

**From:** Andrew.Taylor@Tunbridgewells.gov.uk  
**To:** Christopher Thomas, RTW Town Forum  
**cc:** Elizabeth.Thomas@Tunbridgewells.gov.uk; Catherine.Mayhew@Tunbridgewells.gov.uk;  
Jim.Kehoe@Tunbridgewells.gov.uk  
**Sent:** Thursday, 6 November 2008 12:13:57 PM

**Subject:**

**Disability Impact Assessment for planning applications and equality of access for the disabled**

Dear Mr Thomas

I have been asked to reply to your email to Cllr Mrs Mayhew regarding Officer and Councillor awareness and training on the issue of disability and equality awareness.

I can assure you that we take this issue very seriously both within the Planning Department and within the Council generally. You will no doubt be aware that the Council adopted its Comprehensive Equality Policy and Scheme in April 2007

( <http://www.twbc-apps.co.uk/committee/council/agendas/06-07/25april07/25april07.pdf> ) and since that time has been working to assess existing functions and policies. The Council has been working with other Councils, including Gravesham and Sevenoaks, to ensure that best practice from around the area can be gleaned and used in Tunbridge Wells.

The Planning Service have been an integral part of this process as Ruth Chambers, Western Area Team Leader, has been the Service and Directorates representative on this corporate group.

Ruth has therefore been able to use her knowledge to target and refine existing planning processes and policies. As a result of this work we have produced a leaflet 'Inclusive Design Guidelines' ( <http://www2.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/pdf/inclusive%20design%20guidelines%20new%20logo.pdf> ) in conjunction with the Tunbridge Wells Access Group and the Council's Access Officer, Nick Green. We have also reviewed our decision notices and letters to try and reduce the technical language and make them more accessible and easier to understand.

When the Inclusive Design Guidelines leaflet was produced we ensured that all officers were aware of the available guidance and discussed its practical application at team meetings. We also briefed the committee members of both Area Planning Committees and explained the actions which we would be taking and the advice which was available to members of the public.

The Chairman of the Access Group has also attended a Development Control Officers team meeting to talk from a personal perspective about living with a disability and some of the simple things which can make a disabled persons life easier, and upon which we can exert some control.

In addition you will be aware that most applications are required to be accompanied by a Design and Access Statement. While this is a government requirement and there is national literature available. The Council has produced its own guidance and highlighted the need to consider access for all to and around the buildings and development proposed.

(<http://www2.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/pdf/design%20and%20access%20statements%20guide%20new%20logo.pdf> )

In relation to the Cinema redevelopment the application has been accompanied by a Design and Access Statement which sets out in some detail the way the design has been developed taking into account the impact of ensuring equality of access. This has been assessed within the committee report and may well be discussed at the committee itself.

I would be happy to discuss this with you further but please be assured that the Planning Department does take this issue very seriously and will ensure that its officers and councillors have the necessary training to carry out their respective roles.

**Andrew Taylor**

**Development Control Manager**

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