

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

DOON VALLEY LOCAL COMMITTEE – TUESDAY 23 JANUARY 2007

ANNUAL REVIEW OF ACCESS PANELS

Report by the Head of Planning, Development and Building Standards

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Local Committee of the work of the Access Panels from October 2005 to December 2006.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In 1981 the Secretary of State for Scotland recommended that each Local Authority nominate a Disability Access Officer and set up Access Panels within each area for the purpose of improving disabled access to the built environment. The Panels would provide a point of contact where disabled people could meet and consult with Local Council representatives such as Architects, Building Standards Surveyors and other relevant bodies on access issues.
- 2.2 Following the directive Access Panels were established throughout Scotland with mixed success. Cumnock & Doon Valley Access Panel has flourished through the years with its membership having an active role in the development of disability issues within the built environment.
- 2.3 An Access Panel was formed in the former Kilmarnock & Loudoun area, however membership dwindled and it ceased during the late 90's. In June 2002, East Ayrshire Council invited local disabled groups and disabled community members within the former Kilmarnock & Loudoun boundary to participate in the formation of a new Access Panel. Consequently, East Ayrshire Council now supports two very active Access Panels with similar goals and objectives – “Access for All”, their ethos being that if the facility is accessible for a disabled person, then it will be accessible for the majority of the community.

3. WORK OF THE ACCESS PANELS

- 3.1 Both Access Panels have a remit to review Planning and Building Warrant applications. The Building Standards Service has a statutory requirement to enforce the Building (Scotland) Regulations 2004 which are supported by functional standards. These standards provide detailed guidance on items such as car parking, toilets, steps, ramps and other elements of the built environment in relation to new buildings or those which are being altered.

Guidance on access requirements for disabled people is also included within these standards which are the minimum that Building Standards Surveyors can impose. However greater detailed guidance exists in the public domain and architects and designers are encouraged by the Panel to adopt this as best practice regarding access for disabled people; for example – British Standard 8300: Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people - Code of practice. If the Architect/Designer takes on board comments made by the Access Panel, the facility will be more inclusive.

- 3.2 Both Panels are continually working in partnership with the Council an example of which was the issue relating to accessible parking at the new Maternity Unit at Crosshouse Hospital. There is a requirement within Building Standards that the maximum distance from an accessible car parking bay to the principal entrance is 45m. The Architects for aesthetic reasons proposed to extend this distance to 87m and requested a Relaxation of the Standards. By working together, the Panels were able to convince the Architects that the Standard should be met in full i.e., a maximum of 45m.
- 3.3 During the year beginning October 2005 till present, both Panels have reviewed in excess of 55 Planning applications and 90 Building Warrant applications. The Panels have also met with a number of designers both in the private and public domain to discuss their proposals in greater detail examples of which are:-
 - Parr Architects regarding the four Public Private Partnership Projects for Mauchline and Shortlees Primary Schools and St Josephs and Grange Academies.
 - Keppie Architects regarding new Maternity Unit at Crosshouse Hospital.
 - Project Director for NHS Ayrshire & Arran regarding all construction works at Crosshouse Hospital.
 - Council's Architects responsible for the new Local Office, Library, Police Office and Community Facility at Stewarton.
 - Health professionals regarding the alteration and extension to the Health Centre, Cumnock
- 3.4 Appendix one of this report provides a breakdown of the meetings and site visits undertaken by the Panel Members on a voluntary basis over the past year and credit must be given to them for freely giving up their time in order to work with the Council in securing a more accessible built environment that all the community can enjoy.

4.0 CURRENT WORK BY THE PANEL

4.1 In recent weeks, both Panels have been busy reviewing not only Planning and Building Warrant applications, but other types of projects such as;

- The consultation on the new signs to be erected within Kilmarnock Town Centre.
- The proposed access arrangements for the works surrounding the Barony A Frame in Auchinleck.

4.2 Both Panels have enthusiastically met with the Architects for the four PPP Projects and future meetings are scheduled. It should be noted that the design team are keen to work with the Panels and learn from the personal experience they have to offer.

4.3 Some of the Panel members also attended the recent stakeholder events held by the Council in line with the newly introduced Disability Equality Duty. Both Panels are keen to continue working with the Council within the terms of this new important legislation whereby many public bodies including the Council have a duty to involve disabled people when planning their services.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 It is recommended that the Committee note the tremendous work being carried out by both Access Panels.

Alan Neish
Head of Planning and Building Standards

07 December 2006 (DMcD/SF/SA)

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. For further information on this report contact David McDowall, Building Standards Manager on 01563 576749 or Susan Fulton, Disability Awareness Advisor on 01563 576788.