

# **WATERWAYS ACCESS FOR ALL**

WATERWAYS ACCESS FOR ALL POLICY, DESIGN AND GUIDANCE





# WATERWAYS ACCESS FOR ALL

Applying Waterways Access for All (WAFA) principles in the context of  
Good Design Practice, Heritage Management and  
Environmental Code of Practice Appraisals

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(no amendments)



**Waterway Conservation & Regeneration group**

ARCHITECTURE • LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE • PLANNING  
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This guidance has been prepared by the Waterways Access for All (WAFA) steering group to inform British Waterways' employees of the main issues relating to access and the best approach to improving access to the Waterways. This advice is set in the context of British Waterways' other objectives that strive to conserve and enhance the canal environment so that our obligations in both respects are met fully. The outline methodology of an Access Audit is explained as a standardised framework that can be applied nationally.

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# INTRODUCTION TO WATERWAYS ACCESS FOR ALL - WAFA

British Waterways has always sought to promote access for everyone to its canals and rivers. Staff throughout the organisation have championed and promoted many initiatives aimed at widening access to the network for all sectors of the community and particularly for people with disabilities. Canals and rivers provide an ideal way for people with disabilities to enjoy the environment. They are often close to where people live and many canals and rivers have wide, flat towpaths, with few steep gradients.

Although we have made considerable progress, we feel that much more can be done to develop and promote access for all. To help with this, in 1999, we entered into partnership with the Fieldfare Trust to set up a comprehensive two-year programme to review

progress and to develop new initiatives. One of the objectives of this work was to look at how the principles of access for all can be built into our existing policies and procedures. We recognise that not all waterways and towpaths can be made fully accessible, because of constraints imposed by safety, heritage and environmental considerations. Cost factors can also impose difficulties, but, through access management plans, we can look for appropriate sources of funding to meet our objectives in the longer term.

Access should not be thought about only in terms of physical access. The provision of information, interpretation and the promotion of schemes are equally important.

This Guidance Note is intended to help British Waterways' staff understand the issues and plan for improved access to our waterways. It is complementary to the Waterway Standards and should be used in the context of Good Design Practice, Heritage Management and Environmental Code of

Practice appraisals. Expert support will still be required to specific projects, and training is being provided to a wide range of staff throughout the organisation to provide this. By taking account of these principles when planning new works and schemes, access to our waterways can be further improved for all sectors of the community.

# BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

## 2

**Waterways Access for All (WAFA) is a national project aimed at improving access to the waterways for people with disabilities.**

The project's key aim is to raise awareness of the main issues, provide advice in the context of British Waterways' other work and generate examples of good practice through "pilot projects". The project also includes a disability awareness training programme for a range of British Waterways' staff. This guidance document is a working document and will be amended as project outputs are realised.

Our partnership with the **Fieldfare Trust** aims to ensure that British Waterways' policy and business embrace access issues using nationally accepted standards. These standards are already embodied in the **BT Countryside for All Standards and Guidelines** document. It is these standards that are referred to throughout this report as the **BT standards**.

October 1999 is a key date for the introduction of legislation under the **Disability Discrimination Act (1995)**. The Act has implications for all service providers including British Waterways. The legislation imposes a statutory obligation to address access issues. In many respects British Waterways is ahead of the legislation and consideration of access issues as part of our business is already embodied in corporate policy and guidance namely; **The Environmental Code of Practice** and the **three volumes of Design Manuals**.

The new DDA legislation is an opportunity to consolidate this approach and successfully marry the obligations contained therein with those of the British Waterways Act (1995) which requires us to be custodians of the environment, ecology and heritage of the canals.

## 2.1 The Disability Discrimination Act (1995)

Part III of the Act deals with **Access to Goods, Facilities and Services**. Access for All is linked mainly to this part of the Act. The main provisions are that a service, goods or facilities provider should not:

- refuse to provide a service;
- give less favourable treatment;
- offer less favourable terms; or
- withhold reasonable adjustment - on the grounds of disability.

The following sections of the DDA will come into force in the future:

## 2.2 Timetable for Introduction of Legislation

### From October 1999

- **Section 21(1)**  
Service providers will have to take reasonable steps to change any policies, practices or procedures which make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to make use of a service;
- **Section 21(4)**  
Service providers will have to take reasonable steps to provide auxiliary aids or services (for example, the provision of information on audio tape or of a sign language interpreter) which will enable disabled people to make use of a service;
- **Section 21(2)(d)**  
Where physical barriers make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service, service providers will have to take reasonable steps to provide the service by a reasonable alternative method.

## From 2004

- **Section 21(2)(a), (b) and (c)**

Service providers will have to take reasonable steps to remove, alter, or provide reasonable means of avoiding, physical features that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service.

An important aspect of the Disability Discrimination Act is that all other statutory legislation takes precedence over the provisions made therein, for example; Health and Safety legislation and Planning and Environmental legislation. This is consistent with British Waterways' other obligations but reinforces the need for British Waterways staff with knowledge and expertise in these fields to work with people with disabilities to achieve **optimum access strategies, improvements and solutions.**

## 2.3 Definitions

**Access: Physical access** includes access to buildings, the canal environment and facilities, whilst visitor programmes, guided walks, interpretation, transport, tranquillity, excitement and challenge all form part of what is termed **programme access** that means access by users to information.

**Disability:** The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 gives the following definition of who is a disabled person. A person with “a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day to day activities”.

## 2.4 Some Important Points About Access for All

- The stylised wheelchair symbol is the international symbol for accessibility yet wheelchair users only represent a very small percentage of all disabled people. Other people who are termed disabled may have visual, hearing, speech, learning or mobility impairments.
- Man-made or **physical barriers** prevent people with disabilities from participating in countryside recreation. Other less obvious barriers of equal importance to physical ones include the following: expectations; lack of information; conflict with others; and access with dignity.
- The DDA estimated that disabled people made-up approximately 20% of the population. The creation of “**barrier-free**” access (in all its forms) can also benefit **elderly people, parents with small children, and people with temporary impairments**. This substantially increases the percentage of the population who can potentially benefit from access improvements.
- People’s **expectations** of engaging with the canal environment or the wider countryside include: the impression of naturalness; greater challenge and risk; meeting fewer people; more self-reliance and independence; fewer facilities and services.
- **Access for All** means providing equal opportunities for everyone to enjoy the waterways, in rural and urban settings, without detracting from the heritage and natural environment.
- British Waterways should aim for **universal design**. This means designing for everyone, which usually benefits everyone.
- Successful Access for All improvements involve collective skills and experience. Consultation with people with disabilities is essential to ensure that we understand customer expectations.

## 2.5 Access to Buildings

This document focuses on access to the towpath and the outdoor/countryside canal experience rather than access to buildings because this is the “new” element of Access for All.

It is intended to ensure that all British Waterways’ many buildings, visitor centres, sanitary stations etc will be accessible to people with disabilities in line with the requirements of Part M of the Building Regulations, where finance and heritage issues permit.

It is advised that the Local Authority Access Officer is contacted where any significant changes to an existing building or new building is envisaged in order to improve access.

# 3

## PUTTING ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS IN PLACE

The Disability Discrimination Act requires British Waterways, as a service provider, to appraise its existing facilities to see where access can be improved, carry out alterations to those facilities and design new developments to meet fully the disability standards.

The flow chart in Figure 1 illustrates two entry routes available to managers who will need to consider access improvements as part of the service provided. This may be via:

- a specific project or feasibility study;
- British Waterways' business planning and/or works programming.

Following either of these routes will ensure that statutory obligations for access improvements together with British Waterways' wider responsibilities are fully considered, actioned and reviewed.

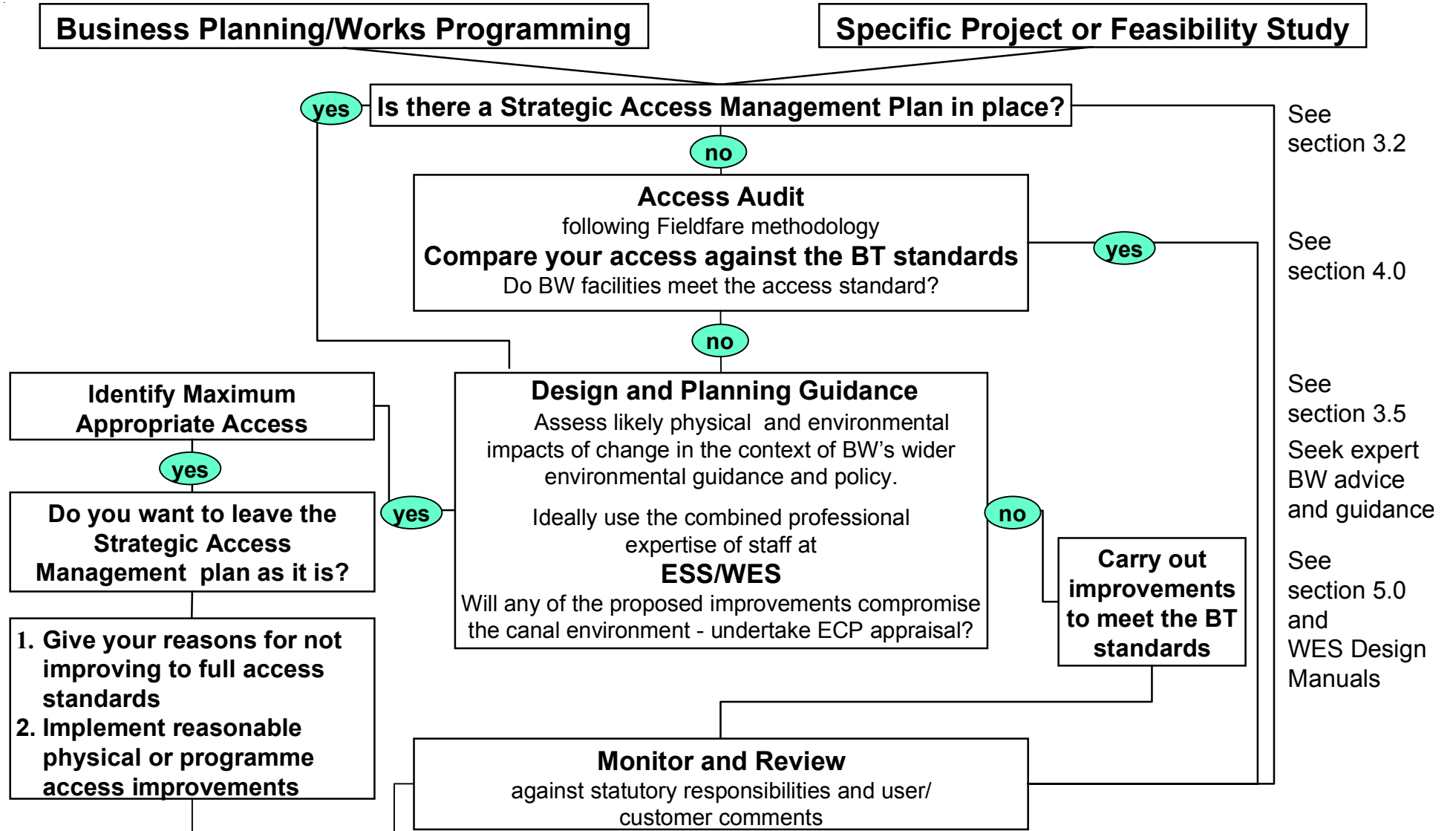
The following should be noted:

- If no Strategic Access Management Plan exists waterway business units will need to consider preparing one. This would then become part of the business plan or works schedule.
- If a Strategic Access Management Plan already exists then project managers and design consultants will need to arrange for detailed access audits to be carried out. These will need to be allowed for in project programmes. The results from the audit will identify areas of conflict between access standards and conservation issues, which will need to be resolved.

The next stage of the flowchart introduces the importance of seeking design and planning guidance to assess the likely physical and environmental impacts of any improvements to deliver appropriate design solutions:

*British Waterways and Fieldfare Trust appreciate that implementing the full **BT access standards** would be impractical or*

Figure 1 - Putting Access Improvements in Place (refer to relevant sections of report)



*could lead to unacceptable impacts on heritage and the natural environment on some parts of the waterway network. Our joint approach will therefore be to apply the BT standards wherever appropriate but to adopt what is termed a **Maximum Appropriate Access** approach where the full standards would compromise the “canal experience”.*

*This means that where application of the full Standards would result in unacceptable harm to the environment, heritage, landscape or character of the site thus ruining everyone’s enjoyment, we would instead apply the maximum improvements possible without such harm resulting.*

Whichever approach is used there are three key aspects to putting successful waterway access improvements in place:

1. Review of the provision of access information for users.
2. Development of a strategic approach to access improvements.

3. Reappraisal of projects (in Business plans) and waterway maintenance operations.

As the flowchart shows the **Maximum Appropriate Access** approach still requires implementation of whatever improvements can be made to either physical access or information and interpretation. The latter two are considered to be **Programme Access** improvements.

### 3.1 An explanation of Programme Access

Improvements to access need not just be physical. **Programme Access** involves the provision of information, support and interpretation, both before and during visits to site, to help people enjoy the waterway environment.

- British Waterways must address the provision of information and assistance for disabled users. Careful consideration of the design and location of information boards, the layout of leaflets and other publicity material and the content of the

information provided is essential. Accessible formats should be available.

**NB** It is important that the form, size or number of signs do not compromise the inherent attractiveness of a location.

- Programme access needs to be considered on a **strategic basis** too and will subsequently benefit a wider range of users.
- Information that is provided either on site or in advance should be in a **format** that is accessible to all users. This may include large print, audio or Braille guides.
- The range of information may include the standard and surfacing of the towpath, details of resting places, any steep gradients or obstructions as well as an “interpretation” of the site (for instance for visually impaired users). This will enable **informed choices** to be made and **defines the environment** not the user.

**Programme Access will be especially important for the marketing of the waterways as accessible**

**locations. There is no point in upgrading waterways to be accessible if people with disabilities remain unaware of the opportunities. Marketing should involve the production of accessible promotional items, promotion of the accessible credentials of key events and the direct involvement of a wide range of local groups representing people with disabilities in the regular user consultation process to work with customers and help them make informed choices about visiting the waterways.**

### 3.2 Strategic Access Improvements

To make sound access management decisions it is important to have a strategic overview in the form of a **Strategic Access Management plan**. This helps decisions to be made in the context of the **wider environment**.

British Waterways’ **Design Manuals** prepared by Waterway Environment Services (WES) state “The creation of a new access point or refurbishment of a

new one should be seen in the context of a complete route planning process”.

This wider view could be provided as part of a **Strategic Access Management Plan, Countryside Recreation Plan** or as part of a **Canal Corridor Study, Conservation Plan, Landscape Evaluation or Character Assessment**. Equally, decisions could be made in the context of the **Waterway Character** initiative, **ECP appraisal, waterway recreation strategy** or **local waterway Biodiversity Action Plan**.

Preparing a **Strategic Access Management Plan** will serve four purposes:

1. Focus statutory responsibilities in respect of the service British Waterways provides and identify where **reasonable** improvements can be made subject to consideration of other constraints such as heritage, environment, operational or user need and funding.
2. Assist in **targeting sites, facilities and programme changes** and then prioritising works

that should be included in future British Waterways' Business Plans. (Internal available finance will be a key factor in implementing change - it is not expected that all improvements will be completed in the short term - but opportunities through **third party funding** and partnerships should be sought);

3. To inform the **local standard** for any works affecting access to British Waterways' canals, buildings and facilities, for instance; towpath repairs, bank protection etc within British Waterways' environmental and heritage policy or guidance.
4. To develop an **information and marketing strategy** relating specifically to access improvements and accessibility of the waterway to broaden the range of users and more fully involve people with disabilities in helping to identify the priorities. Where a recreation strategy already exists this needs to connect with it. If there is not one it could be the impetus to create one to

manage all recreational improvements to the waterway.

The strategy will need to consider where the existing access provision falls short of the appropriate BT standards and assess the likely impacts of meeting these standards in terms of the waterway heritage and environment. This is the next stage and is called an **Access Audit** - see section 4.0.

Any plan should take into account the current and predicted needs for recreational access in addition to any **statutory legislation** or **planning designations** relating to the canal environment. The following designations and statutory protection may have a bearing:

- National Parks;
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- National Nature Reserves;
- Sites of Interest for Nature Conservation;

- Landscape Conservation areas;
- RAMSAR - (EEC directive);
- SAC - Special Area of Conservation;
- SPA - Special Protection Areas;
- World Heritage Sites;
- Conservation Areas;
- Tree Preservation Orders;
- Hedgerow regulations;
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments;
- Listed Buildings.

### 3.3 Fit to Waterway Standards

British Waterways currently classify towpaths within the **Waterway Standards** as T 1-5. The current standards cover width, surface and condition but the BT Access for All standards and the towpath Waterway Standards are not related. For example; where Towpath Standard T1 (that assumes an “urban”

standard) exists, the type of surface (such as granite cobbles) the presence of steps or ramps (eg alongside locks) may not comply with the BT standard in full.

Carrying out access improvements to meet the BT standard in this situation may damage the heritage/ conservation value of the area and so Maximum Appropriate Access would apply. Upgrading of paths (from T3 to T2 or T2 to T1) should always include Access for All standards in the design.

The new Waterway Standards provide for addition of an “A” suffix to the code to denote towpaths where improvements have taken place for users of all abilities. Where these improvements meet the BT Countryside for All standards, this should be noted; otherwise it is assumed that Maximum Appropriate Access has been applied.

Preparing a Strategic Access Management Plan will enable the waterways to identify the current status of the towpath and their aspirations for each length within the Waterway Standards document. This will be an

important step towards providing our users with the information they need to make informed choices about use of our towing paths.

### **3.4 Phasing and Funding in relation to Waterway Business plans**

Naturally, access improvements across the canal network cannot be achieved overnight and the Strategic Access Improvement Plan is therefore useful in targeting sites, facilities and programme changes. In this way it can help prioritise works that could be included in the following years’ Business Plans or as part of a future capital project.

Improvements could still be achieved through third party funding and partnerships. Similarly, access could be improved through British Waterways’ revenue spending by reviewing detailing and specification of routine maintenance works.

### 3.5 Expert Guidance and Access Management

The WAFA training courses (run by the Fieldfare Trust) are building a body of British Waterways' staff who can carry out access audits and assess the access standards required to identify any obstructions to Access for All that need to be overcome.

Do not forget that **expert support** is available both within and outside British Waterways with the skills to provide successful design and planning solutions that will protect, conserve and enhance the qualities of the canal environment whilst still achieving better access for a wider range of users.

It is important to remember that there are many approaches to improving access. Considering natural habitats, the wider landscape and canal heritage alongside access issues often involve sometimes **complex interrelationships** that require sensitive solutions. Managing environments involves the full consideration of these complex issues and much of British Waterways' success in this field stems from combining and using this expert advice.

**It may be more time and cost effective to use the combined professional expertise of staff at Environmental and Scientific Services (ESS) and Waterway Environment Services (WES). Careful and informed design and planning of any changes made to the canal infrastructure often with the minimum of environmental intervention will ensure its continued conservation and enhancement.**

*Internal advice could be obtained from:*

- Landscape Architects, Planners, Ecologists and Architects at WES/ESS;
- British Waterways' staff trained in the Fieldfare auditing methodology;
- Waterway Units may have a recreation manager/project officer who would be able to help.

*External advice could be obtained from:*

- Fieldfare Trust, as our partners in WAFA;
- Local Authority access officers;
- Local groups representing disabled people.

# 4

## THE ACCESS AUDIT METHODOLOGY EXPLAINED

The Wafa training courses provide staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out Access Audits. This section is only a summary of the process and is not sufficient in itself for untrained staff to carry out audits.

A detailed access audit using the Fieldfare format and guidelines can be carried out as part of the preparation of a Strategic Access Management Plan. Alternatively access audits can be initiated on a project specific basis that may include one of the following:

- a particular site or location;
- building or facility;
- a particular section of canal;
- an entire waterway.

Remember this includes **programme** as well as **physical access** auditing. Priority should be given to important features and “honeypot” sites where people are actively encouraged to visit the waterside. Sometimes these are popular because of their

inherent attractiveness or heritage significance or a mixture of both so it is important that these attributes are not compromised by access improvements.

The access audit identifies where facilities fall short of the BT standards. It also identifies the scope for access improvements and areas of conflict in terms of heritage, ecology etc. This is where expert design advice is needed to resolve areas of conflict so that the BT standard can be met or a Maximum Appropriate Access solution applied.

### 4.1 Using the Access audit methodology

The access audit methodology, developed by The Fieldfare Trust, involves the following stages (The highlighted terminology originates from the BT Good Practice Guide and Wafa guidance is given on each stage):

**Stage 1 - Countryside Setting** (Appendix 1). Different access standards apply in different countryside settings. One of the four types of landscape, eg urban

and formal etc may apply. Countryside settings are determined by a scoring system using features and expectations (**Appendix 2**). The **Countryside Setting** determines the **BT Accessibility standard** that should apply.

#### **WAFA**

#### **Guidance -**

Canals are rarely confined to a countryside setting. They pass through environments that are complex and often a mix of urban, urban fringe and rural. Often semi-rural environments in an urban area are of equal value to wholly rural environments. The criteria in **Appendix 2** show how weighting is given to visitor centres, distances to parking and proximity of dwellings. Many canal settings following the scoring system could result in implementing a standard that compromises the canal experience. Straight line distances to facilities can lead to the selection of a

misleading Countryside setting. A degree of judgement is needed, for instance to measure distances along the line of access to the canal - which may be a longer route via a path or road rather than a straight line. It is therefore recommended that any improvements are determined within a Strategic Access Management Plan or that the access audit is carried out as part of a wider Canal Corridor Study or detailed feasibility study.

#### **Stage 2 -**

Assess existing environment against the **BT Accessibility standards (Appendix 2)**, eg path widths, surfaces and distance between passing places and any existing restrictions to access that could be removed. This forms the detailed access audit and uses the **Accessibility Assessment form (Appendix 3)** to see where the standards are or are not being met. It also

identifies reasonable improvement works that could be made that would constitute Maximum Appropriate Access.

**WAFA**  
**Guidance - The Accessibility standards/ Accessibility Assessment form** - this is where the measure of what can reasonably achieved is identified. Some important parts of these standards (such as surfacing requirements) are broadly similar, but others (such as gradients, rest points etc) are far more onerous, particularly in formal, urban settings. This stage identifies where the current facility either meets or falls short of the standard. Where the environmental and heritage issues are a significant consideration this is the stage where it may be decided to adopt a Maximum Appropriate Access approach to any access improvements (see sections 3 and 4.2).

**Stage 3 -** Identify **Priorities** for improvement works to full BT access standards or identify **Maximum Appropriate Access** physical access or **programme access** improvements that could be made.

**WAFA**  
**Guidance -** Prioritising works can be done independently of budgets and business plans. It is appreciated that available funds will be a key factor in carrying out improvement works. Where major physical improvements cannot be made **Programme access** improvements become more important.

**Stage 4 -** Appropriate detailed design, site planning and specification of materials is important in determining and guiding any access improvements.

**WAFA**  
**Guidance -** seek expert advice.

## 4.2 Implementing Maximum Appropriate Access Improvements

An important outcome of the access auditing process is the recording of any reasons for not reaching the full BT standards and hence the justification for deploying Maximum Appropriate Access improvements instead.

The BT Access for All document lists the following as reasons for not carrying out improvements required to meet with the standards if it:

- costs too much;
- spoils the landscape
- has an effect on the ecology of the area;
- creates safety risks; or
- spoils things for other people using it.

However, through implementing Maximum Appropriate Access (including Programme Access improvements) where we cannot attain the full standards, British Waterways will need to demonstrate that we have:

- done what we reasonably can;

- reassessed changing circumstances;
- helped people with disabilities understand the opportunities that are available and the reasons for limitations on any particular sections.

# 5

## A WAFA EXAMPLE OF HOW TO APPROACH A STRATEGIC ACCESS MANAGEMENT PLAN (REF: DIAGRAMS 1 AND 2)

Diagrams 1 and 2 show a hypothetical stretch of canal passing through a rural and urban landscape. There is a steep flight of locks and the canal passes over a stream on an historically significant aqueduct. A long distance footpath to full access standards and a disused railway exist close by.

A group of heritage buildings including a visitor centre, wharf and listed bridge are located at the top of the lock flight. This location is a popular visitor attraction but is isolated from other facilities and features, providing only a limited canal experience.

In this scenario there is no overall access/visitor strategy that links these disparate features or addresses some of the shortcomings that exist in terms of access. As it stands the canal/countryside experience is limited and the various service providers are failing to meet the access standards in some areas. This precludes a wide range of users particularly people with disabilities from enjoying the canal and its associated features.

### 5.1 Existing Access Issues/Strategic Overview – Diagram 1

Various environmental legislation, designations or features of inherent environmental quality exist in relation to features in the surrounding landscape such as: an Area of Archaeological interest; a section of unconstructed towpath with soft edge; and 500 mm wide trodden surface, and a Conservation Area.

Some of the existing access constraints are:

- The wharf in the Conservation Area is not safe for embarkation onto boats.
- The listed bridge has steep ramps, an uneven surface and no handrails.
- All locations lack information in respect of recreational opportunities and access to them. There is no signage or waymarking.
- The lock flight is a significant physical barrier to people with disabilities, with gradients exceeding 1:10, poor surfacing and uneven steps in places.
- Towpath at bottom of lock has small steps of 10 mm in places but otherwise gentle gradients.

- Grass towpath extends from the bottom of the locks to the urban area and is 1.0 m wide in places.
- Public footpath alongside the stream leads to a redundant railway and has a traditional stile at the junction with the towpath.
- Tree branches overhang towpath in the urban area where the grass towpath is of high ecological value. The towpath here has subsided in places.

**Some of the possible access opportunities are:**

- An existing long distance footpath to Access for All standards passes close to the heritage buildings and provides a link to the urban centre.
- A disused railway also connects the heritage buildings with the urban centre.
- The lock flight is within 500 m of the car park.
- The aqueduct is within 1 km of the urban centre and is a potential tourist attraction along the canal.

The table opposite Diagram 1 summarises:

- The existing towpath surface - its condition, width etc.

- Some of the relevant Environmental and Access issues that require consideration in the Access Strategy and any access improvements that may be made.

## 5.2 Proposed Access Improvements – Diagram 2

In this scenario British Waterways and other service providers such as the Local Authority are keen to ensure that their facilities are accessible by the widest range of users particularly addressing the shortcomings in terms of access for people with disabilities. Prompted by this an Access Strategy is prepared.

(A full access audit would also normally be carried out but this is too difficult to represent graphically and is better explained as a practical demonstration).

The Strategic Access Management Plan is evolved in conjunction with a Local Access Group, Environmental Design Consultant, Waterway Manager, the Local Authority and the rail operator.

Diagram 2 shows how the strategy is implemented by achieving either:

- Access improvements that comply with the BT standards
- Adopting a Maximum Appropriate Access approach to resolve access problems where the cost or conservation constraints are felt to be too great to overcome.

The table opposite Diagram 2 summarises a possible approach. The key features strategically and in detail are as follows:

## Strategic Level Improvements

- A programme access strategy is implemented to provide relevant information on access, facilities, attractions and transport at key locations such as the Heritage Visitors Centre, car park, stations and more widely, at the Waterway Office, Tourist Information Centre etc.
- Through partnerships with the rail operator, Local Authority and Countryside Agency, provide footpath links to the long distance footpath; renovate the

redundant station platform, stations and rolling stock to full access standards; negotiate new public footpath beneath railway arch to connect with long distance path.

- In partnership between the Waterway, Local Authority, Local Tourist Board, business and Local Access groups, a narrow boat is adapted for wheelchair use. The boat overcomes the physical barrier of the steep lock flight which is difficult to improve in access terms because of the constricted width alongside the locks and the hedgerow.
- The combined effect of improvements at this level creates greater choice and opportunity for people with disabilities. It also allows a greater range of experiences along what is now a circular route focusing on the canal. Along this route there is the option to 'short-cut' and return to main facilities or transport routes.

## Possible Access Improvements to the BT Standard

- Consent is obtained from the Local Authority to reconstruct wharf to permit safe embarkation.

- 10 mm steps on towpath at base of locks removed by re-grading.
- Set down point created at bottom of locks for trip boat as new lock landing.
- Towpath resurfaced to BT standard between locks and aqueduct. Stile replaced by Access for All gate, public footpath surfaced between canal and new station.

### **Possible Maximum Appropriate Access – Access improvements**

- Consent obtained to re-lay brick surfacing over Listed Bridge.
- Towpath down lock flight resurface with sealed gravel surface and resting places installed. Handrails added to steps on towpath only.
- Consent is obtained to remove the boughs of trees (supervised by tree surgeon) with preservation orders that overhang the towpath to create a clear walking tunnel through the section of ecologically sensitive towpath. Information setting out access constraints should be provided at the visitor centre, car park, station, in relevant literature and tourist

information centre. Expert advice may be sought to identify ways in which the surface could be upgraded without significant detriment to existing value.

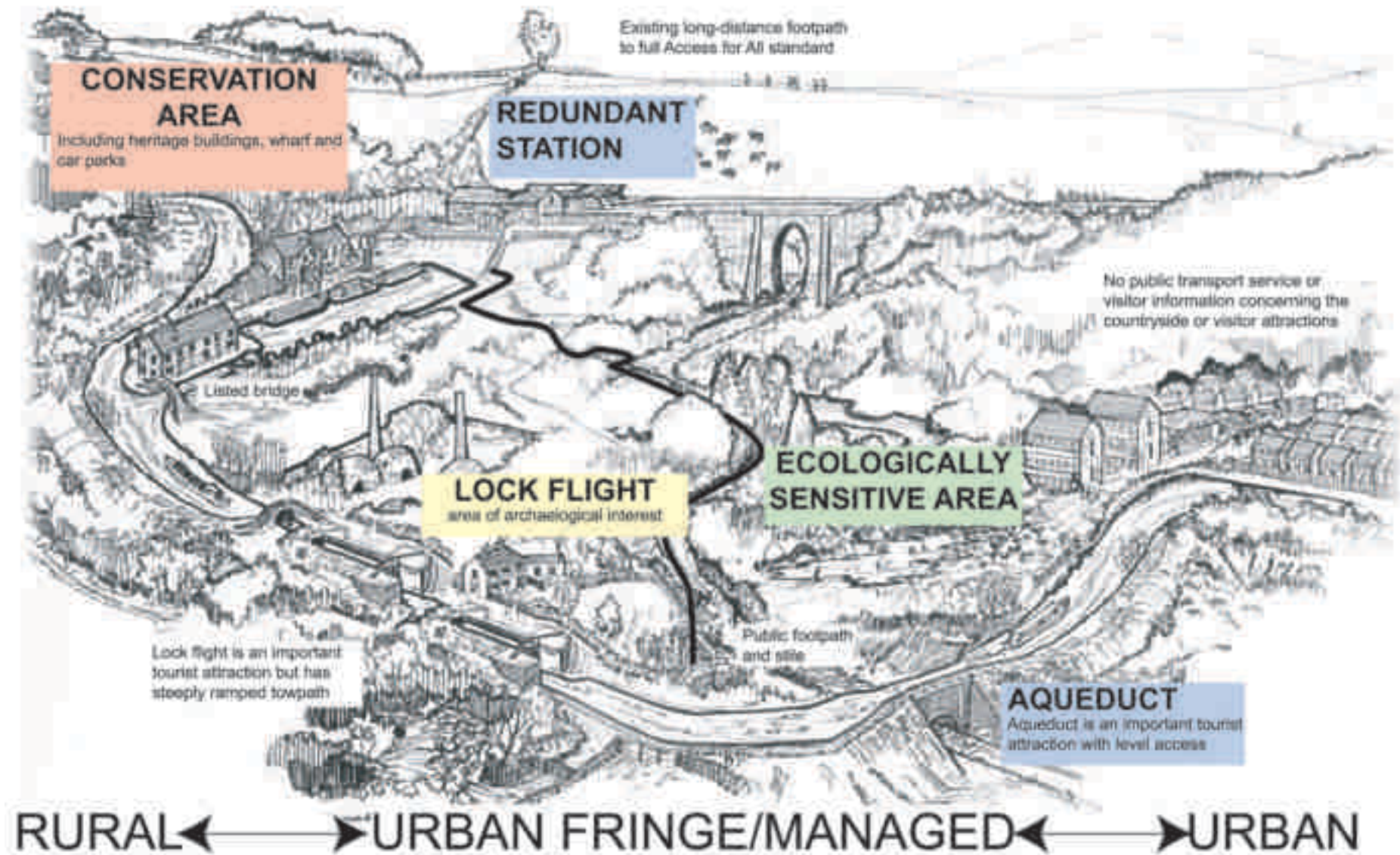
### **Conclusion of the Wafa Example of an Access Strategy**

The approach depicted on the two diagrams demonstrates the importance of approaching the access issues strategically. It also shows how improvements can usually be made to the full BT standard within environmentally sensitive areas. Equally, by adopting Maximum Appropriate Access that directly benefits people with disabilities access can simultaneously be improved for a significantly wider range of users.

A co-ordinated approach (often working with other bodies and user groups) to the provision of information - Programme Access, by which people can make decisions about their recreation, is an integral part of access improvements.

In order to use staff time and resources efficiently, when dealing with some of the complex issues inherent to the canal environment, it is recommended that professional landscape, heritage and ecological advice is sought.

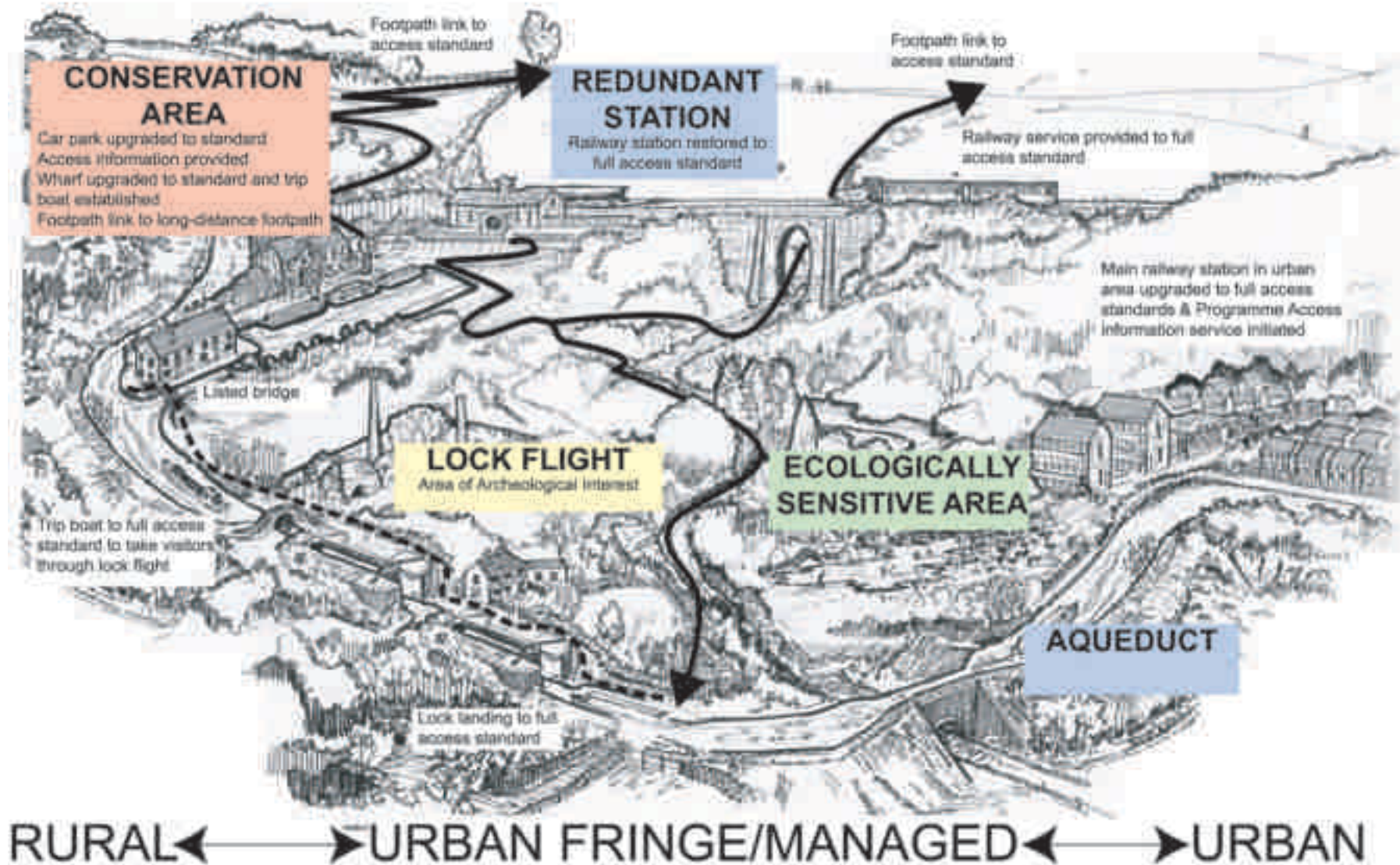
# Diagram 1 - "Access Improvement Strategy" - Existing Access Standards



# Table1 - “Access Improvement Strategy” - Existing Access Standards

Existing access standards	Conservation Area	Lock Flight	Aqueduct/Redundant station	Ecologically Sensitive Area
<p><b>Existing Towpath Surface</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Towpath surface is 1.2m wide and of constructed from bound limestone</li> <li>Conforms fully with BT standard up to the Listed bridge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Towpath alongside lock flight has unbound, pot-holed gravel surface, 1.2m width</li> <li>No resting places or benches, no handrails to steps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Path width less than 1.0m unconstructed and grass as far as Aqueduct</li> <li>Aqueduct has even, towpath surface to BT standard but with 10mm steps either end</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unconstructed grass towpath rich in grass and wild flower species with beaten track 1.0m wide in places</li> <li>Towpath has subsided, is uneven and overtops due to wave wash by boats</li> </ul>
<p><b>Environmental and Access Issues</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Within Conservation area all surfaces and access points comply with the BT standards.</li> <li>Car park and station meet BT standards but lack information on recreational opportunities and access in relation to the canalside facilities and attractions.</li> <li>Existing wharf does not allow the safe embarkation of boat users</li> <li>Listed bridge has steep ramps, uneven surface and no handrails</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The lock flight is the main physical barrier in the area to people with disabilities</li> <li>Lock flight is also a tourist attraction and within 500m of the car park which has 30 car park spaces</li> <li>Ancient hedgerow close to towpath</li> <li>Uneven, steep steps to lock landings with no handrails</li> <li>Towpath ramps steeper than 1:10</li> <li>Towpath has no gradient alongside the lowest lock but has some small steps 10mm in height</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The canalside Area of Archaeological Interest is a potential tourist attraction but is currently only accessible via a steep lock</li> <li>Public footpath exists alongside stream across open ground</li> <li>Traditional up/over stile exists at junction of towpath and public footpath alongside the stream</li> <li>No signage or waymarking</li> <li>Aqueduct is within 1km of an urban area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tree overhang towpath and have Tree Preservation Orders</li> <li>Ecologically sensitive area extends across canal to the offside</li> <li>Important towpath and field hedgerows</li> <li>Towpath well used by walkers in dry months</li> </ul>

## Diagram 2 - "Access Improvement Strategy" - Proposed Improvements



## Table 2 - “Access Improvement Strategy” - Proposed Improvements

Proposed Access Improvements	Conservation Area	Lock Flight	Aqueduct/Redundant station	Ecologically Sensitive Area
<p><b>Access improvements that comply with the BT standards</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information on access, facilities, attractions and transport at Visitor centre, car park, station, Local Waterway office and tourist information</li> <li>• Seek consent from Local Authority to repair and upgrade wharf to allow safe mooring of craft</li> <li>• In partnership with Local Access group provide trip boat converted to accommodate wheelchairs</li> <li>• Footpath link to full access standard installed to link with existing long-distance footpath, partner funded with Local Authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The overall historic character of the ramped lock flight, the restricted width created by the hedgerow and significant level changes preclude any easing of gradients</li> <li>• Towpath surface alongside lowest lock can be regraded to remove the 10mm steps. This allows access for wheelchairs to the bottom of the lock flight to meet the BT standard</li> <li>• A lock landing is installed at the bottom of the lock flight to full access standards.</li> <li>• Trip boat commencing from the Conservation area takes visitors up/down the lock flight.</li> </ul> <p><b>This completes a circular recreational route that encompasses all the area’s main features and that provides a range of countryside experiences for the widest range of visitors. By providing relevant access information the route also offers people with disabilities choice in terms of challenges, risk and self-reliance.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towpath width increased to 1.2m width in rolled limestone surface with resting places every 100m following discussions with English Heritage</li> <li>• 10mm steps to either end of aqueduct removed by regrading of path approaches.</li> <li>• Redundant station and platform restored and access ramps installed in partnership with Local Authority, Railtrack and English Heritage</li> <li>• Public footpath beside stream constructed to full BT standard providing link between railway and canal.</li> <li>• Traditional stile replaced with Access for All gate detail</li> <li>• New footpath negotiated connecting to long-distance footpath</li> </ul> <p><b>The combined effect of these improvements creates a circular route to full Access for All standards relying on the trip boat to overcome the physical barrier posed by the lock flight</b></p>	<p><b>NB Although in an urban setting the environmental sensitivity of the site warrants a Rural/Working landscape Access standard.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canal edge reconstructed</li> <li>• Towpath remains as beaten track but information on limitations of surface is provided at key locations</li> <li>• Care in raising towpath level to ensure bases are not affected by raised towpath level</li> <li>• Resting places installed along this length at 300m intervals</li> <li>• Main station in urban area upgraded to full Access standards and Programme Access information service provided.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Environmental and Access Issues</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design advice sought and Listed building consent obtained to enable to the re-laying of brick paving.</li> <li>• Expert landscape design/ecological advice sought</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Towpath reinstated using sealed gravel surface</li> <li>• Resting places installed along lock flight without affecting hedge or compromising safety</li> <li>• Appropriate handrail in wrought iron installed to towpath steps only to encourage access by less more ambulant users up/down lock flight</li> <li>• <b>Expert landscape design/ecological advice sought</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpretation boards, access and heritage information provided in discrete manner in this location</li> <li>• <b>Expert landscape design/ecological advice sought</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consent obtained from Local Authority to selectively remove overhanging boughs by a trained Tree Surgeon to create a clear walking tunnel</li> <li>• <b>Expert landscape design/ecological advice sought</b></li> </ul>

# 6

## WAFa GUIDANCE ON BT ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS

This section highlights the **accessibility criteria** (from Table 1 of the BT Standards contained in the BT Countryside for All - Standards and Guidelines handbook) and provides WAFa best practice guidance.

A note of caution - nothing in the BT Standards is intended to actually devalue the heritage or natural environment. It is important not to damage or destroy the intrinsic value of the canal environment in carrying out access improvements. This is not the purpose of the WAFa initiative or the DDA provisions.

*The following headings are WAFa specific issues*

**1. Protecting the landscape quality, ecology and heritage of the waterways** Valuable habitats, landscapes or heritage features, buildings or structures should not be removed in order to meet the full BT standards. Careful consideration must be given in order to ensure minimum impact on the existing value of the canal environment. Use of British Waterways' guidance

and procedures such as the Design Manuals, Biodiversity Action Plans, ECP appraisals or expert guidance will help in making these judgements.

- 2. Information** One of the often forgotten aspects of accessibility is the quality and presentation of information, both in advance and on arrival at a location. Considering the need for making our publicity, site notices and information sheets accessible is also an opportunity to improve information for all users. This "Programme Access" is vital for people with disabilities and, with use of information technology, can provide a viable alternative to a physical site visit.
- 3. Towpath/Towpath Surface** Grass towpaths are a significant canal feature but are difficult to make accessible to all. It is important not to alter the landscape character or ecology just to meet the full BT standard, so the presence of a grass surface is likely to mean that we will apply Maximum Appropriate Access. However, there are design solutions that can still improve access

(programme access being an important one) -  
Consult expert guidance.

*The following headings cover the individual issues set out in the BT Access for All Accessibility standards*

- 1. Barriers** Ideally all barriers should be removed. However, the following should be considered: heritage; ecology; landscape character; waterway operations; health and safety, etc. Alternative routes or Programme access improvements should be made if physical barriers cannot always be removed. Fieldfare have raised concern over the design of some barriers that are alleged to allow people with disabilities access but prevent motorcyclists. Consult expert design guidance.
- 2. Path Widths/Access Points/“Clear Walking Tunnel”** Ideally access points and the path will be 1.2 m wide in an urban setting and 1.0 m wide in a rural or working landscape. There should also be a clear airspace 2 m high along the path; but not if this would compromise the landscape character, trees and hedgerows (including tree and hedge roots) towpath verges or emergent vegetation. It is acceptable to have point restrictions less than the ideal width for features which cannot reasonably be removed (such as bridges!) but this must be identified in any information on the site or at key access points.
- 3. Crossfalls and Crowning** Crossfalls greater than 1:35 are a problem to wheelchair users. However, crossfalls are important in shedding water from the towpath. It is not advisable to alter crossfalls that could lead to greater access problems. A strategic overview is always needed in assessing what alterations could be made in addition to a review of programme access information.
- 4. Passing Places/Resting Places** Look for opportunities to install appropriately detailed passing places or resting places. Seek expert advice on design intervals and detailing.
- 5. Ramps/Steepness of Slopes/Landing Intervals** Any gradient steeper than 1:12 is

considered to be an access restriction. Ideally consider regrading but where this is not possible (due to space restrictions, engineering, environmental or heritage constraints) resting places and handrails would constitute access improvements.

- 6. Steps/Step Levels/Gaps** are all considered barriers if greater than 15 mm. It would normally be reasonable to carry out small improvements where appropriate. Remember that Listing includes the setting of any protected heritage structure so alterations to steps (even if remote from the main structure) may be breaching planning regulations.

There are four key points to draw from this document:

- The theme is **Access for All**. This is not just about physical changes to wheelchair users on the towpath, it is about a broad approach that will improve the information about, and opportunities for enjoyment of, the waterways for everyone - able bodied and people with disabilities of all types.
- In order to meet our statutory obligations and improve the service British Waterways offers to all users the right approach to access improvements is needed. A strategic approach, using **Strategic Access Management Plans** at the waterway level and developing national responses to specific issues through the specialist teams in the headquarters departments is a key process. In all cases expert support is available from staff at WES and ESS as well as other British Waterways' staff who have been through the Fieldfare Trust training courses. Individuals on the national project team and at Fieldfare can also help.
- A detailed **Access Audit** can be done as part of a Strategic Access Management Plan or as part of an individual project. It is important to remember that the emphasis is on reasonable improvements. There will be many instances where there are constraints of space, engineering, heritage, environment and landscape which mean that it is not reasonable to implement the full **BT standards**.  
  
If this is the case British Waterways can still serve the needs of people with disabilities by instigating **Maximum Appropriate Access** or **Programme Access** improvements.
- **Marketing and information** will be vital to encourage people with disabilities to recognise the opportunities presented by the waterways and to allow them to make informed choices and become involved in the user consultation process.

# APPENDIX

## Key contact names for advice on the Waterways Access for All Project:

- Glenn Millar                British Waterways (Watford)
- Paul Wagstaffe            British Waterways (Watford)
- Phil Chambers             Fieldfare (Sheffield)
- Graham Attridge          Fieldfare (Sheffield)
- Roger Herrington        British Waterways (Norbury)
- Liz Kelly                    British Waterways (Marsworth)
- Peter Birch                 British Waterways (ESS, Leeds)
- Steve Fancourt            British Waterways (WES, Rugby)
- Simon Crewe               British Waterways (Northwich)
- Mike Youe                  British Waterways (Fazeley)
- Cath Ferguson            British Waterways (ESS, Gloucester)
- Terry Kemp                British Waterways (Devizes)
- Mike Manuel               British Waterways (London)
- Jo Ward                     British Waterways (Norbury)
- Tom Chaplin                British Waterways (Tech Services)
- Helen Rowbotham        British Waterways (Glasgow)
- Mike Harrison             British Waterways (NE)
- Wendy Jones              British Waterways (NE)





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