mitigated by external factors over which you may have no, or limited, control. But that shouldn't stop you trying – for example – to get the local council to provide blue badge bays or lower the odd kerbstone here and there.

Section 6: Pitfalls and positives

or The best laid plans of mice and men...

...and in addition to mice and men you (well not necessarily you but someone) may well be presented with unexpected little surprises. **Asbestos** is a favourite. **Corpses** are not unknown. Surprises like these will almost certainly impact on the usual villains: *costs and deadlines*.

Other unwelcome surprises include having **Fixtures & Fittings** that aren't fixed and don't fit. The designer tap that is hard to turn on, kitchen units fitted so that wheelchair users can't get to them, electronic door controls fitted so that toddlers can open the door onto a busy street, or, conversely, alarm reset buttons and door handles fitted so high they can't be reached. These are all examples of what can easily happen. This is a good reason why a further access audit should be carried out before the job is actually signed off as complete.

The provision of a **Lift or a Stair Lift** often forms one of the main features of solving access problems. Sometimes it can be the port of first call. The installation of a lift can be tricky and expensive and the lift itself may not always bring the desired effect. The size of the lift can be restricted by the type of building you are in, or the space available. Some lifts have been installed and it is then found that they are unable to accommodate a larger-type wheelchair or a scooter. Some lifts can accommodate a wheelchair going in forwards but it then has to be reversed out. We heard of one lift that, being made in Spain and installed by Spanish engineers, only spoke its instructions in Spanish. And also remember that lifts create maintenance costs and running costs for years to come. So, choose carefully and make sure you get what you need and what is appropriate. Bear in mind that, although a stair lift may be seen as an answer to an access problem, stair lifts are not universally loved by people who need to use them. If there is an alternative, consider it.

Good **Signage** is essential in getting your building used and appreciated by everyone. That means both externally and internally. And it's not just about colours and fonts, which are important to people with a visual impairment, but it's also about size, location and clarity. Some signs are required and are covered by regulations – hazard warnings and fire exits for example, others are desired and are there to inform. A badly worded or poorly located sign is frustrating and many organisations found it useful to wait before permanently fixing signs to their refurbished premises. They watched how users wanted to use the building, how people flowed around it and what were the common enquiries before deciding on signs and where to put them. This approach seems to work well.

Perhaps your immediate **External Landscape** will have an impact on your building regardless of it undergoing a successful access project. You may have exterior cobbles (which is a sort of paving rather than a medical condition). You may have a steep gradient, or narrow pavements, or be in a conservation area or share access with others. Any and all of these need to be considered if they apply to your situation and, a bit like the **Transport** issue mentioned earlier, you might want to try to address some of the issues, difficult though it may be.

Feeling a bit daunted by now? Well, try not to be. Rather be inspired by those who have gone before. Having sometimes endured trials and tribulations during refurbishments, organisations can bask in the reflected glory of the **Wow Factor** on completion. Many organisations think the ordeal is worth it when they see what can be achieved: pleasant and safe working environment, more dignified facilities for users, increased numbers of people accessing services, a sense of inclusiveness, pride in what they have created and rising credibility with partners and funders.

Some have become the **Jewel in the Crown** in their particular community and are used as a model for others to follow. Their learning and pioneering have paved the way and the solutions they have found to a very wide range of problems and pitfalls have helped to make it **Better for Everyone**.

Including people just like you...

Section 7: Support and advice or You are not alone...

As we said at the start: We are not trying to be particularly clever in this publication, just share some findings with you. So far, we have not given you any real sources of support and help. This bit goes just a

'At the very least, talk to people who have done it before. I am sure that some of the tensions we experienced could have been avoided if we had known more about the process.'

The Roundhouse

little way to doing just that. We are a bit reluctant to put in information that is subject to frequent change or becomes out of date relatively quickly. So we won't bombard you with information about specific bits of legislation or technical requirements or website addresses. After all anybody with a computer and a search engine can find millions of pages of information on Buildings Regulations or English Heritage or Planning Permission or indeed anything else.

But here are some specific and practical sources of support that we think may be particularly useful to you. Not necessarily in order of relevance or importance!

Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE)

The Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE), a registered charity, has been the leading authority and resource in the UK for over 30 years on inclusive design and access to the built environment for disabled and older people.

As experts in the field, CAE can help organisations meet their duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). This is achieved through information and advice, best practice design guidance, such as Designing for Accessibility, training, access consultancy services and the quarterly journal Access by Design.

In 2005, The City Bridge Trust awarded a grant of £155,000 over three years for the Access and Sustainability Advisory Service based at CAE. This service was created to support organisations applying for the Access to Buildings programme, but is open to London's voluntary sector as a whole.

The Access and Sustainability Advisory Service (ASAS) began operating in January 2006 and provides free information, signposting and advice. This includes how to find and appoint access consultants, architects and building surveyors. It also offers guidance on the Building Regulations, the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005 (DDA) and sustainability audits.

The aim of the service is to guide voluntary and community groups through the whole process of improving access and sustainability from audit to completed works.

Ethical Property Foundation (EPF)

The Ethical Property Foundation was established in 2004 in response to a lack of affordable and reliable property advice for charities and voluntary organisations. The Foundation grew out of the work of the Ethical Property Company, which provides affordable office accommodation for charities and voluntary organisations across the UK.

The Ethical Property Foundation helps charities and voluntary organisations make positive property decisions and ensure that the development and use of property is a benefit rather than a burden.

In 2005, The City Bridge Trust funded the post of a London Ethical Property Advice Manager to provide a comprehensive property advice and support service to develop this work for voluntary and community groups.

The Property Advice Service provides guidance to charities and voluntary organisations through the entire property cycle:



Migrants Resource Centre (MRC)

The Centre commissioned architects to investigate the feasibility of installing a passenger lift into an existing stairwell. Although this would have been an ideal solution to the building's accessibility, there was too little space to undertake this without extensive excavation works that would make the project too expensive. A platform rather than a passenger lift was proposed.

Additionally the cost of installing the lift was also a lot greater than originally anticipated:

'The nature of building work of this kind is that everything will go over budget... and it did go over budget.'

The MRC asked for additional funding to cover the shortfall (estimated at between £25,000 – £35,000), but the request was rejected. Some of the work therefore had to be delayed until further funds became available.

The Centre had to reduce its services for five weeks during this period, concentrating mainly on the most urgent cases. This had a 'massive impact' on advice workers who had to meet targets:

'If they don't do a set amount of hours, money gets clawed back... it was really tough on them. Once the Centre reopened, they had to put in a large number of extra hours.'

The improvements have introduced new, and unplanned for, expenses mainly through increased costs of lift maintenance. The lift also has management and staffing implications:

'A lot of the workers thought that users would be able to use the lift independently, but it is proving to take more management in terms of staff helping users.'

While the lift can accommodate most wheelchair users, some people in larger wheelchairs still have some difficulty navigating their way through narrow corridors within the building itself.

The Centre did not get planning permission for the new front door; it is now in the process of changing it because it is not in keeping with the requirements of the conservation area. Even though the organisation argued that the door was installed to comply with the disability legislation, the local council said that this legislation is overridden by the earlier heritage legislation. The organisation had (wrongly) assumed that the architects had gained planning permission.

The organisation learned lessons. It is important to think about:

'Contingency, timing and money... there is never enough.'

To plan for this, the Centre suggested:

'Putting in at least one or two year's maintenance costs into a funding application when installing a lift. Also prepare a plan on how the lift is going to be used, and how the lift is managed.'

Above all the Centre felt that it was vital to get good advice and work with empathetic professionals. They found that employing community architects, who understood the voluntary sector context, was extremely helpful but that:

'It is important to be honest about your levels of knowledge about building works... don't try and bluff as the potential for disaster is huge. It is OK to be a pain, ask for everything to be explained, they (the professionals) are making a lot of money from the works, don't be scared to question and challenge them.'

- Telephone support, website support and general signposting. The Foundation can discuss quick queries by phone.
- For more complex queries, or for organisations that are not entirely sure about what help they need, the Foundation can arrange a visit from an advisor to talk through the options and help to get the organisation on the right track.
- For technical advice EPF will match the organisation with professional help. EPF have developed a register of property professionals who want to share their skills with the charity sector and are prepared to do some work either for free or on a discounted basis. The register includes:
 - Surveyors who can advise on refurbishment
 - Surveyors who can advise on property portfolio
 - Relocation consultants
 - Solicitors
 - Access auditors
 - Space planners
 - Project managers
 - Some trades persons
- For a property management health check: EPF will provide expert advice on health and safety, fire, accessibility, security, building systems, repairs and maintenance and reducing environmental impact.

There is an emphasis on working with small charities – 60 per cent of their work is with groups with less than £0.5m turnover. This is because such organisations typically cannot afford professional support, and do not necessarily have a culture of seeking professional support, or lack in-house skills.

When all else fails....

When the going gets tough, you need some light relief so we have written a poem for you.

Actually it works better as a song. So you need to sing it to the tune of 'My Favourite Things'. It is based on experiences of those who received a grant from The City Bridge Trust.

Here goes. **These weren't a few of my favourite things**

The man who attended for our access audit
The builders that came with concrete and then poured it
Suppliers that failed to deliver fittings
These weren't a few of my favourite things

Flooring that lifted and windows with wobbles
Ramps that were too steep and exterior cobbles
Architects that presented enormous bills
These weren't a few of my favourite things

Lifts that spoke Spanish and induction loops
Dealing with inspectors and jumping through hoops
Contract and corpses and new openings
These weren't a few of my favourite things

Foul ups and funding and some litigation
Guesswork and judgement and pure inspiration
Continual chasing and some hassling
These weren't a few of my favourite things

Hard hats and hammers and quantity surveyors
Roofing felt applied in multiple layers
Cash flow, contingencies and budgeting
These weren't a few of my favourite things

Project completed, now all in the past
Access for all, now reality at last
Facilities for users are now improving
These are a few of my favourite things

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