



**UNIVERSAL
ACCESS**

**Street Route Accessibility Audit
For
Blessington & District Forum**

September 2019

Accessibility Audit

PUBLIC REALM

BLESSINGTON MAIN STREET, CO WICKLOW

For Blessington & District Forum



This report has been produced by

Universal Access

41/42 High Street

Killarney, Co. Kerry, Ireland

T: 087 9060703

E: info@universalaccess.ie

W: www.universalaccess.ie

Paudie Healy CEO and Fionnuala Rogerson Architect, Access Consultant

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NOTE:

This report outlines the findings of an accessibility audit of the main street in Blessington, as evident on the date of the site inspections during the summer of 2019, and compares these findings to good practice as defined in current national regulations and guidance as well as international standards and guidance documents. It is acknowledged that the items highlighted in the report, when originally designed and constructed by Wicklow County Council and other parties, may have been in compliance with relevant standards and good practice at the time of their design and construction.

The report is intended as a document which identifies shortcomings and barriers to accessibility and inclusion, provides guidance on current good practice, and can be used to assist in preparing an action plan to improve the accessibility of existing infrastructure in order to promote Blessington as an accessible destination and an inclusive place to both live and work. It is intended to be used in conjunction with other strategic and detailed plans and to assist in ensuring that these plans take full account of the needs of present and future generations.

The detailed findings of the Accessibility Audit are located at Appendix A to this report

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report relates to an independent accessibility audit of Blessington Main Street, Co Wicklow on the instructions of the Blessington and District Forum
- 1.2 The area of the town covered starts at the Wicklow County Council Offices on Oak Drive and includes the Main Street as far as the junction with Troopersfield. It also includes the area from Market Square as far as Dunnes Stores in the new town centre and the Kilbride Road as far as the old health centre.

2.0 Objectives

- 2.1 The objective of the audit is to identify elements within the street environment which may impact on the accessibility, usability and enjoyment of the town for everyone and particularly for older people, people with disabilities, families and children, both visitors and locals alike.
- 2.2 The audit identifies where elements do not accord with good practice and references relevant guidance. The aim is to assist the community, the Blessington and District Forum, Wicklow County Council (WCC) and other stakeholders when considering the overall development of the town, its management and maintenance, and when undertaking improvements to the town and its infrastructure, to ensure that Universal Access is fully considered. The ultimate aim is to improve the urban environment making it socially inclusive and welcoming and to enhance the quality of life of all those visiting and living in the area.
- 2.3 A further aim is to assist Blessington and District Forum to develop the town as an accessible tourist destination – see Appendix D

3.0 Scope of Audit

3.1 Audit Process

- 3.1.1 The audit consisted of a desk top study of information relating to Blessington and the surrounding area in order to better understand the forces driving the current and future development of the town and its wider environment. These included the County Development Plan, the Local Area Plan and the first stage of the 2019 Town Centre Health Check as well as details on the proposed expansion of the Greenway. This was followed by an examination of detailed Ordnance Survey maps of the centre of the town and the assembly of both national and international standards and guidance on accessible and inclusive urban and street environments.

- 3.1.2 A thorough examination was made of the external environment in the areas described over six days on 11th and 15th June, 17th and 23rd July, 23rd August & 2nd September 2019. The areas examined included amongst others: footpaths, road crossings, tactile paving, obstacles and hazards, surfaces, ramps, steps and handrails, public seating, recreation areas, cycling, parking and set-down, information, signage and wayfinding.
- 3.1.3 Weather conditions during the audit site inspections were mainly dry with some rain on 11th June and 17th July. As the inspections were carried out during daylight hours no account could be taken of lighting conditions except for example where it was evident that public lighting was obscured by overhanging trees.

3.2 Report Structure

- 3.2.1 The detailed findings are located in Appendix A to this report. They are structured in six sections, each section relating to a specific area of the route taken by the auditors, starting at the County Council Offices and finishing at the bus stop south of the Troopersfield junction. Section 7 refers to traffic and traffic speeds. The detailed findings concentrate on items that do not comply with good practice standards and guidance. There are many items which do represent good practice and these are outlined briefly in Section 4 of the report as positive findings
- 3.2.2 The locations of the Individual items and elements are described in text, identified by photographs, with observations noted. A brief outline of the impact these may have on access and use is given and the relevant standards or guidance are referenced, preceded by the title of the reference document in bold. Where no reference document is given and recommendation are made these sometimes take the form of improved management techniques rather than physical adjustments, bearing in mind the constraints and limitations presented by the existing element, its layout, design, fabric, and usage pattern. The auditors were also conscious that there may be significant changes made to the urban environment in the Town Centre as envisaged in the Local Area Plan and Town Centre Health Check and that these changes have to be designed in detail. Hence it is intended that the audit acts as a guide to the standards and issues that need to be taken into account in any future design and as an aid to the development of a Universal Design Action Plan.
- 3.2.3 Some of the findings may relate to areas which are not in the charge of the Local Authority and/or are located within privately managed areas to which the public have access. An action plan should take account of how the necessary remedial works to these can be managed and implemented.

3.2.4 Some health and safety issues are highlighted as they impact on access and use but the report is primarily an Accessibility Audit and must not be taken as a Health and Safety Audit

3.3 Consultation

3.3.1 The audit process commenced with a meeting with some members of the Blessington and District Forum on the 11th June who outlined the background to the audit and identified issues of concern. Over the course of the site inspections a number of people were spoken to informally. A draft report was circulated to members of the Forum Access Group followed by a meeting on 2nd September to receive feed-back. This aided in identifying which items posed the most barriers to some of those present and which may need to be prioritised. No formal consultation process was undertaken.

3.3.2 Consultation with end users is a fundamental component of Universal Design. Frequently items identified by designers or auditors which appear to pose major obstacles to access and use may in fact be found to have less negative impact than first perceived or it may be possible to overcome them with improved management procedures.

3.4 Priorities

3.4.1 Following the meeting with the Access Group a priority rating was assigned to each item or element as an aid to formulating an Action Plan. These are linked, where possible, with future plans, management and maintenance procedures. Priority Categories may be dependent upon feasibility, health and safety issues, cost and ease of implementation. In order to deliver best value in terms of increased accessibility it is suggested that the priority ratings assigned are further assessed for their likely impact through additional consultation with visitors, older people and people with disabilities. They also need to be reviewed with Wicklow County Council and other stakeholders to ensure that works are coordinated with other planned works. It is recommended that “anticipatory” adjustments are made wherever possible, particularly where they are low cost and/or unlikely to be impacted by future development.

3.4.2 The following priority categories are used:

Priority 1

Items which should be dealt with in the immediate short term, which may present a significant barrier to access, a health & safety risk or which may involve little or no cost.

Priority 2

Adjustments which should be implemented as soon as practicable to improve access

Priority 3

Desirable aims which should be addressed as part of a long term strategy and incorporated whenever the relevant area or element is being refurbished or upgraded.

Priority 4

Items which do not prevent a significant barrier to access but which can be adapted or improved through better Management or Maintenance procedures or through management initiatives and which will enhance access and use of facilities in the town.

3.5 Standards and References

The Audit takes guidance on Standards, Codes of Practice and Technical Guidance for Universal Design, Accessibility and Inclusion in the external and urban environment principally from the following documents:

- *Building Regulation Part M 2010 and Technical Guidance Document M –Access and Use*
- *British Standard 8300-1: 2018. Design of an accessible and inclusive built environment – External Environment. Code of Practice*
- *Building for Everyone –a Universal Design Approach Volume 1: External Environment and Approach published by the National Disability Authority 2012*
- *Govt. of Ireland – Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS)*
- *Local Government Management and Services Board – Good Practice Guidelines on Accessibility of Streetscapes*
- *The Scottish Office – Department of Environment Transport & Roads Guidance on the use of tactile paving surfaces*

Other applicable good practice guidance, where used, is referenced in the findings and listed in Appendix C.

- 3.5.1 Building Regulations apply principally to buildings and to the external environment within a building’s site area. They do not normally apply to the public realm. Nonetheless Part M of the building regulations has been referred to as it gives relevant guidance in relation to several aspects of the external environment including car parking, set-down, gradients, steps & ramps.

4.0 Positive Findings& Observations for Improvement

4.1 Footpaths

- 4.1.1 Most footpaths throughout the area audited are of adequate width to provide safe and inclusive spaces for pedestrians and due to the overall width of the main streets there is much potential to further improve. Apart from the area leading to the New Town Centre they are also reasonably level.

- 4.1.2 In the area of the New Town Centre pavements are smooth and most paved spaces are generous and easy to negotiate.
- 4.1.3 Levels and cross falls on the main street have resulted in many of the pavements being flush with the parking bays and road surface. This has resulted in difficulties with drainage and in particular with cars driving on or over-sailing the footpaths thereby creating obstacles for pedestrian movement and in particular for people with reduced mobility and young children
- 4.1.4 People who are blind or vision impaired mainly negotiate footpaths by reference to footpath kerbs or to the building line. The proliferation of obstacles including cars, A-framed sandwich boards, litter bins and bollards make the public realm very difficult to manage.
- 4.1.5 Poor maintenance of footpaths has resulted in trip hazards and uneven surfaces, some of the worst being in the area of the New Town Centre where poor quality paving and drainage materials and their inadequate design and installation have increased the levels of maintenance required.
- 4.1.6 Rainwater from most buildings along Main Street discharges across the footpaths, leaving them either wet or slippery, depending on weather conditions, and adding to barriers for people with reduced mobility.
- 4.1.7 The absence of safe cycling routes has resulted in cyclists often using the footpaths rather than the carriageway resulting in potential for pedestrian cyclist conflict and making vulnerable pedestrians nervous.
- 4.1.8 Footpaths in the area of the Market Square are either non-existent or poorly designed and the separation of cars and pedestrians is unclear leaving most pedestrians unsure of where to go or who has priority.
- 4.1.9 For wheelchair users or people using wheeled mobility aids the Market Square area is completely inaccessible without using the carriageway.
- 4.1.10 For families with young children or children with autism the Market Square area poses significant safety issues.
- 4.1.11 In several other areas, notably on the outskirts of the town, footpaths peter out without any clear indication of how pedestrian safety is to be ensured.

- 4.1.12 Along the Kilbride Road the footpaths are both narrow and uneven and do not permit safe access either to the old health centre / proposed Greenway visitor centre or to the rear access to Supervalu.
- 4.1.13 In some areas, such as at the Skate Park and equipped recreation area, footpaths are needed to access the facilities available and reduce travel distances.

4.2 Crossings

- 4.2.1 There are only two controlled crossings along the full length of the Main Street which is in excess of 1km in length, with a carriageway of approximately 12m in width.
- 4.2.2 The lights at the controlled crossings do not give adequate time for an elderly person or someone who may move slowly to cross safely and confidently, and the volume of the bleep is too low for people who are hard of hearing.
- 4.2.3 There is only one uncontrolled crossing, which is missing its tactile blister paving, at St. Mary's Junior School. Elsewhere people cross at random, often dodging between cars and lorries.
- 4.2.4 Where footpaths have raised kerbs, dropped kerbs at crossing points are inconsistent, sometimes on one side of the road only, with a raised kerb on the opposite side.
- 4.2.5 In many areas the use of tactile paving to indicate road crossings does not follow correct standards, either in terms of the type of paving used, its layout or its colour.
- 4.2.6 Where used correctly such as at the two controlled crossings the red blister paving (which signifies a controlled crossing) is faded and worn so that it is almost indistinguishable from the surrounding concrete paving. The same applies to many areas of buff coloured blister paving (for use at uncontrolled crossings).
- 4.2.7 The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets guides that at all locations where people are likely to cross provision should be made. There are many locations where additional crossings should be provided but in particular at the Market Square, at the junction between the N81 and Oak Drive and also at its junction with Troopersfield.

4.3 Parking

- 4.3.1 There is ample parking throughout the town both on and off-street.
- 4.3.2 The town is well provided with designated accessible parking bays which, apart from their size and their safety in use, are generally well located.

- 4.3.3 On street parking is free and appears to be uncontrolled. Some cars were seen to be parked illegally.
- 4.3.4 Whilst the extensive general parking is convenient for those relying on cars it also negatively impacts on the quality of the town environment and is particularly intrusive to pedestrians.
- 4.3.5 Due to the wide streets much of the parking is head-on or perpendicular to the footpaths resulting in cars projecting across footpaths and into access routes.
- 4.3.6 Where designated bays are parallel to the footpath they are generally too small with insufficient space for transfer or circulation around the vehicle
- 4.3.7 Many parking bays, and in particular those designated as accessible bays do not meet current standards with regards to the size of the bays. The accessible bays in almost all case are not long enough and do not have a safe zone to the rear and a transfer zone on both sides, and some have markings which are faded or have no vertical sign where it may be necessary..
- 4.3.8 No designated family parking was observed apart from at the Town Centre and none was noted within the public realm in the vicinity of schools or crèches.
- 4.3.9 No designated accessible set-down areas were observed.
- 4.3.10 In many parts of the town, particularly around the Market Square and in the area around the Kilbride Road junction there is sufficient space both to increase the width of footpaths and retain perpendicular parking using wheel stops or other devices to prevent intruding on the footpaths. In other areas parallel bays should be substituted for perpendicular ones where they are too small.
- 4.3.11 A general redesign of parking is required together with a review of both soft and hard landscaping, street drainage, road build outs, services, crossings and lighting.

4.4 Street Furniture

- 4.4.1 Street furniture includes seating, bollards, tree surrounds, sign boards, lighting columns, post boxes and other sundry items which can enhance our streets, creating spaces where people can socialise, get information or rest. They can also create obstacles.
- 4.4.2 Along the main street and side streets there are many fine examples of community engagement with the provision of seating outside commercial premises, posters on litter

- bins, planter boxes and murals on derelict buildings, all of which add to the friendly atmosphere and inclusive spirit.
- 4.4.3 Wherever possible street furniture should be located at or beyond the boundaries of an access route. If it is necessary to locate items within an access route their presence should be clearly apparent e.g. by ensuring that there is enough space and that they contrast visually with the background against which they will be seen in both wet and dry conditions and in different lighting conditions.
- 4.4.4 Many commercial premises have sandwich panels outside their premises which when combined with refuse bins, bollards and lamp and sign posts create very cluttered pavements
- 4.4.5 In the New Town Centre area there has been an attempt to rationalise the location of street furniture and to keep it outside the boundaries of the main access route.
- 4.4.6 Unfortunately the quality of much of the street furniture in the New Town Centre is poor and not suitable for the locations in which it has been used e.g. trees and tree guards have been located too close to kerbs and have been damaged by parked cars.
- 4.4.7 Many stainless steel bollards, which have poor colour contrast, have also been damaged and are now rusting.
- 4.4.8 The extensive use of bollards should be avoided wherever possible and other means of creating barriers to prevent cars mounting the footpaths should be considered, for example where space permits heavy duty planter boxes are preferable.
- 4.4.9 Preferably bollards should be of the same style, minimum 1m high, with good reflective bands and colour contrast based on the background against which they are read and differing lighting conditions. At present at least three different styles are used throughout the town.
- 4.4.10 Some stainless steel tree surrounds are lifting due to surface level tree roots and have created trip hazards. These should be replaced with appropriate surrounds of compacted resin bonded gravel or a rubberized material or similar – as advised by a landscape consultant.
- 4.4.11 Planter boxes in the new town centre are sometimes randomly placed to prevent car parking and intrude into access routes.
- 4.4.12 Seating in the new centre consists of benches with shiny cold surfaces and no backs or arm supports.

- 4.4.13 The attractive granite circular seating area in the Market Square also has no backs or arm rests and in addition is accessed over rough granite cobbles.
- 4.4.14 Post boxes along the main street are located off the pavement but have been raised above a kerb thus preventing for example some wheelchair users from accessing them.

4.5 Parks & Recreational Areas

- 4.5.1 For a town of its size and potential for growth Blessington has relatively few public green areas or parks within the town centre. Hence those that exist need to be preserved and enhanced and other opportunities for the creation of green spaces should be identified particularly as the town expands in line with the Local Area Plan.
- 4.5.2 The two main green areas at St. Joseph's and along the Old Naas Road could both be enhanced, possibly through the provision of seating, more low level planting with an emphasis on bio-diversity, sensory planting and maybe some exercise equipment.
- 4.5.3 The skate park and children's playground off Oak Drive is evidently very popular and has recently been expanded with the provision of an outdoor gym and exercise facilities for people of all ages. This is a great facility but there is scope to consider how it could be made even more inclusive for children and adults of mixed abilities

4.6 Public Spaces

- 4.6.1 The two principal areas of public open space are the Market Square and the plaza in the New Town Centre.
- 4.6.2 Currently the Market Square is used mainly as a car park. This area could be transformed into a very attractive area surrounded by historic buildings and monuments but this is outside the scope of the recommendations of this audit. In any redesign consideration should be given to the needs of all the community and in particular to older people and people with disabilities.
- 4.6.3 The former Downshire Arms Hotel is currently being redesigned as a nursing home and for sheltered housing and this could be a catalyst to ensuring a more inclusive environment for older people at the heart of Blessington.
- 4.6.4 During the audit the plaza in the New Town Centre could be seen to be used widely by children and teenagers for cycling, skating and just climbing on the walls. The potential to create a space which could be used by both older and younger people alike has not been exploited.

4.7 Public Buildings

- 4.7.1 There are few public buildings, as defined under the Disability Act e.g. buildings financed wholly or partly through public funds, within the audit area and which are accessed from the public realm. The Garda Station and the Wicklow County Council Offices are possibly the two principal ones
- 4.7.2 The Garda Station, which is also a protected structure, is inaccessible to wheelchair users and people with limited mobility. OPW should be approached to ascertain what plans are in place to make it accessible.
- 4.7.3 Wicklow County Council's Office building is a relatively new structure and is reasonably accessible. However it is suggested that a comprehensive access audit is carried out (if it has not already been done) and an action plan put in place to bring it up to current required standards.

4.8 Public Toilet Facilities

- 4.8.1 The public toilet facility in the Market Square is in a prominent position and is indicated as wheelchair accessible (it was not available for inspection at the time of the audit). Signage in other parts of the town to indicate its location would be beneficial and it should be noted on all tourist information.
- 4.8.2 Consideration should be given to the provision of additional public sanitary facilities and in particular to the provision of an Accessible Change Facility for people with profound and multiple disabilities who may need to have a changing bench, a hoist and a full size basin and peninsula toilet for assisted use. Once provided this should be mentioned in all promotional information about the town.
- 4.8.3 A possible short term addition to the available facilities for independent wheelchair users and others could be the discreet use of the reasonably large WC in the tourist office.

4.9 Transport

- 4.9.1 Blessington is well served by buses which go to/from Tallaght and Dublin City Centre and southwards on the N 81 serving also Russborough House and the end of the existing Greenway. All buses observed were low floor and had accessible ramps.
- 4.9.2 For visitors arriving for the first time to Blessington by Public Transport it is not immediately obvious where to go for information. The tourist office is some

considerable distance from the point of arrival and is not clearly signposted – the main signpost being outside St. Mary’s Church.

- 4.9.3 Only one bus stop in the town has a shelter and perch seat.
- 4.9.4 Along Main Street the bus stop signs are frequently obscured from view due to overhanging tree branches and may suffer from poor lighting.
- 4.9.5 There is no information at the bus stops about where and how to purchase tickets and route information is poorly located, mainly illegible and not available in multiple formats or languages.
- 4.9.6 Information about the availability of taxis and accessible taxis was also not readily available.
- 4.9.7 It was observed that at the stop with the shelter and seat at the Market Square that the shelter did not align with the higher Kassel kerb and that roadside flooding following a heavy shower of rain resulted in water being splashed onto the pavement where people were waiting.

4.10 Environmental Quality

- 4.10.1 A major factor influencing the environmental quality in the centre of the town is the heavy traffic present at almost all times of the day and week. Whilst long term plans are in place to provide an outer bypass road and an inner relief road is nearly complete it would appear that in the short term it should still be possible to introduce traffic calming measures and possibly diversions, at least for heavy goods vehicles, which would not only improve safety but also environmental air quality
- 4.10.2 A second factor is the speed at which much traffic passes through Main Street. It is within the Local Authority’s control to reduce the speed limit from 50km/hr to 30km/hr and this should be considered as a possible means to help ease the problem and improve safety.
- 4.10.3 A 30km per hour speed limit sign close to St. Mary’s School was completely concealed from view by overhanging branches on the approach from the Market Square.

- 4.10.4 The audit could not adequately assess the extent to which dust and dirt from the surrounding industrial plants were affecting the cleanliness of roads and streets but there did appear to be a relatively high level of dust.
- 4.10.5 On the positive side the efforts by the Tidy Towns Committee to keep the town clean and tidy and to deal with derelict buildings and sites were remarkable.

4.11 Information, Signage & Wayfinding

- 4.11.1 Pre-visit information was not examined as part of this audit but it should as a minimum include information about accessible routes, distances and gradients, facilities, services, points of interest, accessible heritage sites, accessible activities and accommodation.
- 4.11.2 Within the town information should be in multiple formats for example using digital maps, electronic guides as well as printed versions. Audio descriptions of routes and places of interest can be made facilitating people who cannot read or who may be able to download them as podcasts or MP3 files.
- 4.11.3 For people who are visually impaired tactile maps or models can be useful
- 4.11.4 Attractive panels illustrating the heritage sites within the town and of the Greenway are located against the wall of St. Mary's Church / graveyard but some of the information is too high, difficult to read and it is only available in a single format. QR codes could be included to direct visitors to further information on the Visit Wicklow or Blessington web sites.
- 4.11.5 Many people arriving in Blessington will want information about the start of the Greenway and whilst there is a sign for Avon Rí near St. Mary's there is no indication of the distance and no further sign at the Kilbride Road Junction. An audit of all signage should be carried out.
- 4.11.6 Further out the road on the Baltinglass side there are numerous sign posts for various facilities which do not follow Development Plan guidance in terms of colour, design and legibility

5.0 Recommendations

- 5.1 The following is a synopsis of the recommendations made in the table of findings, concentrating mainly on those that are of high priority.

- 5.2 Road Crossings.** More road crossings are needed along the length of the main street and where controlled crossings are provided the timing of the lights should be either sensor operated or give sufficient time for a person moving slowly to cross. Footpaths should be dished on opposite sides of the Main Street in several locations where none exist, in particular at Oak Drive, adjacent to the bus stop at the Adult Education Centre, when crossing to and within Market Square, and at all designated parking bays. The area within Market Square, in particular, needs to be redesigned.
- 5.3 Designated accessible parking bays.** Designated accessible parking bays should be sized and marked in accordance with current good practice. Single perpendicular bays should be 6m long x 3.6m wide including 1.2m marked access zones on three sides. Parallel bays should be a minimum 7m long x 3.6m wide or if in a series or in combination with other bays they should be min. 7.8m long. A space suitable for a mini-bus with rear and side loading ramps should be identified, as a minimum, in the Market Square. Designated family parking bays should be provided in safe locations, in Market Square area and at the crèche/school. An additional space should be provided near the Garda Station and a space on the opposite side of the street should be enlarged.
- 5.4 Set-down areas.** A safe and accessible set-down area should be identified and clearly marked in the Market Square area and road-side bus and car set-down at Saint Mary's School should be reviewed.
- 5.5 General Parking.** Parking within the town needs to be reviewed and controlled in order to ensure that vehicles do not overhang footpaths, thereby creating hazards and reducing available space for pedestrians.
- 5.6 Bus Stops.** Bus stops should be kept clear of overhanging branches so they can be easily identified. Stops should have shelters with perch seats and information on bus services should be provided in accessible formats and at accessible heights.
- 5.7 Footpath Surfaces.** Some section of the footpaths are in poor condition, could present as trip hazards, and should be maintained. In particular attention should be given to the surfaces near Hair Creations and Reid's pub, at the junction of the path leading from the green area in front of St. Joseph's Road, near the Bus Stop on the west side of the street near the Adult Education Centre, on the south side of the Kilbride Road and on the path leading to the town centre, where the paving and tree guards are lifting due to tree roots. Some of the town centre paving gives the impression of being very slippery when wet and should be tested for slip resistance.
- 5.8 Width of Footpaths.** Generally footpaths are wide enough, when not obstructed by cars, but some areas in particular at the Lemon Tree and along the north side of the Kilbride Road are too narrow for safe use as two people cannot pass without stepping on to the carriageway. These should be addressed as part of any new development.

- 5.9 Clutter on Footpaths.** Street furniture, sandwich boards and both fixed and movable bins combine to make some of the footpaths very difficult to negotiate. This was particularly noticeable on the narrow pavement south of the AIB. There needs to be a clear strategy as to how to minimize these obstructions and ensure an accessible route is maintained.
- 5.10 Cycle Parking and Cycle Paths.** Provision should be made for cycle parking throughout the town as well as for cycle paths taking care that the potential for pedestrian / cycle conflict is avoided.
- 5.11 Bollards.** The need for bollards should be reviewed in the context of improved parking and traffic management with the aim to reduce the numbers wherever possible. Where bollards are retained they should be clearly marked with reflective bands so that they are easily identifiable in all lighting conditions and against their backgrounds. Similarly lampposts and other obstructions within walkways / access routes should be clearly identified.
- 5.12 Seating.** The design of public seating should be considered bearing in mind the needs of people who would benefit from more comfortable seats, with arm and back supports and preferably in good quality timber or a material which is not cold to touch. Consider the provision of seating in the area of the plaza at the New Town Centre.
- 5.13 Steps at the Town Plaza.** The steps at the new town centre plaza should be highlighted so that they are easily detected and should be fitted with handrails.
- 5.14 Signage and Information.** A full signage audit should be done to identify weaknesses in the existing signage, in particular considering the needs visitors and people unfamiliar with the town, clearly identifying routes such as to the Greenway, the Tourist Office, public facilities, and heritage sites. Information should be provided in a variety of formats, taking account the needs of people with vision or hearing difficulties, cognitive difficulties or who do not speak English or Irish.
- 5.15 Sanitary Facilities.** Review the quantum, location and ease of access to accessible sanitary facilities and in particular consider the provision of an accessible change facility.
- 5.16 Traffic and traffic speeds.** Consider the provision of a 30km speed limit for the full length of the Main Street and the possible diversion of heavy goods traffic from the main street.
- 5.17 Tourist Routes.** Define accessible tourist routes throughout the town and its surroundings following the guidance given.

5.18 Universal Design Strategy and Action Plan. Develop a Universal Design Strategy and Action Plan and ensure that all developments within and around the town are expertly reviewed and monitored to ensure that they meet the highest standards of accessibility and universal design. This should include all designs, procurements, construction and services.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Generally the town of Blessington was found to be most attractive and vibrant with numerous heritage sites, wonderful natural environment, great community spirit and enormous potential to become an inclusive town where people's independence, diversity and mobility are valued and everyday social engagement is encouraged.

Inclusive and Universal Design permeates almost every aspect of our daily lives and activities. In order to ensure that it remains integral to every action, activity and development in the town it is suggested that an Inclusive and Universal Access Strategy is developed which should address the objectives of the Forum and various stakeholders under the themes of Access, Inclusion and Diversity and would include:

- Consultation within the community
- Collaboration with policy makers
- Education to build awareness and competence
- Innovation to deliver continuous improvement
- Integration into all facets of life in Blessington.





The delivery of an Accessibility Action Plan for the Built Environment will be just one component of an overall action plan which should be monitored, reviewed and updated on a regular basis. This Accessibility Audit is the first step




Appendix A – Detailed Findings

Section 1: From the Council Offices on Oak Drive to the Coimín Centre on Main Street

Ref.	Item/Location	Observation	Photo	Relevant Guidance / Recommendation	Priority
1.1	Signage to WCC Offices	When approaching the Council Offices from Main Street the sign indicating the offices is not visible as it is concealed behind trees		<p>BS 8300-1: 2018 Sxn 8.3.1 Information and Signage.</p> <p><i>NOTE 2 Regular cleaning and maintenance of signage and information panels is necessary to ensure that they remain clearly legible.....</i></p> <p>BS8300-1:2018 A.2.3 Signage and information All signs and information boards need to be kept clean so that the visual contrast is maintained and they are easily identifiable and readable. This is particularly important for people who are blind and partially sighted.</p>	1
1.2	Parking and Entrance to WCC	<p>As with all designated parking bays throughout the town the spaces in the Council car park do not meet current guidance in terms of size, markings and space for transfer to both sides and rear and there is no designated set-down area. Up to 2009 guidance for designated perpendicular bays was for a bay of minimum size 4.8m x 2.4m with a 900mm transfer zone on one side only. Since 2010 the guidance has been for a minimum bay of 4.8m x 2.4m with a 1.2m marked transfer zone to both sides and to the rear.</p> <p>Whilst the building was not audited it was noted that the glazed entrance doors did not have adequate manifestations</p>		<p>It is recommended that the Council Offices are audited, in line with the Disability Act, and action taken to ensure that they become an exemplar of good practice for public facilities</p>	2


1.3	Pedestrian route to Playground from Oak Drive adjacent to Aldi entrance	Approaching from Main Street there is no direct pedestrian access to the playground without walking a considerable distance around the outside. Worn areas of grass indicate a desire line and that people take a short cut across the grass but this route is inaccessible for buggies and people with mobility impairments		Consider providing an accessible route to the playground in this location	1
1.4	Dished pavements on pedestrian route to playground	All of the crossing points leading to the playground within the housing estate had dropped kerbs and blister paving but the dropped kerbs are not always flush or with a small lip.		Refer: Good practice guidelines on accessibility of streetscapes and BS8300-1. Lip should be a maximum of 6mm high and blister paving should extend across full width path where level with the road junction.	3
1.5	Designated parking at the playground	There is one designated accessible parking bay at the playground but no designated family parking. The designated accessible bay does not accord with current standards. See 1.2		BS 8300-1: 2018Section 7.4.1 <i>.... If there is an evidenced need, parent and child parking spaces should be provided in addition to any other designated/assigned parking spaces..... These are to be designated with a suitable parent and child sign. Such spaces are to be provided with extra room around the vehicle. This space provides additional room that is required to load the small child, associated baggage, and pushchair or stroller into the vehicle.</i>	2

1.6	Outdoor gym	The outdoor gym and exercise equipment is an excellent addition to the playground area and much of the equipment is suitable for people of varying abilities. Despite signage indicating that certain items are usable by wheelchair users it was not clear that they were.		See 1.7 below	2
1.7	Children's play area and skate park	The children's play area and skate park are also excellent facilities with a wide range of equipment and several seating areas for adults. However, no wheelchair friendly equipment was noted or sensory activities which might suit specific needs of children with sensory and motor co-ordination challenges or the needs of children on the autistic spectrum	 	Community Parks and Playgrounds – Intergenerational Participation through Universal Design is a recent research report by the Centre of Excellence in Universal Design which should be referred to for an understanding of the complexity, challenges and benefits of providing fully inclusive play facilities. This should be considered in any future developments. Refer also to Greystones for inclusive children's play facility.	2
1.8	Corner of Oak Drive & N81	For pedestrians approaching from the north on the N81 there are no dropped kerbs /dished crossings on the east side of the N81 to permit level crossing to Oak Drive or from the Maxol Station to the footpath at Aldi.		Traffic Management Guidelines 2003 10.7 Dished crossings should be provided at locations where pedestrians will cross regardless of the provision of a pedestrian phase. ...(see Diagram 13.1)	1




1.9	Ramp to Aldi	A telegraph pole at the top of the ramp leading to Aldi is located approx. 600mm from the inner edge of the path which could be hazardous to persons with vision impairments.		<p>TGDM 2010: 1.1.3.1 (d) street furniture, such as lighting columns, signposts, litter bins, seats, etc., should be located at or beyond the boundaries of the access route; BS 8300-1 8.2.2.1 Hazard protection within an access route Any feature which could constitute a hazard should wherever possible not project into or be located within an access route. However, if this is unavoidable, hazard protection should be provided</p>	3
1.10	Bollards	Several black bollards through the town have no reflective bands at the top and are located where they restrict clear access and circulation.		<p>TGD-M:2010 1.1.3.1 General (e) low level posts e.g. bollards should not be located within an access route. Wherever bollards are provided they should contrast visually with their background (refer to 1.6.4)..... See also 1.13</p>	
1.11	Post boxes	Post boxes have been located in inaccessible locations, impossible to reach by wheelchair users and with no tactile information for people who may be vision impaired as to their location		Ensure post box is accessible	3

1.12	In front of Vincent's	In front of Vincent's there is a parallel parking bay with no kerb and a telegraph pole in the middle of the parking area. Cars were seen parking across the path.		Ensure measures are put in place to prevent cars parking across footpaths and initiate awareness raising	1
1.13	Junction of Access Road to St Kevin's Community Centre	Bollards are located on both radius corners on the direct line of travel with dished kerbs around the corner. On the southern side the corner leading to the dished kerb is only 1300mm wide making it difficult for people with buggies or mobility aids to turn the corner.	 	Move bollards and create dishings in direct line of travel on radiused bend so that it is not necessary to go around the narrow corner to cross	1

<p>1.14</p>	<p>Pedestrian gates to St Kevin's</p>	<p>Neither the pedestrian gates on the footpath leading to St Kevin's Community Centre are accessible. One is kept locked and the other is a turnstile. Thus pedestrians are forced on to the carriageway.</p>		<p>BS8300-1:2018 8.5.1 Gates Any side-hung gate on an accessible route should be capable of opening in both directions and of being opened easily with either hand, and should be self-closing. <i>NOTE 1 A gate that is self-closing under its own weight is preferable to one with a sprung hinge. NOTE 2 If the catch can be operated with a clenched fist it is likely that the design is acceptable.</i> Gates should be a minimum of 1 000 mm wide, and should have a 300 mm clear space to both the pull and push sides of the leading edge.</p>	<p>2</p>
<p>1.15</p>	<p>Murphy's Auctioneers to Printshop</p>	<p>There are no kerbs between the footpath and the parallel parking bays over a distance of approx. 120m on the east side of the road from Murphy's to "Punctual Print & Signs". The bays are approx. 3m deep without markings and are broken into sections by trees surrounded by raised kerbs. All cars were parked head on and oversailed the path causing significant obstructions. On the building side of the path there were also obstruction with shop displays and sandwich boards.</p>		<p>BS8300-1:2018 A.1.2 Hazards on pedestrian routes. All vehicular and pedestrian routes should be kept clear of obstructions. 8.1.1 For many users, a clear unobstructed pedestrian environment is essential in terms of creating a usable and inclusive space. A poorly planned and designed pedestrian environment can be difficult for many people to negotiate and navigate in terms of the positioning of street furniture and other obstructions.</p>	<p>1</p>

<p>1.16</p>	<p>Designated accessible parking bay opposite the flower shop</p>	<p>A designated bay diagonally opposite the flower shop has no rear access zone and substandard access zones both sides.</p>		<p>TGDM 2010:1.1.5 On Site Car Parking (d) the minimum dimensions of the designated parking bays should be in accordance with Diagrams 8 and 9; (e) A 1200 mm wide access zones should be provided on both sides and at the rear of each designated parking bay. The access zone at the rear of the parking bay should be clear of vehicular circulation routes. The access zone should contrast visually with the adjoining surfaces to ensure it is kept clear (refer to 1.6.4).</p>	<p>1</p>
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Section 2: From the Coimín Centre to the north corner of Market Square (West Wicklow House)




Ref.	Item / Location	Observation	Photo	Relevant Guidance/ Recommendation	Priority
2.1	Coimín Centre	There is a good example of designated accessible parking bays at the Coimín Centre which are clearly demarcated on the ground, with access zones to both sides and rear out of circulation routes. There is also good ramped and stepped access to the side.			
2.2	On street parking at St. Mary's school	At school collection time cars were noted at St. Mary's School backed up both sides of the road.		Accessible parking and set-down / pick up areas should be provided on street, if not provided off-street, and parking managed to ensure safety of all	1
2.3	Route between St Mary's schools	Concern was expressed by a number of people about school children moving between the senior and junior schools at St Mary's. The route also passes by the entrance and exit to the Circle K filling station where children also use the shop.		Perhaps Circle K could be asked to erect signage alerting motorists to the presence of school children in this area as well as clearly visible road and footpath markings	1

2.4	Road crossing at St Mary's School	At St Mary's junior school there is a school warden to assist with traffic at school hours but there is neither a controlled or uncontrolled crossing for use at other times.		Provide a correctly designed crossing at this point complete with necessary dished kerbs, road markings and tactile paving	1
2.5	Tactile Paving at St. Mary's	An uncontrolled and an unmarked road crossing is located at the school gate. There is no tactile blister paving on either side.		TGDM 2010 1.1 Approach to buildings other than dwellings (f) the danger of inadvertently walking into a vehicular route should be minimised by providing a separate pedestrian route. Otherwise, tactile paving should be used to provide warning and guidance for people with vision impairment (refer to 1.1.4); See recommendation above	1



2.6	Concealed Speed limit sign	The speed limit sign at St. Mary's was completely obliterated by overhanging branches		Cut back branches and maintain clear	1
2.7	Litter bin at school gate	A black litter bin is located at the inside of the pavement at the school gate, where it creates an obstacle though Bin the Poo Signs are a helpful reminder to dog owners		TGDM 2010: 1.1.3.1 General (d) street furniture, such as lighting columns, signposts, litter bins, seats, etc., should be located at or beyond the boundaries of the access route;	2
2.8	Bus Set down parking at St Mary's school	A designated bus set down is located at the Coimín Centre, partially on the carriageway and partially set in between two buildouts. The set down area is on an incline and is too small for some vehicles.		BS 8300-1 : 2018 6.1 Setting down & picking up points Setting-down points should have dimensions of not less than 9 m x 3.6 m as shown in figure 1. Dependent on bus size and door locations enlarge set down area to suit	2
2.9	St Joseph's Road	The main pedestrian route from the residential estate at St Joseph's Road to the centre of town is via a path to the south of the green. The 1400mm wide path is too narrow for people to pass comfortably and is difficult to negotiate for people with mobility impairments, particularly at its junction with the main footpath due to the gradient of 1:5, the surface and the lip at its junction with the paved footpath.		TGDM 2010 1.1.3.4 Ramped access routes A gradient of 1:20 or steeper is considered to be a ramp. Ramped access routes should be designed to have the shallowest gradient practical. The preferred maximum gradient is 1:20 but where site specific constraints require it, ramps not steeper than 1:12 may be provided if	2

				individual flights are not longer than 2000 mm.	
2.10	Sakura Crèche	There is no safe accessible set down or parent/guardian and child parking area close to the Sakura crèche. There is sufficient space to create both in the indented parking bays to the south of the hair studio.		BS 8300-1:2018 Clause 7. If there is an evidenced need, designated parent/guardian and child parking should be provided in addition to other designated accessible parking spaces Where setting down areas & parking are provided, they should be designed and constructed in accordance with the guidance given in TGD M 1.1.6 and BS 8300	1
2.11	Opposite the crèche	A designated accessible parking bay opposite the crèche is well below minimum standard with a 900mm marked transfer zone on one side only and no safe zone to the rear.		TGDM 2010:1.1.5 On Site Car Parking (d) the minimum dimensions of the designated parking bays should be in accordance with Diagrams 8 and 9; (e) A 1200 mm wide access zones should be provided on both sides and at the rear of each designated parking bay. The access zone at the rear of the parking bay should be clear of vehicular circulation routes. The	1





				<p>access zone should contrast visually with the adjoining surfaces to ensure it is kept clear (refer to 1.6.4).</p> <p>(g) all designated parking bays should be clearly marked on the ground with the symbol of access and, if necessary further signage should be provided (refer to 1.6.3);</p>	
2.12	SuperValu to Murphy's Pub	The absence of a kerb and sub-standard head-on / perpendicular parking on the east of Main Street between SuperValu and Murphy's results in vehicles over-sailing the footpath. In other areas there are open drainage channels in the parking bays. Oversailing of footpaths occurs in numerous locations.	 	<p>Where the bays are of sufficient depth kerbs and wheel stops should be provided to prevent over sailing of the paths. If the bays are too short then parallel parking should be considered.</p> <p>TGDM 2010: 1.1.3.1 General</p> <p>(h) drainage gratings should be positioned beyond the boundaries of the access route. Where this is not feasible they should be flush with the surrounding surface.</p> <p>(i) dished channels should not be incorporated within an access route</p> <p>Rationale: They increase the risk of tripping; This would apply to where drainage channels cross the transfer space to the side of a designated bay</p>	1
2.13	Controlled Crossing at Murphy's Pub & Dry cleaners	The crossing is identified by red concrete paving laid correctly. However the colour of the paving, as with the buff blister paving throughout the town, has faded and is no longer distinguishable. On the west side of the crossing poor drainage results in ponding at the junction of the road and footpath in the middle of the crossing point.		<p>TGDM 2010</p> <p>1.1.4 Pedestrian crossings</p> <p>Where pedestrian crossings are provided, tactile paving and dropped kerbs should be provided at controlled and uncontrolled pedestrian crossings in accordance with 'Good Practice Guidelines on Accessibility of Streetscapes'.</p>	3




2.14	Footpath surfaces	Footpath surfaces in the vicinity of Hair Creations and Reid's pub are very uneven		Make good uneven surfaces	1
2.15	Bus Stop at Boyle Sports	The bus stop on the east of Main Street near Boyle Sport is not clearly visible due to overhanging trees, it has no shelter or seat, and lighting at night-time may be poor. Information about routes and timetables is not fully accessible. Whilst one stop on the west side of the street has a shelter there are none on the east side.		BS8300 2018:1 6.2.1 All Transport Modes Real-time information about routes and departures should be provided in both visible and audible formats (including assistive listening systems), both at stops and on the vehicle 6.2.4 Bus shelters	1
2.16	Obstructions in parking bays	Throughout the town there are numerous examples of obstructions in parking bays		These should be highlighted by reflective and contrast markings and relocated if necessary as part of an overall infrastructure upgrade	3
2.17	Sandwich boards	Sandwich Boards, litter bins, private bins and street furniture are inconsistently located throughout the town on both sides of the footpath, restricting access and making the footpaths difficult for people to negotiate, particularly people with mobility or vision impairments		BS 8300-1: 2018 A.1.7 "A" board signs are a particular problem, as being movable low-level signs they can be hazardous obstacles for people who are blind or partially sighted and restrict the width of routes for wheel chair users and parents with prams, etc. Many could be replaced by signs on buildings. Where they are used they need to be restricted to the street furniture zone, highlighted by visual and ground surface contrast, and robustly positioned in place so they do not fall or get knocked over.	1





Section 3: The Market Square – from West Wicklow House to the Ulster Bank

Ref.	Location	Observation	Photo	Relevant Guidance	Priority
3.1	Town Square	At the MarketSquare to the west of Main Street, there is no clear safe accessible route for pedestrians either from the east side of the street or in a north / south direction or leading to / from the square to the new shopping precinct and Dunnes Stores. There is confusion as to where there is pedestrian priority, whether part of the square is a shared space and where footpaths begin and end. The absence of dished kerbs in some areas and the proliferation of cars and other obstacles makes this area very difficult to negotiate for families, people with sensory or cognitive impairments and wheelchair users.		<p>Recommendations for this area need to be made in the context of a complete redesign.</p> <p>In the short term works are necessary to ensure that a) the accessible parking bays are large enough and with transfer zones in accordance with good practice b)there is at least one designated bay large enough to accommodate a mini-bus c) footpaths are continuous, wide enough and with dished crossings in sequence</p>	1
3.2	Designated Accessible Parking	There are six designated accessible car parking bays in the Market Square area, one at the West Wicklow House, one beside the public WC, one at the Ulster Bank, one on the opposite side of the road beside St Mary’s Church and two at McGreal’s Pharmacy. All bays are sub-standard either due to their size, their limited transfer space or absence of road markings. All are well signed on vertical poles.		<p>TGDM 2010:1.1.5 on Site Car Parking</p> <p>(d) the minimum dimensions of the designated parking bays should be in accordance with Diagrams 8 and 9;</p> <p>(e) A 1200 mm wide access zone should be provided on both sides and at the rear of each designated parking bay. The access zone at the rear of the parking bay should be clear of vehicular circulation routes. The access zone should contrast visually with the adjoining surfaces to ensure it is kept clear (refer to1.6.4).</p> <p>(g) all designated parking bays should be clearly marked on the ground with the symbol of access and, if necessary further signage should be provided</p>	1

				<p>(refer to 1.6.3);</p> <p>Diagram 8 Access around designated on-site perpendicular parking bay</p> <p>* Extract from the Traffic Signs Manual</p>	
3.3	Tactile Paving	<p>There is no tactile paving at the junctions of the main footpath and the carriageway. The brick footpath paving carries across the two junctions but it is unclear who has priority. The road markings appear to give vehicles priority hence tactile hazard warnings should be provided.</p>		<p>TGDM 2010:1.1.3.1 General (f) the danger of inadvertently walking into a vehicular route should be minimised by providing a separate pedestrian route. Otherwise, tactile paving should be used to provide warning and guidance for people with vision impairment (refer to 1.1.4);</p> <p>See 3.1 above</p>	1


			 		
3.4	Dropped kerbs / footpath dishings	For buggies or wheelchair users the path dishings are inconsistent. In some areas eg. at the WC there is a dishing on one side of the road but not on the other. For example the footpath is dropped beside the accessible bay adjacent to the Public WC but is not dropped on the opposite beside the Lemon Tree or on the Credit Union side	 	`See 3.1 above	1

					
3.5	Raised table	There is a raised table (crossing) at the Credit Union (former Market House) leading to the monument but insufficient space either side of the monument to get past. If one remains on the path at the Credit Union there is then no access to the west side of Market Square in front of the old forge building.	 	See 3.1 above	1
3.6	Ramped Route	To the north side of the Credit Union / Market House there is an unsigned access route to the lower level where the former tourist office and current craft centre is located. This route is at a gradient of between 1:13 and 1:15, equivalent to a ramp, but without any support or handrails. People arriving at the top of the steps on the southern side of the Credit Union Building are		TGDM 2010 1.1.3.4 Ramped access routes (g) the ramped access route may form part of a wider ramped area. The intended ramped access route(s) should be clearly identified and signposted where necessary (refer to 1.6.3). Additional handrails should be used to divide any intended ramped access route in to channels of	3




		<p>not necessarily aware that there is a ramped access route on the other side and this should perhaps be signposted</p>		<p>unobstructed width not less than 1200 mm and not greater than 2500 mm. Rationale: This permits a person with less strength on one side to be within easy reach of support;</p>	
<p>3.7</p>	<p>West of Market Square</p>	<p>A narrow footpath runs along part of the West side of the Square which is too narrow for pedestrians and wheelchair users can't get on or off it in front of the Lemon Tree. A clear space has been created on the roadway by the introduction of bollards in front of the West Wicklow House and the Old Forge but it does not lead to another footpath.</p>	  	<p>Where shared surfaces are envisaged in any redesign great care should be taken to ensure that stringent guidelines are followed as the use of shared surfaces is controversial and not liked by many people with vision and hearing impairments, older people and people with children</p> <p>See 3.1 above</p>	



					
3.8	Seating	<p>A pleasant circular seating area has been created in natural granite to the South of the WC. There is no area with backs or armrests for people who need support and the rough cobbled surface makes it inaccessible to wheelchair users and people with limited mobility.</p>		<p>BS 8300 2018:1 8.4.1 General An access route should have a firm, slip resistant and reasonably smooth surface. Cobbles, bare earth, sand and un-bonded gravel should not be used.</p> <p>10.7 Seating ...b) For some seats, back support and arm rests should be provided as some people requiring support need both.</p>	3
3.9	Informal Seating	<p>There are numerous informal seating areas throughout the town, most provided by civic minded traders or through community groups such as Blessington Tidy Towns. This was recorded as being a very positive achievement since the 2008 Accessibility Audit report which commented that there was almost no seating</p>			

					
3.10	Bus Stop	<p>The bus stop on the western side of the Main Street in the Square is the only stop with a shelter and a perch seat. The stop sign was camouflaged by tree branches and the signage within the shelter was located too high and not legible to either small people, wheelchair users or vision impaired people.</p> <p>The Kasselkerb (raised kerb used to access buses) is located before the stop instead of at the stop making it difficult for wheelchair users or buggies to enter or disembark.</p>		<p>BS 8300-1:2018 Sxn 6.2.4</p> <p>...Where seating is provided to bus shelters it should be usable for a variety of people and should therefore incorporate arm rests and back supports.</p> <p>Bus shelters should be well lit with sufficient illumination to enable reading. Route information should be provided for passengers which includes route number, pictogram, direction of travel, contact details for assistance. Information displays should be made of non-reflective materials, and should be designed to take account of: viewing distance in relation to text sizes; display heights suitable for seating and standing</p>	2
3.11	Drainage	<p>A blocked gully, which was silted up with leaves, near the bus stop impeded access to the buses and the stop</p>		<p>BS 8300-1:2019 A 2.2A.2.2</p> <p>External surfaces</p> <p>Pedestrian routes (footpaths, ramps and steps, parking areas and public open spaces) need to be kept clean, unobstructed and free of contamination from surface water, snow, ice, leaves, lichen, debris, etc., at all times.</p>	1




<p>3.12</p>	<p>Parking at St Mary's Church</p>	<p>The designated parking bay at St Mary's has no safe zone to the rear and for people needing to remove a wheelchair from a car or to exit a multi-purpose vehicle at the rear the transfer has to be made in the carriageway.</p>		<p>TGDM 2010 1.1.5 On-site car parking (e) A 1200 mm wide access zone should be provided on both sides and at the rear of each designated parking bay. The access zone at the rear of the parking bay should be clear of vehicular circulation routes. The access zone should contrast visually with the adjoining surfaces to ensure it is kept clear (refer to 1.6.4). Rationale: This provides sufficient space to enter and leave the vehicle and move to the rear of the vehicle and should safely lead to an access route;</p>	<p>1</p>
<p>3.13</p>	<p>Directional Signage</p>	<p>Generally directional signage is quite poor, particularly for visitors and people unfamiliar with the area. For example at St Mary's Church there is a sign pointing west for the tourist office but no place to cross and no sign on the opposite side to show how to continue. On the same post a sign for Avon Rí is not followed by another one at the junction with the Kilbride Road.</p>			<p>2</p>





3.14	Signage for local amenities	<p>Attractive signs have been mounted in cast iron stands in a number of location around the town. They provide much information about the heritage of the town and items of interest to both locals and visitors. Often information is located too high on the sign to be legible, it is provided in one format only eg. no provision for people who may be blind or partially sighted, and the Perspex protective layer can be reflective.</p>			3
3.15	Cycle Routes & Parking	<p>There is no standard or non-standard cycle parking in either the Market Square or on the route to Dunnes. The only two cycle stands seen in the Public Realm are located at the bus stop beside Boyle Sports. There is a clear need for provision for cyclists and in particular due to the increasing popularity of cycling, its importance for health and wellbeing and in the context of the proposed extension to the Greenway.</p>	 	<p>BS8300-1:2018 7.1 Cycle parking Cycle parking should be located in a clearly defined area. Cycle stands should contrast visually with the background against which they will be seen. Cycle stands should provide ground level detection for the extent of the stand, in the form of a tapping rail for people who are blind or partially sighted navigating using a white cane, with its underside not higher than 150 mm above ground level, or similar barrier. Where a number of cycle stands are provided, some of the cycle stands should be positioned to allow the parking of adapted cycles, which can be considerably larger than other cycles. This should be taken into account in the positioning of cycle stands clear of pedestrian route widths (see also 8.2.1.3).</p>	2





					
3.16	Cycle Paths	<p>There is no cycle path anywhere in the centre of the town and people with the result that both adults and children were found to cycle on the footpaths.</p>	 	<p>The provision of cycle paths is strongly recommended both to promote healthier lifestyles and reduce car dependency and also to cater for the many visitors and tourists who now visit by bicycle or who may wish to rent bicycles as part of the Greenway initiative.</p>	2




<p>3.17</p>	<p>Public WC</p>	<p>The automated WC was out of order twice during audit inspections and not inspected but visitors were noted struggling with the instructions which were hard to follow.</p> <p>There is no Accessible Change Facility in the town which would facilitate an adult or child with profound or multiple disabilities that needs a toilet facility</p>	 	<p>BS8300-1:2018 A.1.4 Signage Temporary signs and information are particularly important where facilities such aspublic toilets are temporarily out of service. In these cases signs need to be located at points where people can choose an alternative so that they do not have a wasted journey.</p> <p>Refer to Changing Places Ireland for Guidance on Accessible Change facilities or to BS 8300-2:2018.</p> <p>The provision of an Accessible Change Facility would be of great benefit for those who need one and its provision should be registered with Changing Places Ireland and highlighted when promoting Blessington as an inclusive tourist destination.</p>	<p>2</p>
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Section 4: From Market Square (The Lemon Tree) to Dunnes Stores

Ref.	Item / Location	Observation	Photo	Relevant Guidance / Recommendation	Priority
4.1	Paving	The new footpath to the north of the road leading to Dunnes Stores is paved with smooth stone flags and is defined by a dark band of paving both sides. Trees and street furniture are grouped within or outside this band. Whilst this keeps the accessible route clear and assists people who are partially sighted, for people who are blind there is no kerb or building line to follow. In wet conditions it was reported that this paving can become very slippy		This should be taken up with the management company responsible, the slip ratings established and remedial measures implemented as appropriate	2
4.2	Hazards on paved areas	In places the flags and tree guards are lifting due to tree roots, creating trip hazards.		BS8300-1:2018 8.2.1.7 Tree grilles <i>COMMENTARY ON 8.2.1.7</i> Tree grilles can be particularly problematic for people using mobility aids such as sticks, canes, wheelchairs or wheeled walking frames, or for people with assistance dogs. Tree grilles should be avoided. Smooth or paved permeable surfaces should be used wherever practicable.	1
4.3	Drainage Channels	On the south side of road leading to Dunnes there are numerous locations on the footpath where light weight galvanised drainage channel covers have bent or lifted also creating trip hazards.		TGDM 2010: 1.1.3.1 General (h) drainage gratings should be positioned beyond the boundaries of the access route. Where this is not feasible they should be flush with the surrounding surface. Rationale: It is important to minimise the risk of trapping canes or wheelchair wheels;	2

4.4	Tree Guards & Grilles	Tree guards have been damaged by parked cars		The location of trees and tree guards needs to be considered in the context of an overall upgrade of the urban environment	3
4.5	Paving, routes and dropped kerbs at the Lemon Tree corner	<p>New paving around the Lemon Tree is cracked and uneven. When approaching from the southern end of Market Square eg the Ulster Bank end, there is no means for a wheelchair user to cross the road to the opposite side or to reach any of the commercial units to the south of the new centre without travelling significant distances to cross the road. Similarly a wheelchair user arriving at this point cannot cross to the Public WC Convenience due to the absence of a dropped kerb.</p> <p>To the side of the building the path along the roadway is too narrow at only 1m wide for people to pass either wheelchairs or buggies and the covered walkway terminates in a flight of steps.</p>	 	See 3.1 above	1
4.6	Steps	The step nosings at the end of the Lemon Tree building are poorly marked. There is a single row of corduroy hazard warning paving approximately 400mm deep instead of 800mm and the handrails do not extend past the bottom as would have been required by Building Regulations.		<p>TGDM2010: 1.1.3.5 Stepped Access Routes (h) all step nosings should incorporate a permanently contrasting continuous material on the tread. The material should be between 50 mm and 65mm wide on the tread and should contrast visually with the remainder of the tread (refer to 1.6.4).Rationale: This will</p>	2

				help people with vision impairment appreciate the extent of the stair and identify the individual treads;	
4.7	Unmarked crossing opposite the steps	When approaching from the west there is an unmarked crossing with cracked and uneven paving. For wheelchair users once one reaches the opposite side one has to proceed on the carriageway due to the steps and the narrow footpath to the left.		BS8300-1:2018 8.1 Access routes <i>...Street furniture, flower tubs, litter bins and signposts are all intended to improve the environment but, whether free-standing or projecting from a building, they are hazardous if not carefully designed and positioned.</i>	2
4.8	Path leading towards tourist office	The path on the south side of the road leading towards the tourist office is narrow with various obstacles and parked cars oversailing the kerb.		Improve parking as part of an overall parking and management strategy	2
4.9	Eurobins and planters	Eurobins and planters were blocking the access route to the footpath leading to the commercial units and tourist office to the south of the new town centre		See 4.7	1

4.10	Steps to south side of Market House / Credit Union Building	The new steps to the south of the Market House have a single row of blister paving slabs 400mm deep at the top and bottom which can easily be stepped over and are not adequate to warn of a hazard. The nosings are also not highlighted.		TGDM2010: 1.1.3.5 Stepped Access Routes (h) all step nosings should incorporate a permanently contrasting continuous material on the tread. The material should be between 50 mm and 65mm wide on the tread and should contrast visually with the remainder of the tread (refer to 1.6.4).Rationale: This will help people with vision impairment appreciate the extent of the stair and identify the individual treads;	2
4.11	Steps to rear of Market House	The more historic wide flight of steps to the rear of Market House leading to the Craft Centre have a single central handrail.			3
4.12	Bench Seating	Bench seating along the route towards Dunnes is helpful but it has neither arm nor back rests and is finished with a shiny polished surface.		BS 8300 2018:1 10.7 SeatingA choice of seating options should be provided suitable for a variety of users.... a) Where more than one seat...., a variety of seat heights should be provided..... b) For some seats, back support and arm rests should be provided Seating should contrast with the background against which it is seen. It should not have a highly reflective finish.	3

4.13	Plaza at Dunnes	<p>The hard landscaped plaza on the route to Dunnes appears well used by children playing, on trikes, bikes and skateboards. It seems like a missed opportunity not to have provided comfortable seating where older people could sit and watch or even exercise opportunities for older people.</p>		<p>BS8300-1:2018 10.7 Seating <i>Seating can be essential for people in terms of providing somewhere to stop and rest, but can also be a valuable tool in creating a place or space which is welcoming and inviting in which people will choose to spend time.</i></p>	3
4.14	Plaza at Dunnes	<p>When approaching the plaza from the east side there are two steps which are unmarked, very difficult to detect, and which have no handrails or tactile paving</p>		<p>As these are on an important access route but located in an area that may be privately managed the issue should be raised as a priority with those responsible</p>	1

4.15	Crossing at Tourist Office	At the end of the modular paved carriageway there is an uncontrolled crossing point at a raised table. Cars frequently park on the table preventing use of the crossing and severely impeding access for vision impaired people and wheelchair users. In addition a moveable planter box is located in the direct line of travel beyond the car.		BS8300-1:2018	2
4.16	Colour of tactile paving	The tactile blister paving at the uncontrolled crossing at the tourist office is coloured red which should only be used at controlled crossings. Buff blister paving is required at uncontrolled crossings. The use of blister paving to act as a guidance path, which is what this appears to do, is not recommended		Refer to : DETR Guidance on the Use of Tactile Paving Surfaces. Guidance should be followed carefully. Guidance recommends that local authorities consult local groups representing visually impaired people with regard to any provision of guidance paths. This will ensure that the surface is used to best effect.	2
4.17	Bollards- lack of colour contrast	The stainless tubular steel bollards in the new town centre area have limited colour contrast when seen against the light coloured aggregate paving. They also have no contrasting band which limits their visibility in poor lighting conditions.		TGD M 2010: 1.1.3.1 General (e) Wherever bollards are provided they should contrast visually with their background.	2
4.18	Damage to bollards	Several of the bollards have been damaged, probably by impact from vehicles and are now damaged and rusting			3

4.19	Tourist Office	<p>The tourist office, despite its location away from the centre of the town and with insufficient signage, is a good facility. Small improvements could be made with minimum effort.</p> <p>The main entrance door has only one row of manifestations, two being a requirement of building regulations.</p> <p>Inside there is good circulation leading to the information/ reception desk with some seating and display shelving around the perimeter. There is a reasonably large WC to the rear for staff use.</p>	  	<p>By providing some seats with arm rests, making some minor upgrades to the WC and signing that it could be available as a wheelchair accessible WC for visitor use, the facility would become a more welcoming and useful place. In addition consideration could be given to improving physical access to the leaflets and printed information and a sign could indicate which languages are spoken by staff, including possibly Irish sign language. Irish Standard 373 is a new standard developed by the NSAI, with the support of Fáilte Ireland and the National Disability Authority of Ireland (NDA), to help businesses ensure their products and services are more accessible to a wider variety of visitors by improving various types of communication such as written, verbal and electronic. It includes four useful toolkits which provide businesses with training on how to make their services more accessible to a wider customer base.</p>	4
4.20	Route to the Tramway Theatre	<p>Access to the Tramway Theatre at St Mary's Senior National School from the new town is via a very narrow path on one side of the road which terminates in locked gates outside opening hours. There is neither a turning area for cars or signage for pedestrians to indicate an accessible route and opening times. .For people unfamiliar with the area this could result in a wasted journey over difficult terrain.</p>		<p>This should be dealt with as part of an overall upgrade of the New Town Centre area to make it more accessible</p>	3

					
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Section 5: From southern end of Market Square (Ulster Bank) to the corner of Dempsey's Lane



Ref.	Item / Location	Observation	Photo	Relevant Guidance / Recommendation	Priority
5.1	The Ulster Bank	The Ulster Bank has created a ramped and stepped access to an ATM in the gable of the building as well as to the main entrance. The ramp has a steep gradient of up to 1:7 in places and it terminates with an awkward junction at the top landing at the main entrance. Whilst not strictly meeting building regulation standard it has nonetheless created access to both the bank and the ATM, located in an historic and protected structure		TGDM 2010:1 1.1.3.4 Ramped access routes ...The preferred maximum gradient is 1:20 but where site specific constraints require it, ramps not steeper than 1:12 may be provided if individual flights are not longer than 2000 mm	3
5.2	West side of Main Street	Vehicles also overhang the pavement on the main access route on this side despite there being plenty of space for perpendicular / head-on parking.		The layout, accessibility and urban design of the entire of the Market Square area needs review. See 3.1	1




5.3	Garda Station	<p>There is no designated accessible parking bay at the Garda Station and no wheelchair access into the station. There are three low step at the entrance. The inside of the building was not inspected but it appeared that space in the entrance lobby was quite restricted.</p>	 	<p>As a public building the Garda station should be accessible as required under the Disability Act 2005. OPW should be requested to advise on how it is intended to achieve compliance</p>	1
5.4	Drainage Gratings	<p>A number of drainage gratings throughout the town were found to be located within access routes with open slots which measured 40mm x 160mm and are in line with the direction of travel. Slots of this size can catch sticks, wheels and walking aids.</p>		<p>BS 8300-1:2018 8.2.1.5 Drainage channels Slots in gratings (in pedestrian access routes) should be not more than 13mm wide and should be set at right angles to the dominant line of travel</p>	3
5.5	Rainwater Discharge onto pavements	<p>As with many historic streetscapes rainwater downpipes discharge frequently across the pavements to drainage channels or gully's in the roadway. This can result in slippery conditions in both wet and icy weather which can be treacherous for older people and people with mobility impairments leading to them being fearful of walking</p>		<p>The provision of underground drainage to take water from buildings to on street drainage should be considered as an important element of the upgrading of the street environment.</p>	3

5.6	Controlled crossing at Kilbride Road junction	The controlled crossing at the junction with the Kilbride Road has an audible signal and red blister paving both sides. The red paving is worn and it is hard to distinguish the colour from the surrounding paving. The crossing is timed to give approximately 6 seconds before turning orange for a crossing of approximately 9/10m in width. The same applies to the timing of the controlled crossing at Boyle Sports		<p>Age Friendly Ireland Guidelines state that 1 in 3 adults aged 65 -74 years and three in five adults over 75 years walk slower than 1.2m per second. Hence a crossing of 9m should allow 11 seconds to cross.</p>	1
5.7	Pavement obstructions between AIB and McGreal's	The stretch of pavement between the AIB and McGreal's and the end of commercial units is heavily used, narrow and frequently blocked by signs, sandwich boards and bins.		Improvement management of sandwich boards and bins would greatly improve this relatively narrow stretch of pavement	1
5.8	Parallel parking near the Office Shop	A designated accessible parallel parking bay near the Office Shop and McGreal's is only 2.4m wide x 4.7m long with an 800 space between it and the adjacent bay and no dished kerb to get on to the pavement. The road markings are also completely faded.		As this designated bay serves a significant number of commercial premises and services along this stretch of road it should be enlarge to facilitate mini-buses and correctly laid out with safe zones leading to a dished kerb	1

5.9	Footpath on north side of Kilbride Road	On the north side of the Kilbride Road the footpath narrows to approximately 1m in width making it impossible for two people to pass without stepping on to the roadway		Increase to minimum standards as part of an overall upgrade of pedestrian routes	2
5.10	Hazards on footpath on south side of Kilbride Road	On the footpath leading to the old health centre the surfaces are rough and hazards such as this lamp post are located in the middle of the path		Highlight lamp post with reflective bands and improve footpath as part of overall upgrade and as a minimum before the old health centre site is developed	2

Section 6: From Dempsey's Lane to the Further Education & Training Centre & corner of Troopersfield



Ref.	Item / Location	Observation	Photo	Relevant Guidance / Recommendation	Priority
6.1	Ramped Path to side of the Old Naas Road	At the end the Old Naas Road there is a steep ramp at a gradient of between 1:7 and 1:8 between the path and the roadway / access route to the path outside Dempsey's with an equally difficult cross-fall at the intersection	 	TGD M 2010: Max ramp gradient is 1:12 on accessible routes, with handrail support. Consider redesign of entire corner	2
6.2	St Joseph's Hall	Access to St. Joseph's Hall is also very difficult due to the steep gradient but is within the private realm so was not considered			

6.3	Dempsey's Lane	The pleasant walking route through the trees between Dempsey's and the Punchestown Road could possibly be exploited more for its amenity value		Consider providing seating in a sunny area and possibly some exercise equipment	3
6.4	Punchestown / Naas Road junction	At the turn to the Naas Road the kerb dishing on the Blessington side of the junction is extremely steep with a gradient of between 1:4 and 1:8.		Improve gradient	2
6.5	Tourist Signage	At the junction of the N81 and Naas Road there is a proliferation of signs which do not follow National Traffic Signs Manual or Wicklow Co Co Development Plan guidelines		Wicklow Co Co Dev Plan Ch. 9 Infrastructure. AS4 Tourism and leisure facilities shall be on signs of white writing on brown background. All other signs shall be black writing on white background	2
6.6	Troopersfield junction	The crossings on the Troopersfield road are good but there is no crossing when approaching from the west side of the main road.		Provide crossing point with dished kerbs and tactile paving	1

<p>6.7</p>	<p>Bus Stop at Troopersfield</p>	<p>Between the bus stop and footpath on the west side of the road at Troopersfield and the Further Education and Training Centre there is neither a controlled or uncontrolled crossing</p> <p>To reach a dished kerb it is necessary to go southwards towards Baltinglass and across a very steep gradient of 1:4.5 and rough surface before reaching a point where one can cross to a dropped kerb on the east side.</p>		<p>Provide a safe crossing point to give more direct access from the west side to Troopersfield, the road to the start of the Greenway and the Further Education and Training Centre</p>	<p>1</p>
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Section 7: Traffic

Ref.	Location	Observation	Photo	Recommendation	Priority
7.1	Throughout Main Street	Traffic through the town was at all times heavy with large numbers of heavy goods vehicles		Diverting through traffic and / or traffic calming measures are essential if the urban environment around the main street is to be improved, made safer and more inclusive for both residents and visitors	2
7.2	Throughout Main Street and the New Town Centre	The reversing of cars parked perpendicular to the main street tended to slow traffic but was also quite hazardous.		Rationalising car parking, restricting parking on the Main Street and in public areas to short term, introducing parking controls, ensuring parked cars do not impinge on the pedestrian environment and improving designated accessible and family parking bays as well as standard and non-standard cycle parking is also essential.	2

7.3	Relief Road	Traffic on the partially complete inner relief road appeared to be light at almost all times and there was no signage to indicate this could be a route for some through traffic		Consider if it is possible in the short term to divert through traffic away from the Main Street from Aldi via Oak Drive and back on to the N 81 at the Naas Road junction.	2
7.4	Speed Limit	The existing speed limit of 50km per hour through the centre of the town is excessive, particularly considering the width of the road, the numbers crossing, schools, elderly people and the historic environment. 5 out of 10 pedestrians hit by a car travelling at 50km/hr will die as opposed to 1 out of 10 hit by a car travelling at 30km/hr. (DMURS)		Local Authorities have powers to impose special speed limits of 30km/hour in designated areas eg in built-up areas and around schools. Consideration should be given to this as a possible short term measure until traffic calming and other measures are in place.	2

Appendix B – Relevant Legislation

Disability Act 2005

The Disability Act 2005 places a statutory obligation on public service providers to ensure that both their buildings and services are accessible to persons with disabilities. Section 25 of the Disability Act came into operation on the 31st December 2005. Section 25 (3) of the Act requires that:

- a) Buildings which are public buildings on the commencement of this section or which become public buildings after such commencement, shall be brought into compliance with Part M of the Building Regulations (unless the building is already required to be so compliant) not later than 31 December 2015; and
- b) Public buildings shall be brought into compliance with any amendment of Part M made after such commencement not later than 10 years after the commencement of the amendment.

Section 37 of the Disability Act came into operation on 29th July 2005. Under this section the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government was required to publish a sectoral plan outlining inter alia:

- (a) measures to be taken to ensure compliance with Part M of the Building Regulations
- (b) measures to be taken to facilitate access by persons with disabilities to public roads and other public places and to other services provided by the Minister, local authorities or other public bodies in relation to which he or she performs functions and the time proposed within which such measures are to be taken,
- (c) arrangements proposed to be put in place by the Minister and the Minister for Transport to facilitate access to the vehicles providing the passenger transport services by such persons from a public road.

Under section 37 of the Act “public places” includes

- (a) street furniture, pavements and pedestrian zones
- (b) signage
- (c) public parks and open spaces owned or maintained by a local authority
- (d) harbours, bus and light rail stops for which a local authority is responsible

Appendix C – Standards, References & Resources

These Standards, References and Resources, where available freely, can be accessed by clicking on the links. The British Standard is only available to purchase.

Standards

1. [Building Regulations 2010 Technical Guidance Document M – Access & Use](#)
2. [British Standard 8300-1:2018 Design of an accessible and inclusive built environment. External Environment. Code of Practice.](#)
3. [NDA Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach](#)
4. [Dept. of Environment Community & Local Government – Design Manual for Urban Roads & Streets](#)
5. Local Government Management & Services Board – Good Practice Guidelines on Accessibility of Streetscapes
6. [The Scottish Office – Department of Environment Transport & Roads – Guidance on the Use of Tactile Paving Surfaces](#)
7. [DoELG, DOT and DTO Traffic Management Guidelines 2003](#)

References

1. [Disability Act 2005](#)
2. [Wicklow County Council : Blessington Local Area Plan 2013-2019](#)
3. Loci Urban Design Consultants – The Blessington Study 2019 – Town Centre Health Check, Town Centre Strategy and suggested improvements / objectives for the future
4. [Capita Symonds – Accessibility Audit Report March 2008 Blessington Town Centre](#)

Resources

1. [L'DGO Design of Streets with Older People in Mind – Design Guide 04 – Pedestrian Crossings](#)
2. [RIAI – Creating Places for People : The RIAI Town & Village Toolkit](#)
3. [CIHT – Creating Better Streets: Inclusive and Accessible Places 2018 – A Review of Shared Space](#)
4. [Age Friendly Ireland – Being Age Friendly in the Public Realm – Guidelines & Good Practice](#)
5. [Age Friendly Ireland – How Walkable is your Town](#)
6. [BSI Inclusive Urban Design – A Guide to creating accessible public spaces](#)

Appendix D – Defining Accessible Tourist Routes

In recent years accessible tourist routes have been introduced in some European towns and cities as a specific form of tourist attraction which enhances the experience of a city for all its visitors and especially those with specific access requirements.

Accessible routes enable both local citizens and tourists to move around easily and safely and enjoy the historical, touristic and cultural Points of Interest (POIs) which the city offers.

Improving pedestrian access and enabling people to navigate and experience the city more comfortably and conveniently can help to reduce motor traffic, making the city environment better for everyone and creating a magnet for tourists and citizens alike.

Definition: An accessible tourist route is here understood as a pre-determined pedestrian pathway which visitors can follow to experience an environment of touristic interest.

The accessible route should be easily reached by public or private transport. It may be followed in whole or in part, according to the visitor's interests, abilities and the time available for the visit.

To qualify as an '*accessible*' route it must provide comfortable and equitable access for all visitors, including persons with specific access requirements or disabilities. The route should be designed to enable users to orientate themselves, move easily and navigate the route.

The path itself must have a continuous clear width and free height, and a smooth surface which has no major obstacles and no steep gradients, allowing easy access for parents with small children and babies in push-chairs or prams, persons who use wheelchairs, mobility scooters or other walking aids. The route should also provide information which is also accessible to persons with vision or hearing impairments and those who have difficulties in understanding.

The path must have suitable directional signage on the route itself, making it easy for visitors to know where they are and to find their way to their preferred destination or point of interest. This can be achieved with clear, legible signage, local area maps and plaques, in appropriate formats that can be easily perceived and understood.

'*Accessibility*' applies not only to the physical access of the route. Certain points of interest along the route should be identified and an explanation of their particular character or historical and cultural significance should be available in accessible formats. In addition, available services such as accessible public toilets and a Tourist Information Centre should be included in visitor information.

Alternative ways of experiencing the buildings or environment may be offered through recorded (spoken) information, text displays, tactile information and models, etc. Smart technologies can be considered for

this purpose, including digital simulations, audio guides, QR Codes and mobile applications for smart phones and tablets.

Where the points of interest are buildings open to the public, these should also be accessible, allowing all visitors to enter at least part of the building, wherever possible using the main entrance.

Information about the route and the points of interest should be available from a Tourist Information Office and Website. Information should be produced in printed form, in Braille and in digital formats (including video with audio description where possible). This will enable visitors to discover the route and plan their itinerary before arriving in the city. It also allows them to review the route and points of interest after a visit and “re-live” the experience with their friends and family.

Accessible Routes in Urban Environments

Accessible routes in the town should be suitable for all visitors, providing not only ease of access but also the opportunity to enjoy interesting cultural experiences and engage in activities that make the visit a memorable, comfortable and pleasant one.

An accessible town centre can be characterised as having a number of features, including some or all of the following:

- Accessible routes to public transport, taxis and public parking areas
- Easy access to local cafés, restaurants, etc. to buy food and drink
- Proximity to a Tourist Information Centre
- Accessible shops near to and/or along the central streets
- Accessible street furniture
- Seating at regular intervals
- Walking routes that include views from the path, landmarks and/or easy access to activities and events
- Bus shelters
- Publicly available accessible toilets and baby-changing facilities
- Designated parking bays for holders of parking permits (accessible parking).

Where facilities are accessible for various user groups, visitors should be informed about them through tourist information channels, so that they can plan their visit accordingly. It is therefore very important to make an inventory of accessible routes and features of the town as a starting point, both for making access improvements and, for example, for eventually developing a town Access Guide.

Transport arrival and departure points

- Pedestrian routes for visitors may be described from identified start and finish points. The route may be “circular” (that is, starting and finishing at the same point) or it may be “linear”.
- The start and finish points may be marked in maps and guides.
- The selection of start and finish points should take into account how the pedestrian (visitor) will reach the route, by various means of transport. Consideration should also be given to the availability of services close to the route or on the route itself, e.g. Toilets, food and drink.
- The main route may have branches or side routes to accessible Points of Interest (POIs).

Car parking availability

- The start and finish points should be easily accessible by public transport and, where possible, also by private vehicles (with spaces for car parking).
- In car parks or streets, designated parking bays should be available for drivers with a disability and vehicles used to transport passengers with a disability.
- Designated parking bays should conform to the current standards regarding their positioning, size, road markings and signage.

Public transport

- Ideally, accessible pedestrian routes should be served at the start and finish by public transport.
- Public transport vehicles which serve the route should be accessible for wheelchairs and children’s push chairs. That means they must have level or ramped access between the vehicle and the pavement. “Kneeling buses” or “low-floor buses” should be available if possible.
- Where wheelchair accessible taxis or minivans are available, this should be indicated in the published information about the town and the accessible routes.
- Railway stations should provide level or ramp access for wheelchairs and children’s push chairs between the entrance(s) or street level and platforms, and be equipped with guidance routes and signage suitable for all passengers. Ramp or level access between the platform and railway carriages is also required.
- Ticket sales points should be accessible for all users; this applies to ticket counters and self-service ticket machines.

Navigation and orientation: maps and descriptions

- Following the access audit of the town, the accessible routes should be clearly marked on a printed map that can be used by the visitor when following the route. There should be an indication of the scale of the map and the orientation (showing the direction of North).
- The route should be described in words (text). There should be an indication of the length of the whole route and the average walking time.

- There may be additional indications of the distances and average walking times between Points of Interest.
- Digital maps and/or electronic guides may also be used but there should always be a printed version.
- Audio descriptions of the route and points of interest can be recorded for use in electronic guides and for downloading as Podcasts / MP3 files. Audio guides are also useful for those visitors who cannot read.

Points of Interest

- The accessible routes should include *points of interest* such as historical buildings, monuments, gardens, squares, etc. which may be viewed from the route or entered by the visitors (either public or private property, with or without an entrance fee).
- Each point of interest should be clearly marked on the route map and described in the information available to visitors.
- Information may be available at the point of interest, in various ways including tactile models or maps, signs, plaques, or using new technologies, such as QR Codes. Information should include accessibility information, any entrance fees required, opening and closing times and other specific information related to the facility which might be essential for the visitors.

Public services (Tourist Information Centre, accessible toilets, etc.)

- Where appropriate the accessible routes should be close to public services for visitors.
- It is an advantage if the route(s) pass near a *Tourist Information Centre* or other Tourist Information Point.
- Public services should be marked on the general location map of the route.
- There should be an *accessible public toilet* at some point within 500 metres walking distance of the route. The toilet should be open during normal visiting hours. It should not be necessary to have a special key to access the toilet, as tourists are unlikely to have such a key.

General

- Where there are cafes, restaurants, kiosks and other places to buy food and drink along the route, this will be appreciated by visitors. Efforts should be made to encourage owners of these establishments to make their premises accessible so all visitors can access and enjoy every tourism service.

Outdoor serving areas should be made accessible by observing the guidelines for free passageways and removing steps or similar barriers where possible.