



Access All Areas

A Guide to Destination Access Audits



TOURISM
SOUTH EAST



Access All Areas

A Guide to Destination Access Audits

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on behalf of Accentuate



**TOURISM
SOUTH EAST**

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www.outsidethebox.so

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Section 1

Introduction

Background to the Guide

Over the last three years, Tourism South East has been responsible for delivering 'Destination Zones'. This is an Accentuate project that aims to make the South East more welcoming to disabled people.

Accentuate is a transformational programme of 15 projects, inspired by the Paralympic Movement. It seeks to make a cultural shift by changing perceptions and offering opportunities to showcase the talents of Deaf and disabled people. It is a Legacy Trust and SEEDA funded initiative managed by Screen South.

The principal components of the Destination Zones project have been destination access audits. Following competitive tendering, external access auditors were commissioned to carry out the audits. The audits were part funded by local authorities seeking to improve the accessibility of town centres and transport interchanges. Prior to the launch of Destination Zones two destination access audits, covering Brighton and Winchester, were undertaken with the benefit of SEEDA funding. These helped to shape the Destination Zones project.

Since 2009, 15 destination access audits have been undertaken across Buckinghamshire, Kent and West Oxfordshire. These have assessed the experience of disabled visitors with mobility, visual and hearing impairments, from arrival to what they encounter around the destination. This included public transport links, parking, WC provision, as well as accessibility to shops, restaurants, parks and



tourist attractions. Recommendations were made on how barriers to access can be removed. Some of these audits have already led to significant investment through the take up of those recommendations.

The importance of involving disabled people was one of the key lessons from the audit process and became the subject of a separate best practice guidance document for local authorities. This was commissioned and widely disseminated in 2011/12. However, other aspects emerging from the process of undertaking audits also needed to be recorded or there was a danger that they would be lost. This document aims to highlight these areas of learning and provide a guide to best practice.

Purpose of the Guide

This best practice guidance is for Local Authorities wishing to carry out a destination access audit. Its aim is to take you through the different key stages of the process.

These are:

- Planning the audit
- Procurement
- Carrying out the audit
- The audit report
- Evaluating the audit

Because the involvement of disabled people is a highly important aspect of the process, an abbreviated version of 'Involving Disabled People in Access Audits' has been included in **Section 4**. To access the full version of this guide to best practice, please visit:

www.accentuateuk.org.uk/toolkits-how-to-involve-disabled-people



Section 2

Introducing Destination Access Audits

What is a Destination Access Audit?

“The advantage of the Destination Audit approach is that it’s comprehensive and covers access to travel and information etc, not just buildings themselves.”

Local Authority

A destination audit assesses access in a physical location where someone lives or visits; it can either be a single town or a district. It aims to identify areas in need of improvement and make recommendations on how this can be achieved. It is a holistic approach and requires good partnership working from the key stakeholders involved. Areas audited might include the facilities and services provided by the Local Authority, accommodation, tourist activities and attractions, and the cultural experiences provided through museums and galleries.

A destination access audit particularly considers the needs of disabled residents and visitors and should include people with sensory and mobility impairments and learning disabilities. The Equality Act 2010 places duties on organisations providing facilities and services to the public to “remove barriers for disabled people so that they can use the service as close as it is reasonably possible to get to the standard usually offered to non-disabled people”.

Whilst many service providers and venues have improved access for disabled people their investment may be undermined by factors relating to the surrounding environment: difficulty moving between

venues, lack of suitable parking and toilets, etc. A destination audit will help to overcome these issues. It will enable Local Authorities to incorporate access improvements into their development plans, and enable businesses to plan and invest in accessible facilities with greater confidence.

“We really enjoyed carrying out the destination Audit. Our involvement in all aspects of a visitor’s experience including a thorough review of pre information and genuine community involvement gave us a proper context to influence and hopefully improve the disabled visitor experience.”

Auditor

Why undertake a Destination Access Audit?

The Economic Case

Destination access audits will make locations more accessible, attracting visitors and benefitting the local economy. Sometimes small changes can have a huge impact on a customer’s experience. Improving access for those who are most in need will also mean improvements for all your customers: young, old, those with pushchairs, wheelchairs, arms full of shopping, support dogs, learning difficulties, fatigue, temporary conditions. As a consequence of this improved access there will be more tourist traffic. Ultimately this will bring increased revenue and benefits to the local area and to those holding the purse strings; it’s a win/win situation.

For an average business or town, disabled customers may account for up to 20% of the customer base. Disabled people are a sizeable yet poorly addressed segment of the consumer market. A recent Department of Business Innovation and Skills survey of disabled people's buying patterns revealed that 83% had to take their custom to a more accessible competitor. Given that there is a strong link between age and the prevalence of disability, as the population grows older the market is likely to grow. The government has estimated that businesses may be losing over a quarter of their potential customers by failing to respond to disabled people. This is a particularly important issue for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Disabled people tend to research and plan before travelling, booking or visiting venues, precisely because they are dependent on good access being available.

A nationwide disabled access register, **www.directenquiries.com**, receives 250,000 hits per week from people looking for accessible local businesses. Disabled people are often in the company of carers/personal assistants, family, and friends, and the choice of venue for the whole group will often be dependent on good access. Not only will the more accessible venues win the groups' custom but they are also more likely to get return custom from those people individually as well.

Letting people know about good access is key to attracting higher visitor numbers.

"12% of all overnight domestic trips in England between January and June 2009 were made by visitors with access needs, or those accompanying someone who had access needs. This amounts to 5.7 million trips, contributing almost £1bn to the economy in just six months."

'Accessible Tourism: making it work for your business' (Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2010)

Research undertaken by the Department of Business Innovation and Skills discovered that there is a "fear and discomfort" associated with disability which stems from a narrow understanding of "access" and the confusion around the term "reasonable adjustments". They concluded that there needs to be a focus on the disabled consumer market as a business opportunity. It was felt that this is a "business opportunity still to be exploited", and that there is a strong economic and business case for targeting this market.

2012 Legacy for Disabled People: Inclusive and Accessible Business by ODI and DBIS

Good access is as much about inclusive service delivery and customer care as it is about the built environment. It is not all about lifts and ramps, and improving access isn't always an expensive undertaking. A good destination access audit will help to identify the size, cost, and priority of improvements; where longer investment is needed and where you can find 'quick hits'.



The Priority for Local Authorities

Local Authorities will want to make sure that the services and facilities they provide are efficient and inclusive, in order to maximise economic prosperity and ensure that the region thrives socially and economically.

In addition, Local Authorities, also have responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 to comply with the public sector Equality Duty. This means they must “have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Therefore, it is important that throughout their work they consider the different demographic groups that make up their population, and make sure that they meet the needs of people with “protected characteristics”. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation.

By undertaking a destination audit Local Authorities will be better placed to meet the needs of their population.



Section 3

Destination Access Audits – Best Practice Guidance

Introduction

This section provides Local Authority staff with a step-by-step guide to the different stages involved in carrying out a destination access audit: preparation, auditor selection, audit management, reports and recommendations, follow up and evaluation. Appendix 1 of this guide contains a summary checklist of the key tasks required to complete the destination access audit. This can be used as a practical tool whilst planning and undertaking the audit.

Stage 1 Planning the Audit

Preliminary tasks:

Task 1: Understand the purpose of a destination audit and its benefits (see **Section 2**).

Task 2: Agree what you want from the audit and what will be done with the findings.

Being clear from the beginning about why you are carrying out a destination access audit will help you throughout the project – for example, when briefing your auditor, other Local Authority staff, venues and service providers, and local disability groups.

Auditing of venues as part of a destination access audit can be a catalyst for change. It can highlight to LA's the areas they can improve in order for that venue to become truly accessible to disabled people.

I would recommend being audited, whether being part of a bigger project or not. There were definitely benefits because it locked us into the Local Authority. This was because things which were at the fringe of their interests were of immediate interest to us. Before someone came to us these issues would have remained at the fringe of their responsibility and not dealt with. ... It stimulated the Local Authority Highways Department to visit the site and put into their budget things that needed doing."

Heritage Venue

The Local Authority must ensure that it complies with its duties under the Equality Act. Carrying out an Equality Analysis during this initial planning stage will help you to consider the different demographic groups that make up the local population. It will highlight potential areas in which the audit could adversely impact on different parts of the community. The plan can then be changed accordingly to ensure there is equality and inclusion. This document should be referred to at regular points throughout the project to ensure equality is maintained.

Whilst private organisations (e.g. hotels, cinemas, night-clubs etc.) may not be subject to the same statutory duties as LA's, they must still have regard to their general duties under the Equality Act. Therefore, do encourage and advise service providers and venue owners participating in the audit to promote their positive actions in providing good access for their customers.

Access All Areas

A Guide to Destination Audits

Agree the scope and detail of the audit

The importance of being very clear about the detail that is expected in the audit is vital at this stage of the project because it will determine the way in which the findings are used. Communicating clearly the detail of the audit with the venues and service providers being audited, will help manage their expectations. As the purpose of a destination access audit is to consider the visitor experience, it only needs to concentrate on the public-facing aspects of disability access and does not need to deal with access for disabled staff.

Agree the budget and funding sources

Set your budget

In order to set an accurate budget, it is important to have researched the market rates for this kind of work beforehand. It is worth contacting access auditing companies for quotations. This will also help when it comes to assessing the bids. If one auditor significantly undercuts another's price, ask yourself why this may be. An experienced auditor will want to maintain their reputation and will therefore be realistic about the amount of work involved and the time it will take.

"We are a quality led company and our services are delivered by professionally trained and registered staff. The widening out of scope and the narrowing down of funding on subsequent contracts for this type of work has meant that we have since struggled to be competitive without reducing our quality, which has never been an option for us."

Auditor

Find committed investors

In order for the audit to fully consider all the stages of a visit to your destination, it is vital that a variety of different stakeholders are on board with the project from the beginning. This will include Local Authority departments, major transport providers and interchanges, venues, and other key partners responsible for community facilities and local town centre management.

Discuss who will fund the project. Will it be the Local Authority's Tourism Department, external funding sources, or a combination of these? Although one Local Authority department will lead on the project, consider asking other departments to contribute funding. This will make it easier to get commitment and "buy-in" from those other departments.

"I would make sure there was more buy-in from the top in my own organisation, but this was difficult because of the cuts. Managers were nervous because they thought that the recommendations could be very expensive. The approach was good as we liaised with a lot of businesses and departments internally."

Local Authority

Also consider asking service providers and venues to make a contribution. This will encourage them to put a value on their individual audit, and as a result mean that they have more of an interest in following up recommendations made. The amount of contribution from each party would probably vary according to the size of the department or organisation involved.

“The main disadvantage was that although I was the lead officer within the council, and although we had the direct support of the local transport and seafront team managers, many of the points raised were for other issues outside our direct control, e.g. private sector run attractions, venues, accommodation - for external companies, e.g. bus and rail companies - or for other council teams that had not been directly involved, e.g. public toilets. It was sometimes challenging to get the message across that work needed to happen / things needed to change, when we did not have any direct control over these areas.

Local Authority

What can you realistically achieve?

As well as the cost of the audit, it is important to consider what funding will be available to actually carry out any access improvements which may be recommended in the auditor’s report. There is little point in carrying out an audit if the financial resources of the Local Authority are so stretched that recommendations cannot be implemented!

Agree the timescale

The timescale allocated for any project can often depend on a number of factors, including funding sources, other developments that the project needs to tie in with, and staff availability. Whilst taking these factors into account, allow your auditor to negotiate with you and give you the benefit of their expertise to highlight any factors not previously considered.

Be realistic about the time it takes to carry out an audit to the depth you require. Whilst researching auditor charges, you should have asked about realistic timescales for carrying out an audit to give you an idea for budgeting purposes.

“The Local Authority, that went out to tender, had allocated an unrealistic level of resources to undertake the audit. This meant that large areas were expected to be audited in a timescale that could not allow sufficient auditing input. As a consequence very few organisations responded to the tender and the audit did not take place. Had sufficient time been spent at the beginning of the project to look at the scope of the audit, expectations would not have been raised and time would not have been wasted in the tendering process.”

Auditor

Access All Areas

A Guide to Destination Audits

Consider seasonal opportunities

If tourism is particularly seasonal in your town, take this into account when setting your timescale. Remember that out of season many tourist attractions are closed and there are no customers with whom your auditor can discuss accessibility issues.

"We gave them a month for every destination. They did the primary research at the beginning and then moved on to the sites. We were guided by the auditors to see what was feasible. Five accommodations, attractions, shops, etc. gave us a view of different types of attractions etc. to see what the issues were."

Local Authority

Consider the effect of unforeseen circumstances such as weather conditions or illness/annual leave of key contributors to the audit due to illness or annual leave. Can the timescale be extended in the event of any such circumstances? What will be the impact of the project not being delivered on time?

"Wherever possible given the timescales we carried out a thorough visit. The length of time varied according to the size of the premises. We usually ran over the time allocated because some businesses were only open for short periods - especially during the winter months. Our visits were also affected by upgrades or renovation works which meant that we were not seeing the product with its usual layout."

Auditor



Tie-in with other development programmes

Other local developments may be taking place either at the same time as this project or in the near future. Consider how you might collaborate. Any recommendations made in the destination access audit will also help with those developments.

"The Town Centre Managers were very supportive, and 'integrated transport' were very interested because there were lots of refurbishments going on at the time so the recommendations from the audits could feed into those projects. Things were more difficult with the bus service, but it was important for them to be made aware of what needed to be done to make their services more accessible."

Local Authority

Section 3: Best practice guidance

It helps if the coordinator is a central person within the Local Authority, i.e. the head of the tourism department, or an equalities officer. If your authority promotes the use of 'champions' to provide focus and support to colleagues and partners, then appointing an enthusiastic person to help drive the project can be very beneficial. Having the different heads of services on board will also make it easier to ensure commitment from all areas. This may also prove easier if they are providing some of the funding towards the audit.

"Many of the suggestions and recommendations have been incorporated into longer term strategic planning (e.g. shared space on roads). The recommendations for my own area – i.e. tourism website and visitor information – were particularly useful and something we were able to action almost immediately. Our website and information have since been held up as best practice to other destinations."

Brighton & Hove City Council

Reassure your investors

Reassure managers that there are many quick, low-cost solutions for making services and facilities accessible to disabled people. For example, changes to policies and procedures, or providing more information. They may be uncertain about taking part in the auditing process because they fear that any recommendations made will involve

costly structural changes, and require resources that they do not have. However, the audit will also be able to highlight areas where access is already good, so it will be also give them a chance to pat themselves on the back and promote what they are already doing well.

The best way to achieve good partnership working within the Local Authority as well as externally is to highlight the benefits of the destination access audit approach:

- The area will be accessible to as wide a group of potential visitors as possible, and to your local population.
- You will be able to provide good, clear information for all.
- You will benefit from increased revenue by attracting disabled people and their family/friends to the area.
- You will be able to promote the area as accessible, making it more attractive to visitors and identifying you as a Local Authority that is responding to the needs of its population.
- You will be able to target venues and services that need improvement.
- You may be able to feed auditors recommendations into bigger development programmes, and tie in with their timescales, making things more cost effective.

Access All Areas

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Choosing venues

Make sure you have good links with people from different Local Authority departments so that you know which services and venues to audit.

Our research into destination access audits carried out around the South-East of England has shown that the most receptive venue owners and service providers were those who had been approached by a known Local Authority contact rather than the auditor simply cold calling them. They will want to know:

- What the audit can do for them?
- Why they should have one?
- What will happen to the findings?

In particular, you should stress that it will help them meet their legal requirements under the Equality Act 2010. Remind them that anyone providing services on behalf of the public sector has the same duties under the Equality Act as the Local Authorities themselves. An audit will be a good way of measuring how far those requirements have been met.

Having a written report recommending areas for improvement can also be a useful tool for stimulating action within their own organisation.

“Being audited highlights issues to your governing structure. Sometimes governing bodies need issues put before them to get them to understand that they need to comply.”

Heritage Venue

As with any business, reputation is important to them, and they may fear that any failings they have around accessibility will be publicised, ultimately affecting the level of business they receive. They may also fear that they will be penalised in some way. Assure them that this will not be the case, and that the findings and recommendations will be used only for the parties directly involved in the project who can help them improve their service. Also reassure them that the audit will highlight the many things that they are already doing well and that are already accessible. This will give them the confidence to advertise them.

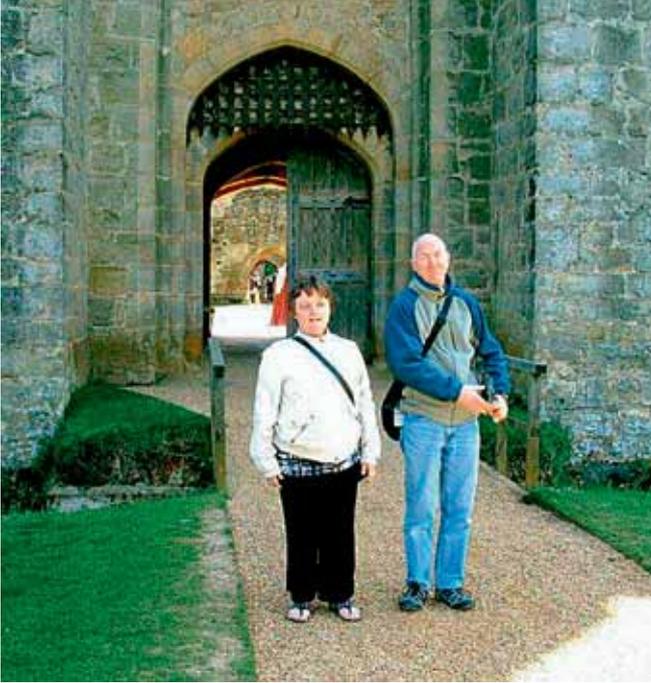
“The venues wanted to know who would see the report in terms of publicity. This was quite tricky. We stressed that they needed to comply with DDA but many of the recommendations weren’t essential but suggestions. We didn’t want it to be confrontational”

Local Authority

“We made it clear that they were getting a free audit and that it would benefit their business, and that the information would be just used for the Local Authority and them. We also stressed that the report would highlight good practice as well as less positive areas.”

Local Authority

Section 3: Best practice guidance



Supporting your auditors

Having made contact with venues and service providers beforehand, it is a good idea to give your auditor a letter of introduction to take with them when they first visit. There may be venue owners who will not be supportive of an audit carried out by the Local Authority. Your initial conversations with the venue coupled with the letter will help to smooth the path for the auditor.

“If the service providers have a disagreement with the LA, they are less likely to respond in a positive way when we contact them. We found this at one destination in particular, where small accommodation businesses had objected to a “budget chain hotel” being developed, but which received permission to go ahead despite the objections.”

Auditor

Be prepared to allow the auditor to come back to you if they experience any problems at this stage. You could either make further contact yourself, or discuss alternative venues with the auditor.

Difficulties with particular venues or service providers may arise after the initial introductory contact, so in some cases it may be more worthwhile to move on and choose another similar provider.

“On the whole it went well, but there were notable exceptions. These tended to be within the larger retail providers group, including a large shopping centre and a luxury department store. The most willing were the attractions, transport providers and the accommodation providers. Although with accommodation there was a notable exception of a luxury hotel where the middle management were willing and facilitated the audit but then found themselves under criticism from more senior managers (whilst the audit was on site) which was awkward.”

Auditor

“The resistance we encountered was more to do with the venues concern that we would recommend expensive changes that they could not afford. Once we were able to reassure them about the scope of the audit this tended to resolve it.”

Auditor

Sometimes venues that have already had an audit like to sign up because they want to check they are doing things right. What would be better in this instance is to encourage them to seek feedback from their customers on what they think of their accessibility.

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Involving disability groups

Destination audits are primarily about improving access for disabled people. Therefore, it is important to have local disability groups on board. Access groups, impairment specific organisations, and local Centres for Independent Living are good places to approach. If you do not already have a relationship with such organisations, developing one as part of this project will give you useful contacts for the future.

“We have a good and proactive relationship with the local Federation of Disabled People. They produce an online accessible city guide, where venues and businesses are audited by local disabled people. We work closely with them in encouraging local businesses to be part of this work, which is ongoing.”

Local Authority

“This is a core part of our practice, as we believe however experienced we may be, local knowledge and experience is key. We involved disabled people throughout our contract in a number of different ways, including direct involvement in audit, on-site discussions with visitors and service users, attending local community group meetings and sharing experiences, and later discussing recommendations. As our scope included county-wide strategies, the input from these groups specific to this area in particular, strongly informed our recommendations.”

Auditor



Section 4 of this guide specifically looks at the involvement of disabled people in destination access audits.

Stage 2 – Procurement

Who will carry out the audit?

External Auditor

We would highly recommend that an external qualified Auditor is commissioned to carry out a destination access audit. Where volunteer unqualified “auditors” are used there is a high risk that issues are not assessed from the view of all impairment types, and a comprehensive and accurate assessment is not made.

It is important to note that all access auditors must have professional indemnity and public liability insurance. This may not be possible if work is undertaken by unqualified ‘auditors’ as they will not have the criteria necessary to assess all access needs. This may result in legal action and financial recompense being sought from the venue and/or the Local Authority who commissioned the audit.

“It’s better that the audit is done by a professional external organisation who have done audits elsewhere. If it’s undertaken by the Council it can be seen as less objective. This approach helps us to shape the audit to what we need.”

Local Authority

Internal Auditor

If you have the skills and resources within the Local Authority, you may wish to carry out the audit in-house. However, a Local Authority should not underestimate the skills and time required to produce a quality destination access audit.

- Identify a suitable person/persons to undertake the audit
- Produce a checklist that the in-house auditor can use to assess route ways, and venues within the town or city. The checklist will be vital for the auditor to ensure that nothing is missed.
- Provide adequate specialist training for the in-house auditor. Consider accessing a training course that potential auditors from a number of different local authorities could attend so that training could be provided for a number of auditors at once.
- It is important that the auditor is able to produce a clear and comprehensive report that details the outcomes and recommendations of the audit.

Invite tenders

Follow your Local Authority’s Standing Orders for the procurement of contracts. These will cover issues such as the length of time allowed for applications and where it has to be advertised. This may depend on the value of the tender.

Be very clear with prospective auditors about the work you wish them to do - it will avoid any disputes later on. It will also help the auditors to consider accurately what they can offer, how much they will charge, and ultimately enable them to present a better application. Produce a brief for your preferred supplier or tender.

Items to include:

- Background to the project
- Aims of the project
- The scope and detail of the audit
- Whether the project ties in with other development programmes and any other data which needs to feed into the report
- How you would like the report to be set out and delivered
- Timescales
- The budget
- Any particular previous experience you are looking for from the auditor

What should the report look like?

A typical format for an access audit report is a combination of narrative and tabular information, with recommendations prioritised in order of those which need to be done more

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urgently/would benefit disabled people the most, and by level of expense. Photographs of specific areas requiring improvements are also particularly useful.

If the audit report is not specific enough it is hard for the venue to know exactly what they need to do. For example, a report recommending “access to train platforms needs improving” is vague. It could be improved by highlighting exactly where a dropped curb is and exactly where floor surfaces need changing and to what.

Ensuring that the final audit report is written in a clear format is vitally important. In initial discussions with the auditor, the format of the final report should be agreed. A clear and prioritised summary of recommendations will assist enormously.

“We wanted it broken down into destinations in Kent and wanted the recommendations to be grouped into different levels of expense so that it was easy to see which ones could be done for different budgets and which needed to be done more urgently than others.”

Local Authority

During our discussions with auditors, it was highlighted that producing a report in a format which grouped all similar facilities, services and venues together had proved most effective. One auditor indicated that “a one-stop shop” that put all the information in one place was the best way to ensure information was accessible.

Select the auditor

Involve key representatives from the project to be part of the selection process. Possible suggestions could be: the Local Authority staff member who will lead / be the champion for the project, a representative from the local tourism department, and a representative from a local disability group.

Key questions to ask in the interview include:

- What is their understanding of the scope of the audit, its aims and objectives, and their methodology for its execution?
- What is their experience of large scale audits?
- What experience/lessons learned from previous audits can they offer?
- How they will prioritise the tasks involved to ensure the final report reflects the project aims?
- Do they consider the project to be feasible within the timescales?
- Where do they see the project leading (for this destination and for themselves)?
- If previous work needs to be fed into the report (e.g. research data), will it be compatible with this piece of work?
- How they will set out the report, including their method for prioritising the recommended actions?
- How do they intend to work with the Local Authorities, transport leads and existing access groups?
- If no formal access groups exist, how will they involve disabled people?

Section 3: Best practice guidance

When selecting an auditor, it is strongly recommended that the person undertaking the audit should be a member of the National Register of Access Consultants (NRAC). This will ensure that all recommendations are based on not only the most up-to-date legislation, but experience and knowledge. The NRAC's website, which can be found at www.nrac.org.uk contains valuable information about selecting an auditor, and how to ensure an NRAC member is identified.

Planning together

A planning meeting between the Local Authority, the auditor and other key parties will set good ground for collaboration.

Allow the auditor to use their expertise to negotiate with you on issues such as timescale and what can be done within the budget available. Discuss with them the types of venues you would like to audit. Give them contact details for the venues you have pre-selected, as well as for any access groups and other disability organisations you would like them to involve.

"We checked the sites in the beginning and discussed with the auditors in detail what sites would be included and then we chose different ones if they were not interested etc."

Auditor

It would be useful at this stage to discuss with the auditor how the draft report should be shared with the Local Authority and how feedback will be provided.

"We got drafts of the report as it was produced and we met frequently."

Local Authority

Access audit reports can be very bulky, usually containing images of the items identified for improvement. This means that electronic files are particularly large and will often mean the report cannot be sent over e-mail. Local Authorities often have a policy around the sharing of files through file-sharing sites, as these can be seen as a security issue. If a file sharing site cannot be accessed, ask the auditor to send the draft on a CD-ROM.

Schedule updates

Regular progress meetings will ensure that all parties are kept in the loop about how the project is going and any difficulties that have arisen. This ensures that solutions can be found at the earliest opportunity.

"Regular meetings, understanding that there might be sensitivities with particular businesses. It was important to have meetings with destinations that were being included. Regular meetings to keep informed of what was going on. Good knowledge of Kent. We contacted the businesses in advance to pre-warn them that the audits were going to take place. We picked different businesses that would be of mutual benefit. We talked to the transport team in advance to get them on board."

Auditor

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“The key contact staff for each area of work were great and very willing to work with us, particularly when a given situation meant we needed some flexibility to progress.”

Auditor

Make sure that all contact information given to the auditor is accurate. Contacting the different parties to be involved can be a lengthy process, particularly if inaccuracies occur.

Be aware that making contact with venues and local disability groups can be a longer process than expected, so delays may occur in these situations.

“We have found that contacting and involving people often takes longer than anticipated. In the case of access groups they may only meet once a quarter and if a meeting has just taken place it requires a further three month wait. Also obtaining information from disabled people about their experiences can be a long process, just locating the right contacts despite best efforts can take some time.”

Auditor

“We did have some problems with engagement with some key people within the council, there was a lot of re-structuring going on at the time of our audit and staff jobs were changing so it was sometimes difficult to get staff to prioritise meetings with us, however this was not in all areas and we were mostly able to overcome where it did occur through persistence.”

Auditor

Stage 3

The Audit Report

Draft version

Once you have received a draft of the report, make sure you give feedback. Work with the auditor to make sure you are getting the information you need, and that it's presented in a way that is clear and useful for you.

“They presented it as we wanted. If there were a lot of issues we didn't want a negative report coming back. We wanted to know where there were good practices etc.”

Local Authority

Final version

Once you have received the final report you will need to digest the information and share it with your stakeholders.

Supporting venues

Having offered the opportunity for venues and service providers to receive an access audit, it is important that the Local Authority maintains contact. Rather than simply sending the venue a copy of their report, begin your follow-up support by arranging to meet with them to discuss the recommendations made in their report. For smaller businesses, it is likely that they will not be used to reading long reports of this nature, and therefore they may have difficulty

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processing the information in a way that helps them take further action. It is also helpful for service providers to know that they are dealing with the recommendations in the right way.

Good communications, with all parties throughout the project, will deliver more success. It is especially important to ensure venues and other third parties understand the benefits and can deliver the recommendations suggested.

Disseminate report

It is recommended that once the final report is produced the auditor and lead commissioner of work undertake a presentation of the key findings to all stakeholders, including any disability groups involved. This will allow stakeholders to ask questions but more importantly will make them feel involved in the process. Copies of the reports can be handed out and made available electronically. This approach will hopefully make the reports become living documents that are used for the benefit of all, rather than just sitting on the shelf and gathering dust.

Share your next steps

Holding an event for all parties involved will provide an opportunity to share the results of the work carried out. Take the opportunity to get the press involved. Engage your in-house publications too. You can also use this event to tell disabled people about the recommendations made so that they know what to look out for. Encourage a dialogue between service providers/venue owners and disabled people so that disabled people can actively contribute to any future developments.

It may be that not all the priority recommendations can be followed up at that time, but it is helpful for disabled people to know this. So do take the opportunity to discuss the recommendations with local disability groups and find out which ones they would like to see acted on first.

“They required five separate reports, one overview of the county as a whole including marketing, transport links, county strategy etc. and then four further reports one for each specified area. The reports were a mixture of both narrative and tabular including an executive summary and priorities for each recommendation made. The final report format was discussed and agreed at a kick off meeting with all main stakeholders present.”

Auditor

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Stage 4 Feedback and Evaluation

Customer and venue feedback

Having carried out an audit, it is useful for all parties to know which recommendations have been followed up. As well as providing an opportunity for everyone to evaluate the success of the project, it also enables service providers to publicise their positive changes to disabled people. It will enable auditors to know that the work they are doing is resulting in positive action.

“We had very little feedback. Once the final report, (with recommendations), was issued this effectively terminated our involvement. However, as with all audits, when we were on site we picked up a number of ‘easy hits’ and discussed these direct with the service providers. Many of them signed up to the changes there and then, one restaurateur produced a large print copy of his menu in easy read format and gave his staff training on the spot!”

Auditor

Don't leave it too long before seeking feedback otherwise it is difficult for people to remember what happened. Staff teams change over time, so a long gap between the audit and feedback could easily result in nobody recalling the audit taking place, or if they do, they may know very little about it.



Sometimes it is not possible for all the recommendations to be followed up e.g. because of financial resources or geographical limitations. Encourage service providers to publicise the adjustments they can make, so disabled people can still access their service.

“Main barriers will have been around financial resource, and the geographical limitations of the city – e.g. we can't take away steep hills - but we can (and do) make sure we tell disabled visitors that they are there and suggest alternative routes.”

Local Authority

Consider how you will get feedback from service providers and customers. This could be done in a number of ways:

- by questionnaire
- one-to-one interviews
- small focus groups
- a combination of all three.

Make sure that whichever method you use is accessible to disabled people so that they can take an active part.

Seek some initial feedback after the audit, but don't just do it on one occasion. Encourage a culture of willingness to receive it at any time.

Feedback from Disabled People

As well as seeking feedback from venues and service providers, ask local disabled people to tell you about improvements that they've noticed. Set up a regular dialogue with local disability groups so that you can engage with them on future service developments. Encourage them to tell you about any difficulties they have in accessing services, and tell them about improvements that you are putting in place. For example, East Sussex County Council and the county's Primary Care Trusts have set up a Disabled People's Participation Group, which recruits disabled people interested in commenting on different issues. They sought their input on service developments by holding small focus groups and larger conferences.

“Winchester City Council employed a Disability Access Co-ordinator, to carry out the recommendations of the Destination Access Audit. As a result the following improvements have been made:

- *Updating of pre-arrival information produced for visitors by our tourism team - Welcoming the World page in Visitor Guide - a web page for disabled visitors. Listings on the tourism website which can be searched by access requirements to ensure you choose the right accommodation for your stay.*
- *A DVD of Winchester Cathedral www.industry.visitsoutheastengland.com/site/accessibility/video-case-studies explaining how it aims to provide services for disabled visitors.”*

Local Authority

“Our Disability Co-ordinator encouraged the venues and service to carry out the recommendations.”

Local Authority

Overcoming barriers and following recommendations

Local Authority departments, venue owners and service providers will likely have differing approaches to following up recommendations. Those who run large public buildings may be more inclined to take them forward, whilst smaller businesses who do not perceive themselves as accessible in the first place may be less so. A further perceived barrier for owners / occupiers of historic buildings may be the belief that as well as being costly, structural changes will be unachievable aesthetically.

“This varied greatly. It depended on the venue, i.e. if it was a serious public venue they were more likely to take things on. Also if a historic building, more difficult to do cheaper or aesthetically.”

Local Authority

However, there are good examples of some historic buildings being made accessible whilst retaining their historic characteristics. Chatham Historic Dockyard, and Somerset House in London are two such examples. Allow venues / service providers who have received an audit to access disability equality training courses provided to Local Authority

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staff. If such training is recommended as a result of their audit, try to offer courses that are delivered at flexible times so that shift staff (for example, in hotels) can attend. Further information about training is presented in the 'Involving Disabled People' guidance abbreviated in **Section 4**.

Audit Evaluation

As with any project, it is important to evaluate the success of a destination audit. If you have already sought feedback from different stakeholders involved, this will make your final evaluation easier as you can incorporate that feedback into your overall evaluation.

There may also be indirect benefits as a result of your project. Although the destination access audit approach would not have considered any aspects relating to staff areas, it is inevitable that any changes made that benefit the public will benefit disabled staff as well.



"The nature of our museum means we have a lot of customers who are veterans. We have a high proportion of young people and also elderly. We've always had to cater for those who have mobility or sight difficulties, so it hasn't increased the amount of people who come here - it's just made it easier for them. We've always had a diverse workforce with lots of volunteers, including veterans and disabled people. We have a wheelchair user at front of house, and it's just made it easier for everyone. We invite feedback from our volunteers whenever we're doing anything like this."

Heritage Venue

Similarly, additional nuggets of advice and learning may arise just by building relationships with the auditors:

"We would advise all providers of services to have an Access Statement or description of their services. These are often non-existent or hidden away. Similarly if all Local Authorities could have a one-stop shop of access information (with good external links to accessible local services) that would really help potential disabled visitors to find what they need."

Auditor

Section 4

Involving Disabled People in Destination Access Audits



The value of involving disabled people throughout the participatory process of planning and undertaking Destination Access Audits cannot be underestimated.

Involving disabled people makes extremely good business and economic sense. The quality of information obtained and the access solutions identified will encourage return visits increasing revenue to the area. It also clearly demonstrates a commitment to, and valuing of the disabled customer.

“If you’re not disabled you don’t know what to look for. It seems obvious to you, because you are disabled and deal with it every day, but I guess it isn’t as obvious to everyone else.”

Involving disabled people from the outset and making sure their views are incorporated means that destinations and related services (e.g. transport) will be able to tailor their delivery and environments, to ensure that the needs of disabled customers of all ages are catered for.

“They put in a handrail but don’t realise that if you use a walking stick you use the same hand whether you are going one way or the other... It is things like this that you don’t realise unless you are in that position yourself.”

You will also be able to amass details relating directly to particular service providers and venues, and to the geographic landscape. Local people know the area well; they have firsthand experience of living in it and of what their own access requirements are in different places.

There are five key indicators of a well planned and effective process to involve disabled people. These are:

- Involving local disability groups and disabled representatives for whom the audit will have an impact;
- Valuing the involvement of disabled people and demonstrating this through example and best practice;
- Ensuring that all those disabled people involved are able to contribute fully to the process without experiencing communication barriers;
- Demonstrating that once provided, the views of disabled people will be acted upon;
- Putting in place, from the start, a clear mechanism to feedback the outcomes and results to all disabled participants.

These elements combined with use of a practical checklist to identify the individual stages for involvement should ensure that the final Destination Access Audit results will be better informed and of greater value to disabled visitors and their families/friends.

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Checklist for involvement

This checklist has been taken from 'Involving Disabled People'. This toolkit for Local Authorities and large tourism organisations can be found at www.accentuateuk.org.uk/resources-toolkits

Step 1: Starting the right way

By acting in a sensitive and respectful way you can help participants to feel they are being treated equally and that their input is valued. Disability Equality training will help with this, and introduce you to effective ways of removing barriers.

Step 2: Have you involved disabled people right at the start?

As soon as you have an idea or an aim, involve your target groups of disabled people. It is essential that you do not go in with this part already decided, or participants may well feel the task is paying lip service only. You will develop a project that is reflective of what is needed and wanted by your community, including disabled people.

Step 3: Have you recruited a diverse group of participants to involve?

Building a diverse group will give you more rounded feedback so try to include disabled representatives from all the 'diversity strands'. Disabled children and young people are often left out of consultations, yet they make up a large percentage of the population.

All printed and electronic information should be tailored to the target audience.

Using existing groups for involvement

Contact with Access Groups can be made via your council's Access Officers and Tourism Officers.

Involving a range of disabled people on location

Asking people for their views whilst visiting a location can have all sorts of benefits, including those arising from immediate recall, recent experience, and visual prompts.

Approaching people even if they do not visibly appear to be disabled is beneficial. Non-disabled people can also have issues around access, particularly families with small children, and those who do not speak English. People with 'hidden impairments' may be just as affected as a wheelchair user might be, by the attitudes and language of staff, poor layout of facilities, or inaccessible information.

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Step 4: Show your appreciation

It is good practice to offer some form of remuneration to participants in recognition of their contribution, and to show appreciation that their input has been valued. Access Groups are limited to what funding they are able to receive, and rules for benefit claimants can cause difficulties in terms of paying participants.

Some people, however, may not be able to participate without being reimbursed for expenses, such as travel and additional support costs.

Project proposals need to be explicit about who will finance this.

Step 5: How will you know if this engagement was successful?

When considering what to evaluate, good practice would include looking at how meaningful and accessible the engagement process was for the disabled participants. The evaluation also needs to focus on the auditing process used and any resulting changes to improve access.

In terms of best practice, everyone who is participating in the project should be involved in deciding how the evaluation will happen. By involving disabled people in designing the evaluation process, you will ensure that it is done in an inclusive and accessible way.

Step 6: Have you been clear about roles and expectations?

The importance of involving disabled people in the auditing process needs to be explicit in the auditors brief.

Outlining your expectations and giving specific examples is recommended, e.g. target groups and numbers, funding provision to meet costs arising from involvement.

Try to give the auditor a realistic idea of what you hope to achieve, and make sure that disabled participants receive a brief about their role.

Step 7: Creating a supported and positive experience

There is a clear link between making sure that everyone feels supported when participating in a Destination Access Audit, and the quality of information received from the disabled people involved. To achieve this successfully, the following key elements need managing effectively:

Choosing the right person for the job

Where possible, use participation workers reflective of disabled participants' own needs and backgrounds.

Being flexible and offering choice

Disabled people often have better times of the day than others, so do allow for this when making arrangements.

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Providing a safe environment

Creating a 'safe space' where disabled participants' needs are met will enable them to feel comfortable and willing to share their views.

Remember that some people may need more time and support to process and communicate their views.

Allowing people to give their views in a variety of ways

Good initial communication between all parties will enable the information gathered to be recorded in the most effective way for analysis.

Disabled participants will find different forms and formats suit them best and it is important to think creatively when designing the ways in which views can be expressed e.g. email, social media, pictures.

Allowing enough time

One of the biggest barriers to good consultation is time. For disabled participants, more time will often be needed to ensure equal access in the involvement process.

Sufficient time should be built into the audit plan to enable a good rapport and relationship of trust to be formed with participants.



Step 8: A job well done

Participants will be keen to know the results of their involvement and what changes have been made.

It is important to have in place a mechanism to feedback the results of their involvement; making sure this stage is implemented as soon as possible once the audit has been completed.

There will also be positive, sustainable relationships created between auditors and participants; these can bring mutual benefits that will build bridges for future engagements.

Summary and conclusion



By choosing to carry out a Destination Access Audit you will be responding to the access needs of your population in a holistic and effective way. Using accredited auditors, input from disabled people, and following the steps in this guidance will hold you in good stead for making tangible improvements and working collaboratively with the stakeholders involved.

Planning and delivery are only part of the process. Taking action on the audit recommendations is perhaps the most challenging part of improving access.

As a Local Authority this is the area that will prove your Destination Access Audit worthwhile. You have successfully highlighted where barriers can be removed.

In order to see your investment come to fruition you will need to continue to support and encourage your services and venues to take up the recommendations.

In addition to the suggestions in this guidance, the document '*Involving Disabled People*' also suggests ways that you can develop the results of your project to leave a lasting legacy of improved access.

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30 Appendix: a practical checklist

Steps involved	Recommendations	Your notes
■ STAGE 1 – Planning the Audit		
Understand the purpose of a destination audit and its benefits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read Section 2 of Destination Access Audits: A Guide for Local Authorities.• Carry out an Equality Analysis to ensure that the needs of all those “protected characteristics” are met and project plans are changed if required.	
Agree what you want from the audit and what will be done with the findings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set out the level of detail that the audit will cover so that this can be communicated clearly with all parties involved.	
Agree the scope and detail of the audit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research the market rates for access auditing work by contacting external auditing companies for quotes.• Agree which Local Authority department will lead the project, but seek funding from other departments to secure their “buy-in.”• Agree any external funding sources to be approached and complete applications as appropriate.• Consider funding sources available for carrying out any recommendations relevant to the Local Authority that may arise from the audit report.	
Agree the Budget and funding sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set a realistic timescale for carrying out an audit of the depth you require and allow the auditor to negotiate with you once appointed.	
Agree the timescale, considering tie-in with other development programmes and any seasonal factors.		

Steps involved	Recommendations	Your notes
<p>Agree key parties to be involved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nominate a Local Authority Officer to co-ordinate the project (e.g. Tourism Manager, Equalities Officer or Disability Champion). • Discuss the audit with other Local Authority Departments, transport providers and partners responsible for community facilities and town centre management. • Contact local disability groups to seek involvement from disabled people, taking in to account the recommendations in Section 4 of “Destination access Audits: A Guide for Local Authorities. • If not already in existence, develop a relationship with a local Access Group as part of this project. 	
<p>Agree and approach the venues to be audited.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss with different Local Authority departments the relevant venues to be audited and gather names and numbers of main contacts. • Make the initial contact with service providers and venue owners to introduce them to the audit and explain what it can do for them. • Prepare an introductory letter for the Auditor to take to the venue on their first contact. • Allow the Auditor to negotiate with you if they experience any problems with their initial approach to venues. 	

<p>Agree who will carry out the audit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless the Local Authority has an appropriately skilled person, commission an external qualified Auditor to carry out the audit. 	
<p>In-house</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a suitable person within the Local Authority to carry out the audit. • Produce a checklist that the in-house auditor can use to assess route ways, and venues within the town or city. • Provide adequate specialist training for the in-house Auditor, considering the possibility of courses accessible to a number of Local Authority Auditors at the same time. 	
<p>Invite tenders for external Auditor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow your Local Authority's Standing Orders for the procurement of contracts. • Produce a brief for your preferred supplier or tender, to include: background and aims of the project, scope and detail, tie-in with other programmes and / or other data to be fed in, report format and delivery method, timescales, the budget, and previous experience required. 	

Steps involved	Recommendations	Your notes
Select the auditor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve representatives from all parties to be involved in monitoring the project in the selection process e.g. the Equalities Officer / Champion, Tourism Department representative and a representative from a local disability group. • Interview at least three Auditors, asking each to undertake a presentation about their approach to the project, the format of the report they would produce and the key points they would wish to cover. • Ensure that the Auditor you commission is a member of the National Register of Access Consultants (NRAC). 	
Hold planning meeting with auditor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange planning meeting with Auditor and other key parties to be involved in the project. • Allow the auditor to use their expertise to negotiate with you on issues such as timescale and what can be done within the budget available. • Discuss with the Auditor the types of venues you would like to audit and give all available contact details for any pre-selected venues, as well as for any access groups and other disability organisations you would like them to involve. • Discuss with the Auditor how the draft report should be shared with the Local Authority and how feedback will be provided. 	

Stage 2 continues on next page...

Recommendations

Steps involved

STAGE 2 – continued

Schedule regular progress updates with the auditor

- Agree and hold regular progress meetings so that all parties are kept in the loop and problems can be identified and solved as soon as possible.

■ STAGE 3 – The Audit Report

Receive, read and consider draft report, and give feedback

Once you have received the draft report from the Auditor, give feedback

Receive final version of report.

Contact venues to discuss their report and how recommendations will be followed up.

- Begin follow-up support by arranging to meet with each service provider / venue owner to discuss the recommendations made in their report.

Send report to all parties involved.

- Arrange for the Auditor and the lead commissioner of the work to undertake a presentation to all stakeholders. Enable them to ask questions and to reinforce their continued involvement in the project.

Hold stakeholder workshop to share findings and agree next steps

- Take the opportunity to share the results of the work that has been carried out. Involve the press and use in-house publications so that the Local Authority, service providers and venue owners can highlight existing good practice to disabled.
- Tell disabled people about the recommendations made so that they know what to look out for and can give feedback. Encourage a dialogue between the Local Authority, service providers and venue owners so that disabled people can actively contribute to any future developments.

Steps involved	Recommendations	Your notes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make service providers and venue owners aware of their own legal requirements under the Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers for disabled people. • Let disabled people know if there are recommendations which cannot be followed up at the time and the reasons for these <p>Discuss the recommendations with disability groups and enable disabled people to tell you which recommendations they would like to see acted on first.</p>	
	<p>■ STAGE 4 – Feedback and Evaluation</p> <p>Seek feedback from venues and customers about recommendations made</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't leave it too long before seeking feedback from venues and service providers on the audit as people either won't remember or staff teams may change. • Encourage service providers to tell their visitors about any adjustments they can make to enable disabled people to access their service, particularly if recommendations have been made that cannot be followed up (e.g. because of financial resources or geographical location). • Seek feedback from service providers / venue owners and customers via questionnaire, one-to-one interviews or small focus groups – or a combination of all three. <p>Make sure that whichever method you use is accessible to disabled people so that they can take an active part.</p>	

Stage 4 continues on next page...

■ **STAGE 4 – continued**

Seek feedback from venues and customers about recommendations made
Continued

- Don't just seek feedback on one occasion; encourage a culture of willingness to receive it on an ongoing basis.
- Set up a regular dialogue with local disability groups to enable them to be involved in future developments. Invite them to tell you about improvements they have noticed and any difficulties they have in accessing services.
- Allow venues / service providers who have received an audit to access any disability equality training courses provided to Local Authority staff such as Welcome All training.



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