

Pushkin House - Access Statement

Statutory and regulatory background

Earnscliffe, Making Access Work prepared this Access Statement on behalf of Pushkin House. It relates to the proposed refurbishment of the charitable organisation's premises at 5a Bloomsbury Square, London, a Grade II* listed Georgian townhouse, to improve accessibility and performance. The house has four (Ground, 1st, 2nd, 3rd) upper storeys plus a basement.

Earnscliffe, Making Access Work was tasked with ensuring that the design proposals were inclusive and fit for purpose for a public facility, meeting the Disability Duties of the Equality Act 2010, the London Plan and London Borough of Camden planning guidelines.

This Access Statement was informed by a site visit, meetings with the architect and Pushkin House director, and design reviews to identify potential barriers and opportunities for improving accessibility and inclusivity.

In order to achieve an acceptable level of accessibility the proposals have been measured against current legislation, building standards and best practice guidelines, as a minimum to include:-

Approved Document M of the Building Regulations, Oct 2015 Volume 2
– Buildings other than Dwellings M1-M3

Building Regulations Approved Document K – Protection from falling, collision and impact

B8300: 2018 – Design of an accessible and inclusive built environment
Part 2: Buildings – Code of practice

Access, A Best Practice Guide for Arts and Cultural Organisations, Arts Council England 2019

The Equality Act 2010

Inclusive design process

Improving accessibility across the site was the starting point of the design process, with the aim that everyone, be they visitor, staff, volunteer, tenant, hirer or artist, can access as much of Pushkin House as feasible to enable them to participate in activities and events easily, safely, comfortably and confidently.

The proposals reflect sensitivity to the need to conserve the special characteristics of the Grade II* listed townhouse, most especially the main staircase. Measures to improve accessibility have therefore been carefully balanced between conservation and accessibility.

Design philosophy

A key aim of the refurbishment was to achieve access both into and around the building and to access key facilities within it, including toilets and events / exhibition spaces. The design philosophy is based on the social model of disability and the principle of inclusive design that maximises access, choice and opportunities for disabled people, balanced against the need to preserve the historic fabric of the buildings. Inclusive design is the process by which the needs of everybody are considered and embedded in the proposals for the design, refurbishment and subsequent management of the built environment.

The key elements of inclusive design, which benefit everyone, are:

- a) ease of use
- b) freedom of choice and access to mainstream activities
- c) embracing of diversity and difference
- d) legibility and predictability
- e) high quality.

Access has been considered in its broadest sense to reflect the needs of individuals with sensory, mobility and hidden impairments, learning disabilities, mental health needs, reduced or hypersensitivity to temperature, and limited reach and stature. The needs of others to whom the built environment can be disabling, including young families, elders and those for whom English is not a first language (including British Sign Language users) have also been considered. This approach has facilitated an inclusive approach to access and ensured that opportunities for maximizing access have been identified throughout the design process.

Access Provisions

Approach

Users approach the building from Bloomsbury Way. The building is clearly signposted.

There exist two steps up from street level to the external entrance landing with rises of 100mm and 170mm. There is an additional 90mm rise at the entrance door threshold.

The proposed access solution is a series of ramps. A folding, portable ramp approximately 900mm wide and with a gentle gradient will address the 270mm level change and will culminate in a bespoke folding landing 1010mm deep x 1100mm long that leads onto the external entrance landing. The latter concrete landing has a depth of only 1190mm but wheelchair users do not need to turn once off the ramp landing as the entrance door is straight ahead.

Entrance

The 90mm level change at the threshold will be addressed by a portable / not fixed short ramp. From here there will be level access into the spacious Ground Floor Entrance Hall / Reception through a wide single leaf door 1100mm wide. The nib on the inside of the door is

less than the 300mm required to enable a wheelchair user to open the door towards themselves clear of the leaf. It is envisaged that the solution will be a managed one, with staff located in Reception being on hand to assist as required.

The new Welcome Desk will be clearly visible to those entering the building and will be 760mm ffl high with a knee recess to enable wheelchair users to pull up close. An induction loop for the benefit of hearing aid wearers will be permanently located here, in line with Part M, and clearly advertised. Light levels here will be at least 500 lux as recommended by CIBSE to enable floor plans etc. to be read.

Circulation

There is stair access from Ground Floor level via the principal stair (Stair 2) to the upper levels. The steps have reasonable treads but the risers of 190mm are steeper than the maximum comfortable rise of 170mm. As a key historic feature no alterations are proposed. There is a handrail to one side of the flight only. It may be possible for a second handrail on the wall side to be added but this may not be continuous where there are feature wall reliefs. The treads are carpeted with no contrast nosings. Where the stair turns the treads are tapered.



A second stair (Stair 1) connects Ground and Basement levels and offers reasonable access. Stair lighting will be upgraded with integral LED strips in handrails.

Version 01 of the design proposals seeks to provide step-free access for those unable to use stairs, including wheelchair users, by the introduction of a standard platform lift (external dimensions of 1560mm x 1360mm) within Office. This would be accessed at Ground Floor entrance level from Reception via a wide door that provides a clear opening width of 915mm into the gallery. The lift would travel to Basement and First Floor levels.

The Library and Office facilities would be relocated to upper floors.

At First Floor the lift would be visually discrete, being located behind a screen to the rear of the main Function Room seating area in a zone that would also accommodate stacked chairs at the opposite end to the lift door. 1500²mm clear landing could be achieved in front of the lift. This lift would provide access to the whole of the First Floor. On this level are the Main Function Room itself, which can comfortably seat 32 and grand piano, and has views out of the large windows looking out over Bloomsbury Square. The Library and Foyer spaces on the same level can also be accessed via wide doors.

At Basement Level the lift again has a 1500²mm clear landing. The lift would be a prominent feature within the large Gallery (B.1). The lift at this level would also provide access to the unisex accessible toilet via a reasonably wide route that comprises a door and a third arrangement between Gallery B.1 and Lobby B.7, and a second wide door that leads into Foyer B.5, a corridor just below 1200mm wide. This corridor has a wheelchair turning zone in its corner, facilitated by a second door into Gallery B.1 that can reverse out of the Foyer. This zone would enable wheelchair users to turn towards the toilets.

Version 02 relies on the same entrance arrangement as Version 01 but proposes a standard platform lift in a more discrete location towards

the northern end of the building. This can be accessed directly from the Entrance Hall / Reception and consequently will be easier to find on a door-free route. To accommodate the lift Stair 1 would need to be reconfigured at Basement level.

The lift will provide access between Ground and Basement Floor levels. The Main Function Room will be relocated from First to Ground Floor in order for it to be accessible to all visitors.

Toilets

The toilets at Basement Level will be reconfigured in both versions to provide one standard cubicle and an adjacent unisex accessible toilet to Part M standard, being 1500mm wide and 2446mm long with an outward opening door.

Offices and Meeting Rooms

In both versions there will be no lift access to the Second Floor that houses two Meetings Rooms and a cloakroom toilet cubicle.

The Third Floor houses an additional Meeting Room plus Offices, one for the Russian Language Centre, the second for internal staff. Again, a small toilet is provided.

Fire Safety

In both Version 01 and 02 there is a fire exit door leading off Lobby B.7 to an external area on Bloomsbury Way. In Version 01 an area of safe refuge would need to be provided in a fire-protected zone and ideally within close proximity to an escape stair.

Xenon flashing light beacons will be considered for the Basement toilet lobby for the benefit of deaf building users.

Proprietary fire exit signage will include signs to indicate level escape routes and safe refuge, as appropriate. The latter will be provided with a two-way communication assistance call point.

Conclusion

The design of access measures within the refurbishment proposals has been carefully considered and a reasonable level of accessibility demonstrated despite working with the restrictions of a Grade II* listed building with significant physical constraints.

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