

# Jacob Wells Baths Design Review



Date: 5<sup>th</sup> December 2025



# CONTENTS

Main Summary & Definition of Disability	Page 3
Principles of the Access Audit	Page 3
Audit Introduction	Page 4
Summary of Findings	Page 6
Recommendations	Page 14
Appendix	Page 17



## **Main Summary**

### **Disability Inclusion**

As an organisation, you should be wholly committed to the principles and aims of the Equality Act 2010 and to its implications for your staff and service users. In accordance with your equality obligations, you have the responsibility not to treat disabled customers less favourably than their non-disabled peers, and to comply with your duty to provide an inclusive environment, making it accessible for all. The aim is to ensure that these principles apply in all aspects of your business/organisation and seek to ensure that these principles are applied whenever relevant individual decisions must be made regarding accessibility.

### **Social Model of Disability**


The social model of disability is a way of viewing the world, developed by Disabled people.

The model says that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. Barriers can be physical, like buildings not having accessible toilets. Or they can be caused by people's attitudes towards difference, like assuming Disabled people cannot do certain things.

The social model helps us recognise barriers that make life harder for Disabled people. Removing these barriers creates equality and offers Disabled people more independence, choice, and control.

### **Principles of the Audit**

The Access Audit has been undertaken to appraise proposed plans and designs and propose the extent of works required to improve the proposed designs in accordance with the definitions of the Equalities Act



2010. The audit considers the needs of people with mobility impairments (including wheelchair users) and sensory impairments. The audit will identify physical barriers to access. This audit should be treated as the starting point of an ongoing access plan, which should be regularly reviewed by the organisation. Changes made after the audit may improve or reduce levels of accessibility.


It is important to stress that West of England Centre for Inclusive Living (WECIL) does not claim to be surveyors or official assessors. WECIL are a Disabled Peoples Organisation that has several members with a variety of impairments that can relate to the access issues Disabled people face daily and have over 10 years of experience in providing accessibility support. All WECIL's access audit specifications come from the official HM Government Approved Document on Access to Buildings and Use, using M1/M2 specifications.

## Audit Introduction

This combined Stage 1 & 2 Design Review explores the complexities of transforming the Grade II listed Jacob's Wells Baths into a fully inclusive venue. Due to the building's steep topography, historic constraints, and multi-level configuration, accessibility requires a carefully layered approach.

Key objectives include:

- Creating level or near-level access through multiple entrances
- Ensuring safe and intuitive vertical movement through accessible lift strategy
- Developing clear, multi-sensory wayfinding systems
- Improving toilet accessibility and consolidating provision
- Designing for neurodivergent, visually impaired, mobility-impaired, and sensory-sensitive users

- 
- Balancing heritage protection with modern accessibility requirements
  - Embedding operational and safety considerations early in the design
  - Ensuring community participation and lived-experience guidance throughout

This report integrates findings from both design review sessions and outlines recommendations to guide the next design phase.



## Summary of Findings

### Accessibility & Physical Access Improvements (Reception and Accessible Entry Point)

The project team is proactively addressing the inherent challenges of the steep site, multi-level interiors, and protected heritage fabric.

#### Entrances & External Access

- A multi-entrance strategy is proposed, including two new glazed south-side entrances, one fully level with power-assisted doors.
- North-side access remains challenging due to steep internal corridors; the design includes two lifts linking south to north and the potential for a new level-access north entrance.
- External conditions pose significant barriers: steep road gradients, lack of disabled parking, no drop kerbs, and limited bus stops. Engagement with BCC Highways is planned to narrow carriageways, widen pavements, add disabled bays/loading, and improve crossing points.
- A partnership with City of Bristol College may offer interim disabled parking during events.

#### Internal Movement

- The lift strategy prioritises accessibility via a large 1.7m × 1.75m lift car, enabling use by mobility scooters and multiple wheelchair users.
- A fire-protected lift lobby is proposed, though there are concerns regarding user intuitiveness and safety during emergencies.
- Door design includes colour-contrasted frames, tactile handles, and enlarged kick plates to assist wheelchair users.



## Tactile, Tactile Ground Indicators & Manifestations

- All glass entrances will feature contrasting manifestations and tactile indicators to reduce collision risk.
- Tactile paving is proposed at entrances extending externally.

## Handrails


- Internal and external handrails will use tactile-friendly, non-metal materials to avoid temperature extremes and support balance. This is useful on the immediate interior to follow the line of the double doors on entry.

---

## Wayfinding, Signage & Sensory Design

The building's numerous level changes and entrance points require a robust, intuitive wayfinding strategy.

- Signage should avoid compass directions in favour of community-named entrances, supporting neurodiverse users and local engagement.
- Dual-height signage, strong colour contrast and non-glare materials will support visually impaired users.
- Tactile maps, clear floor naming, and consistent iconography are recommended.
- Adjustable, dimmable lighting is essential, especially in reception areas where natural and artificial lighting blend.
- Lighting must also be designed to avoid disturbance to protected bat species.
- Permanent hearing loop installations will be fitted in reception and performance/auditorium spaces.

- 
- Signage must be compatible with emerging AI-enabled assistive technologies such as smart glasses.
- 

### **Toilet and Washroom Facilities (Entry and Pump Room)**


Accessible toilet provision is a major focus due to spatial restrictions.

- Multiple accessible toilets will be distributed across the building, with alternating transfer sides clearly marked.
  - Current layouts require improvements to transfer space, door placements and clutter reduction.
  - Consideration is given to rotated toilet layouts to maximise transfer space.
  - Debate continues on the viability of a child-friendly accessible toilet, though data is currently insufficient.
  - Colour-contrasted grab rails, comfort-height toilets, and dual hand-drying options are essential.
  - Clear policies are needed regarding whether accessible toilets near entrances remain dedicated or become shared use (risk of over-occupancy).
- 

### **Reception & Entrance Experience**

The reception area is being developed with accessibility, sensory comfort and operational clarity in mind.

- The reception desk will be lowered and widened with adequate knee space for wheelchair users.
- The background wall must contrast strongly with staff clothing; bright, flat-painted surfaces are recommended.

- 
- Lighting must avoid glare, while balancing natural light with dimmable uplighting.

---

## Operational & Safety Considerations

Accessibility is closely tied to safety, evacuation planning, and day-to-day management.

- A fire-fighting lift with smoke-protected lobbies is proposed but requires careful review for user clarity.
- Doors will feature magnetic latches for powered opening but will automatically close during alarms.
- Continuous handrails, colour-contrasted nosings, and closed stair risers are essential for stair safety.
- Policies around entrance management during peak events must be defined to ensure consistent wayfinding.


---

## Lift and Accessibility Design

Part 2 of the review focused heavily on resolving the lift strategy, fire safety requirements, and the spatial experience of the south-side circulation zone. The team prioritised ensuring that lift access is safe, intuitive, and comfortable for users during both everyday use and emergency scenarios.

A dedicated operational and accessibility workshop with the Trinity team is scheduled for 11 December (12–1 pm) to finalise key decisions relating to the main lift, lift lobby area, user flow and evacuation procedures. Findings from this meeting will feed directly into the forthcoming building control submission.

Concerns were raised about the current lift lobby configuration, particularly that it may feel too confined, dark, and unsafe during emergencies. Advisors recommended removing fully enclosed lobbies and



instead using fire-protected glazed doors to maintain visibility and reduce claustrophobia. Options for a separate refuge room, ideally with natural light, remain under consideration. Additional measures such as flip-down seats inside lifts were proposed to accommodate longer waiting times during evacuation.

Lift specification discussions emphasised the need for:

- Enlarged platform lift dimensions (recommended 1–1.2m width and minimum 1.5m depth)
- Weight capacities exceeding 300 kg to support powerchairs and assistants
- Tactile buttons, auditory feedback, auto-closing doors and robust intercom systems
- Forward-in / forward-out layouts to prevent difficult turning manoeuvres
- Automatic double-leaf doors with minimum clear openings of 1.75m


The team reviewed operational placement to reduce queuing and improve visibility, recommending that the platform lift be located close to the entrance, with stairs positioned behind it and staffed during events to support wayfinding. Handrails, solid barriers, and tactile edging will help prevent falls at stair interfaces.

While some suggested exploring large-format lift solutions such as the “oval shaped” lift at Bristol Museum, enclosed fire-safe lift models remain the preferred option for regulatory compliance and user protection.

---

## **Acoustic and Sensory Environment**

Sensory design—particularly acoustics—was identified as a critical area for improving comfort for neurodivergent visitors, visually impaired users, and individuals sensitive to noise. Although the current phase’s budget is



largely directed toward structural repairs, acoustic upgrades remain a priority for future phases.

The main hall currently experiences significant echo, limiting speech clarity and causing sensory overwhelm. The team explored a range of solutions, including movable acoustic baffles, recycled leather flooring, and acoustic wall treatments. Ceiling-mounted solutions are challenging due to the glazed roof and rigging requirements for performances.

A strong emphasis was placed on providing calming, low-stimulation spaces during events, particularly where the main hall may not meet sensory accessibility needs. Options include:


- A quiet or sensory room in the north wing
- Use of accessible toilets with dimmable lighting as a temporary private calming space
- An outdoor sheltered area near the boiler room as an additional regulated environment

Lighting will be fully programmable LED, with calming colour modes and dimmable functionality. The team will source guidance on light colours, textures and furnishing choices to ensure a non-clinical, soothing environment. References included the successful sensory room at Warner Brothers Studios Leavesden, highlighting the value of thoughtful design for families and carers.

---

## **Toilet and Circulation Planning**

The circulation and toilet layout strategy has developed significantly, responding to concerns about confusing access routes and fragmented toilet provision. Plans now include relocating stairs to form a central staircase and consolidating toilets at the south studio level to remove the need for accessible toilets split across floors.



A redesigned wheelchair-accessible toilet is proposed at approximately 2m × 2m, supporting sliding-door access to maximise usable space. Consistent 1.5m turning circles will be maintained at all lift exits. Fire compartmentation will be carefully integrated using glazed fire doors to preserve sightlines while maintaining safety.

Wider double-leaf powered doors remain a priority throughout circulation areas, with the team working toward achieving at least 1.75m clear openings. Tactile and high-contrast wayfinding, intuitive colour zoning, and digital aids will support navigation for visually impaired and neurodivergent visitors.

---

## Wayfinding and Digital Navigation

The team explored digital, tactile and hybrid navigation strategies as a key component of inclusive design. Technologies such as Navilens and Soundscape were strongly recommended due to their proven success in heritage and multi-level venues.

QR-like codes placed around the building can provide:

- Real-time directional information
- Distances to facilities
- Floor-level orientation
- Audio descriptions for lifts, toilets, and exits

These systems offer independence for visually impaired users and complement—rather than replace—physical signage, tactile maps and high-contrast graphics. Tactile maps created by RNIB and similar organisations will be installed in lift lobbies and other high-traffic areas to support spatial understanding.

The combined tactile/digital approach is considered essential given the building's complex geometries and multiple entrances.



---

## Seating and Event Access Strategy

Seating design and operational accessibility for events were highlighted as major considerations for the venue's future programme of performances and community activities.

Recommendations include:

- Seating variety: chairs with armrests, flip-up armrests, and soft seating
- Avoidance of noisy metal seating
- Use of lightweight, height-adjustable trestle tables without central posts
- Strong colour contrast between seating, floors and walls
- Flexible layouts supporting users who prefer to sit with or apart from companions

Wheelchair-accessible positions must avoid isolation in back rows where possible. Challenges with raked floors were acknowledged, and raised platforms with ramps—similar to those at Bristol Beacon—were recommended to deliver equitable sightlines.

Booking and access management processes will be designed to support:

- Multiple booking methods (online, phone, email)
- Companion ticket allocation
- Dialogue-based seating arrangements
- Nimbus Access Card integration for centralised access requirements
- Clear policies on the use of access-seating to prevent misuse

Staff training and communication protocols are essential to support dignified and informed seating management during busy events.



## Recommendations

### Priority 1 – Immediate Integration into Detailed Design

#### Lift & Vertical Circulation


- Adopt forward-in/forward-out lift design with minimum 1.7 m × 1.75 m car.
- Remove enclosed lobbies; install fire-protected glazed doors.
- Include tactile buttons, auditory cues, intercom, automated doors.
- Provide flip-down seats for evacuation waits.
- Ensure platform lift meets minimum 300 kg capacity and 1.5 m depth.
- Achieve 1.75 m powered door openings at key circulation points.

#### Toilet & Circulation Strategy

- Implement consolidated accessible toilet at south studio level (2 m × 2 m).
- Install sliding door to maximise internal clearance.
- Ensure 1.5 m turning circles around lifts and circulation hubs.
- Provide strong colour contrast for all fixtures and rails.
- Keep transfer zones free of obstruction.

#### Wayfinding & Safety

- Install tactile floor indicators at all entrances.

- 
- Adopt tactile and digital mapping strategy (Navilens, Soundscape).
  - Integrate glazed fire doors for visibility and compartmentation.
  - Install tactile edging, solid barriers and safe handrails at stairs.
- 

## Priority 2 – Fit-Out & User Experience Enhancements

### Sensory & Acoustic Design

- Prepare movable acoustic baffles and wall treatments for future installation.
- Specify programmable LED lighting with calming colour modes.
- Develop sensory room in north wing; identify secondary calming spaces.

### Reception & Public Spaces

- Fit reception desk with knee recess and high-contrast backdrop.
- Install permanent hearing loops with signage.
- Use non-glare finishes and dimmable lighting throughout.

### Seating & Event Access

- Procure varied seating with armrests and flip-arm options.
  - Introduce raised wheelchair platforms with ramp access.
  - Use height-adjustable trestle tables without central posts.
-



## Priority 3 – Longer-Term Site & Infrastructure Development

### External Access

- Continue negotiations with BCC Highways on pavements, bays and crossings.
- Establish interim disabled parking partnership with City of Bristol College.

### Digital Navigation

- Implement full Navilens/Soundscape rollout with physical marker integration.
- Install tactile maps at lift lobbies and entrances.

### Sensory Outdoor Environment

- Create sheltered calming area outside near boiler room.

---

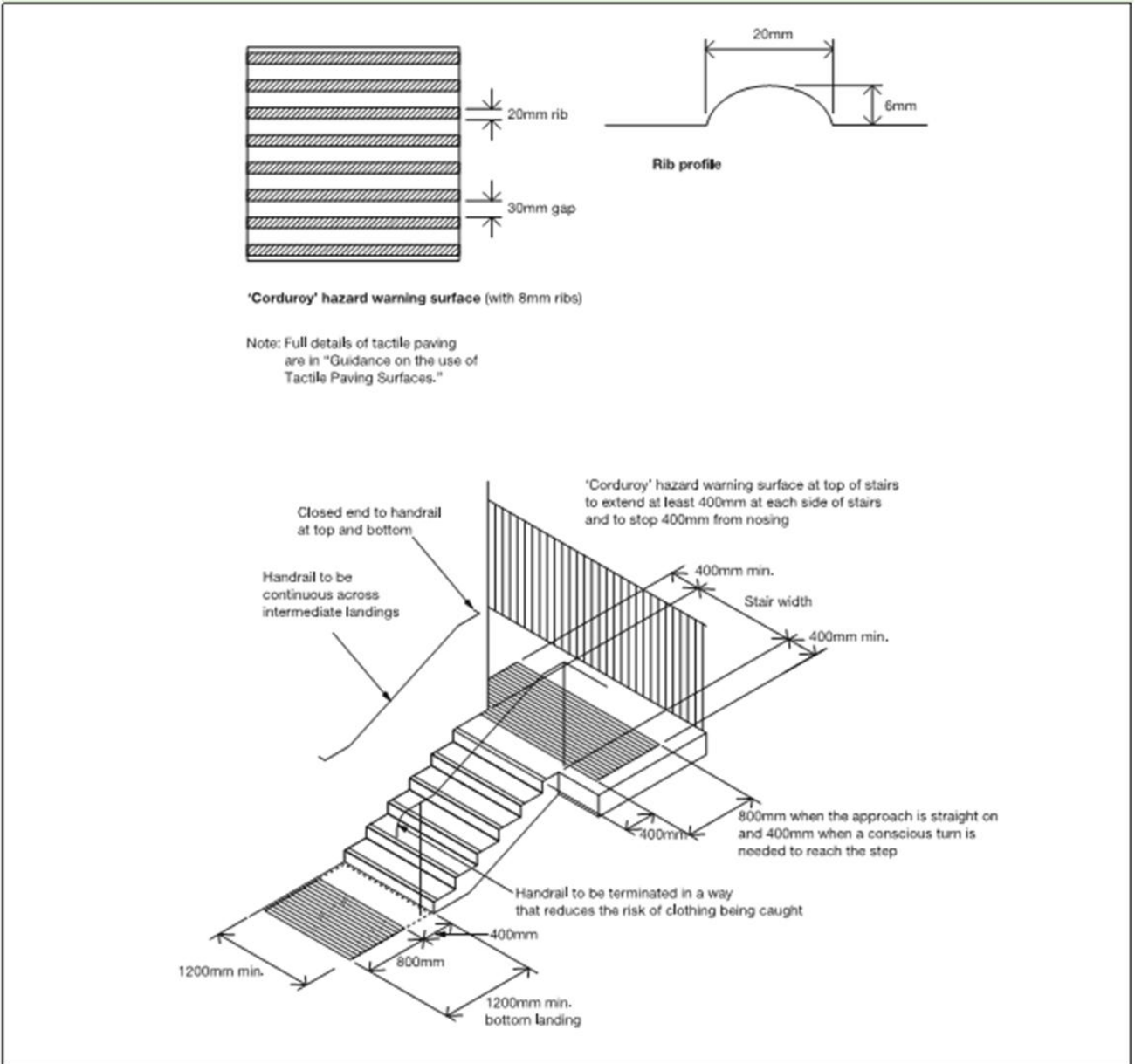
## Priority 4 – Ongoing Operations, Training & Monitoring

### Operational Practice

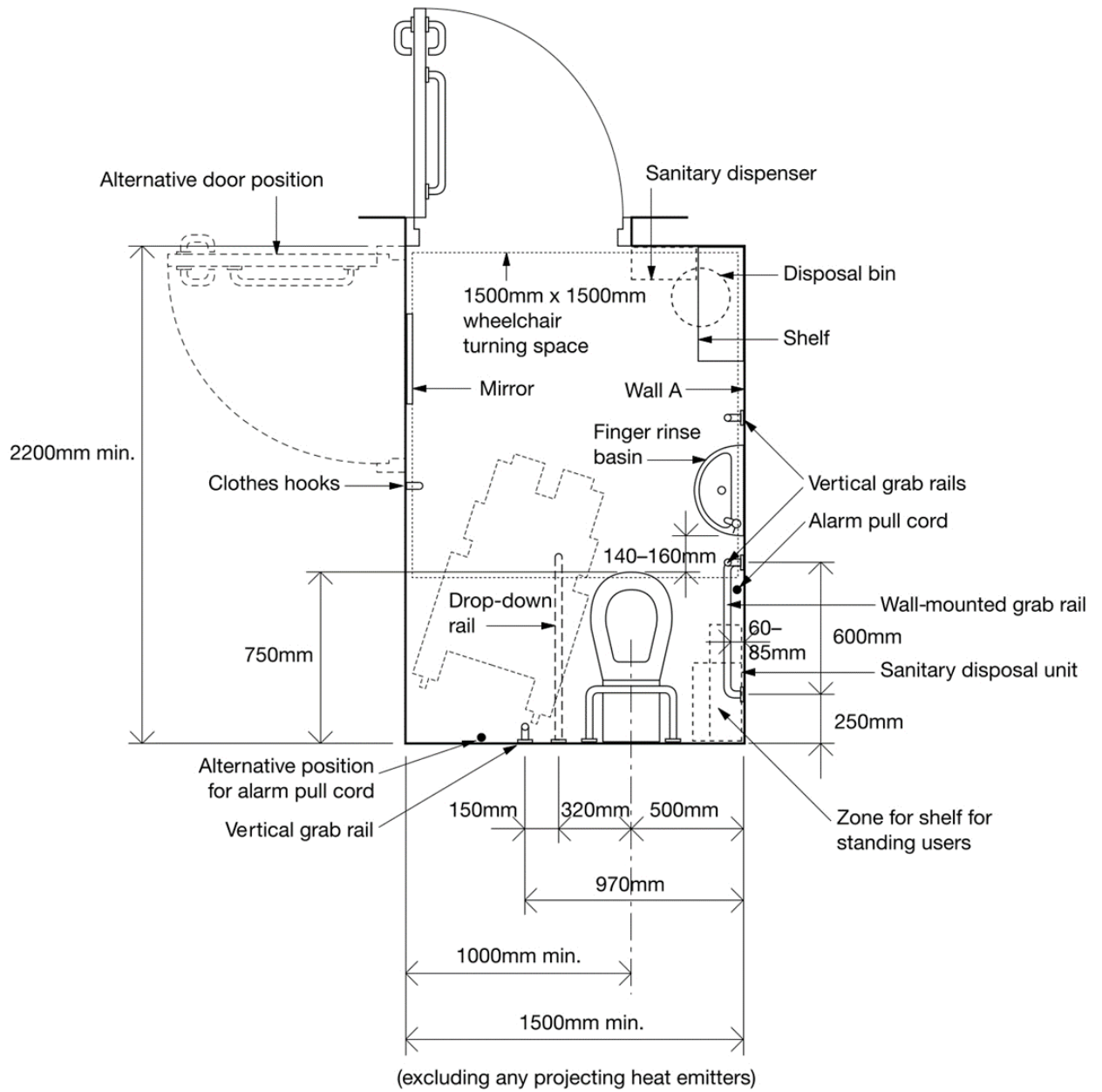
- Staff training in sensory inclusion, lift safety, communication methods.
- Procedures for seat allocation, access membership and companion tickets.

# Appendix 1 Internal and external stepped access

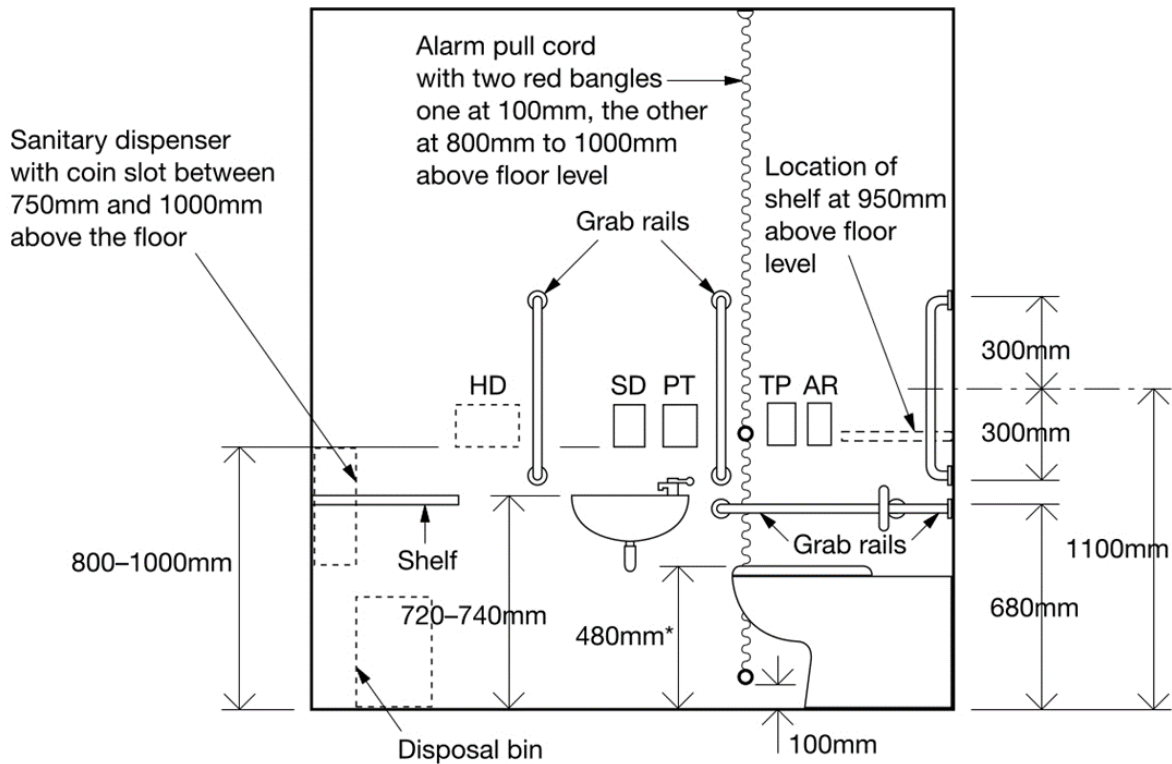
Diagram 4 Stepped access – key dimensions and use of hazard warning surface



## Appendix 2 Accessible toilet dimensions



Note  
Layout for right-hand transfer to WC

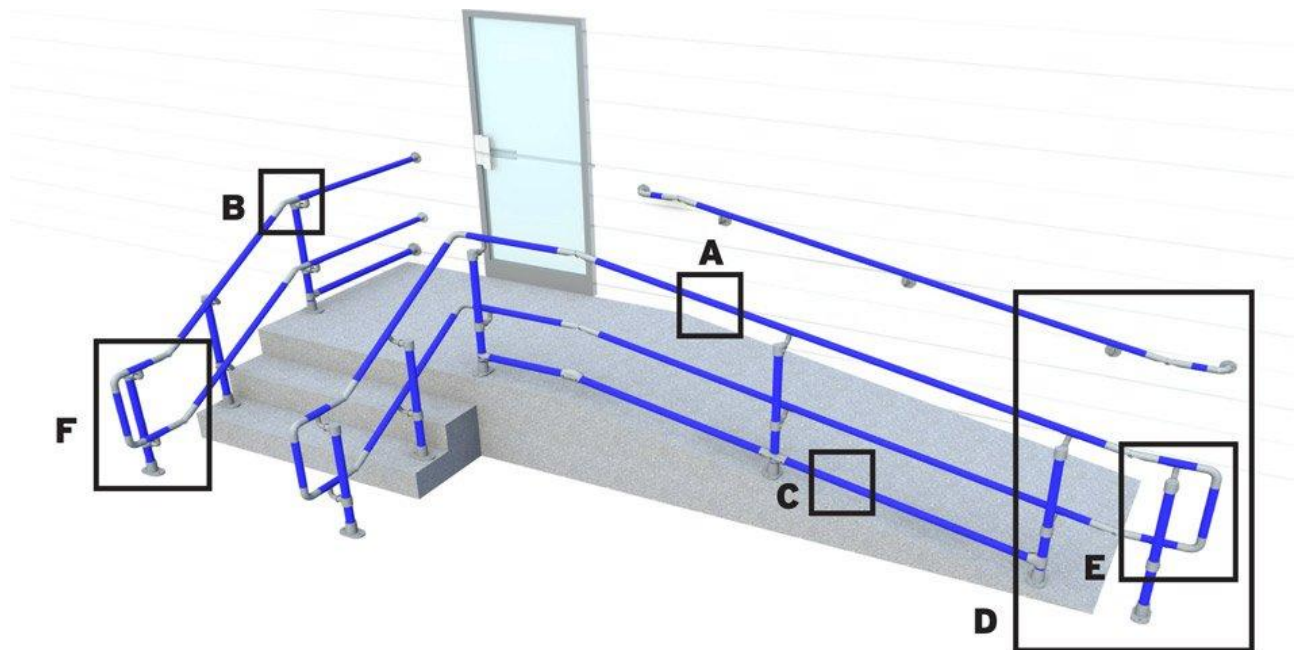


\*Height subject to manufacturing tolerance of WC pan

- HD: Possible position for automatic hand dryer (see also Diagram 20)
- SD: Soap dispenser
- PT: Paper towel dispenser
- AR: Alarm reset button
- TP: Toilet paper dispenser

Height of drop-down rails to be the same as the other horizontal grab rails

## Appendix 3 Handrail Guidance



A) Handrail: Handrail must be a continuous smooth surface. A handrail must be on both sides of ramp or stairs.

B) Handrail height: Handrail must be 900mm - 1.1m in height.

C) Edge protection: When there is a drop off, ramps require a curb or curb rail to prevent wheelchairs from slipping out from under the handrail. In some cases, a mid-rail is sufficient to provide this protection.

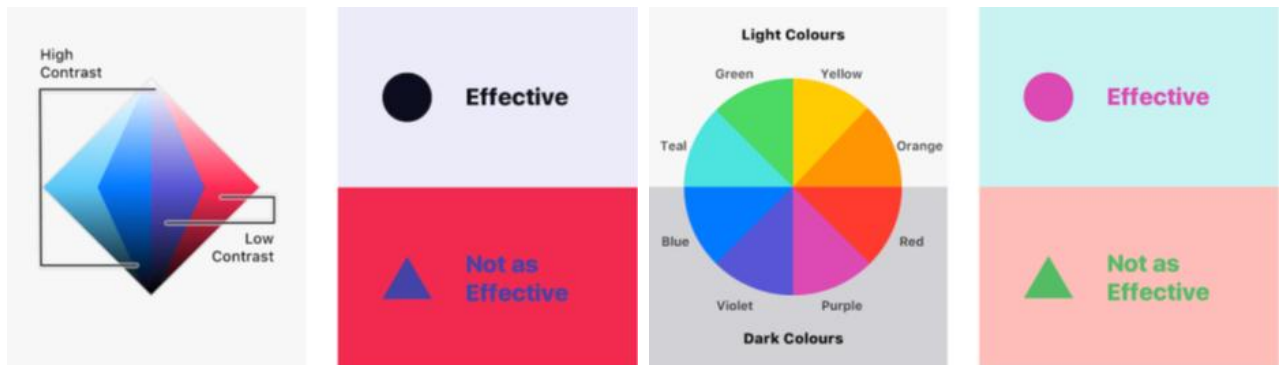
D) Clearance: A ramp must have a minimum clear width of 500mm.

E) D Returns: Railing ends need to be rounded or return smoothly into a floor, wall, or post.

F) Extensions - stairs: The Handrail should extend the width of one stair tread and then level out for 300mm. Ramps: The Handrail should extend parallel to walking surface 300mm; past the top and bottom of the ramp.

## Appendix 4 Colour Contrast

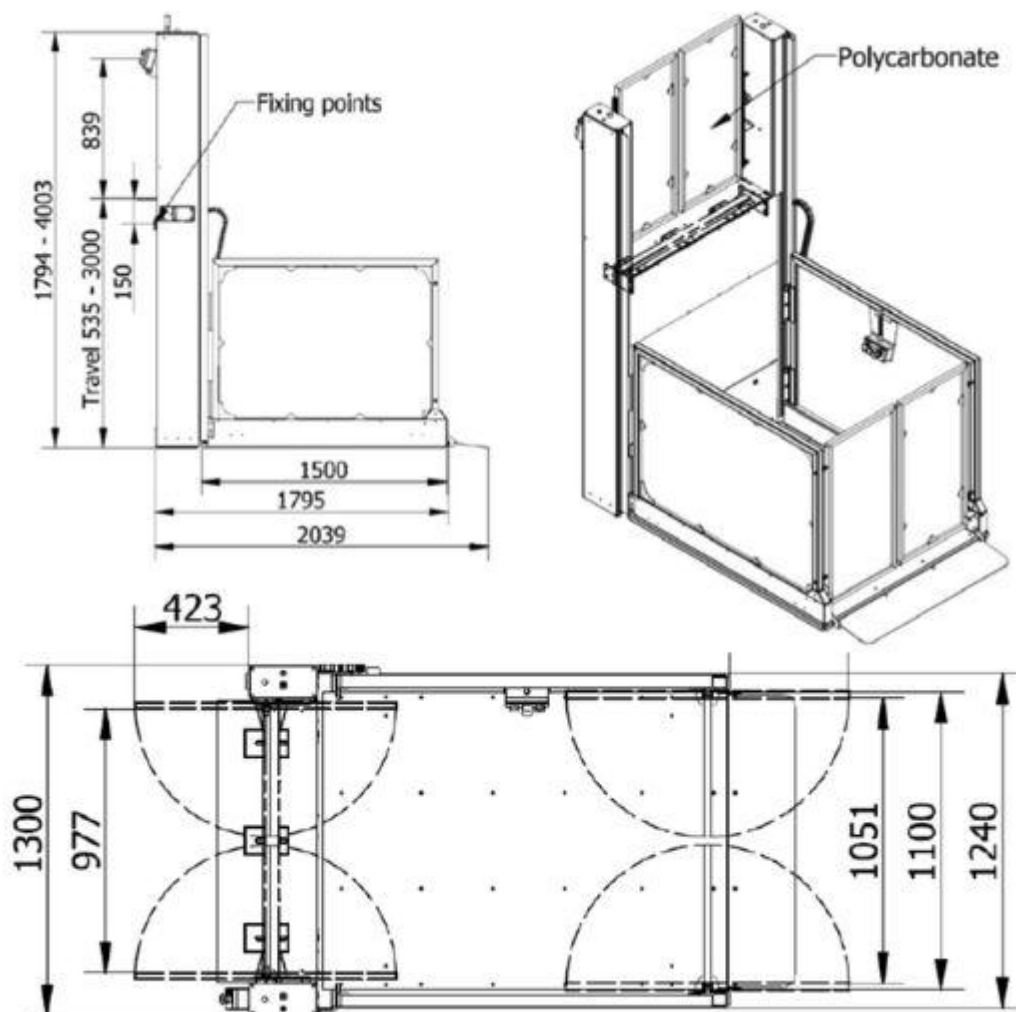
Colour contrast comes up a lot when looking at different areas of an organisation from information and public spaces to marketing and digital platforms. The best colour contrast is a white background with dark colours. Yellow and black also works well. Below is a colour contrast chart that shows the difference between good and bad contrast:



## Appendix 5 Platform Lift Design Examples

[Swedish Style Platform Lift | Level Access Lifts Ltd](#) – Closed style platform lift

[Open Style Platform Lifts - The Platform Lift Company, Fully Supplied & Installed Lift Services](#) – Open or discreet style platform lifts



- Automatic or self-closing door
- Auditory indicators
- Single button press operation
- Minimum weight limit 400kg