

# Managing Accessible Toilets

## Introduction

Under the Equality Act 2010, all organisations have a duty to provide accessible goods and services. The provision of accessible toilet facilities is a fundamental and crucial part of inclusive service delivery and their design and management warrant careful attention. Training staff is essential in order that they understand a range of different needs and the importance of communication and contingency arrangements when needed.

## What is an accessible toilet?

An accessible toilet is designed to meet the majority of needs of independent wheelchair users\* and people with mobility impairments, as well as the additional requirements of people with bowel and bladder conditions (such as colostomy bag users). It also helps people with other physical conditions such as impaired dexterity and grip, balance and other conditions where physical support from grab rails and the presence of an emergency alarm is helpful. Most accessible toilets in public buildings are designed for independent use with a corner layout design (see overleaf).

[\* Standard accessible toilets do not meet the needs of all people with a disability – see [Changing Places](#) link at the end of this document].

## Who needs an accessible toilet?

There are many reasons why an individual might have a specific need for an accessible toilet facility, including permanent disabilities, intermittent medical conditions and short-term impairments during recovery. There are estimated to be over 12 million disabled people in the UK (over 50% of disabilities are hidden). The UK has an ageing population with over 40% of the population over 45 years – the age at which the incidence of disability begins to increase significantly. Whilst people live longer, and are better off than previous generations, age brings an increasing chance of disability or impairment.

## What is the difference between accessible and ambulant accessible?

An **accessible toilet** is designed to accommodate different transfer preferences of wheelchair users and therefore requires more space than a standard or ambulant accessible toilet. In addition to a higher toilet pan and grab rails, it is fitted with shelves (for colostomy and general use) and a basin with lever or sensor taps. It has an emergency alarm facility for assistance. A right hand transfer is the more common need but where more than one accessible toilet is provided, alternating transfer hands should be offered. The key details, as set out in current standards, are given below and the illustration shows a left hand transfer arrangement.

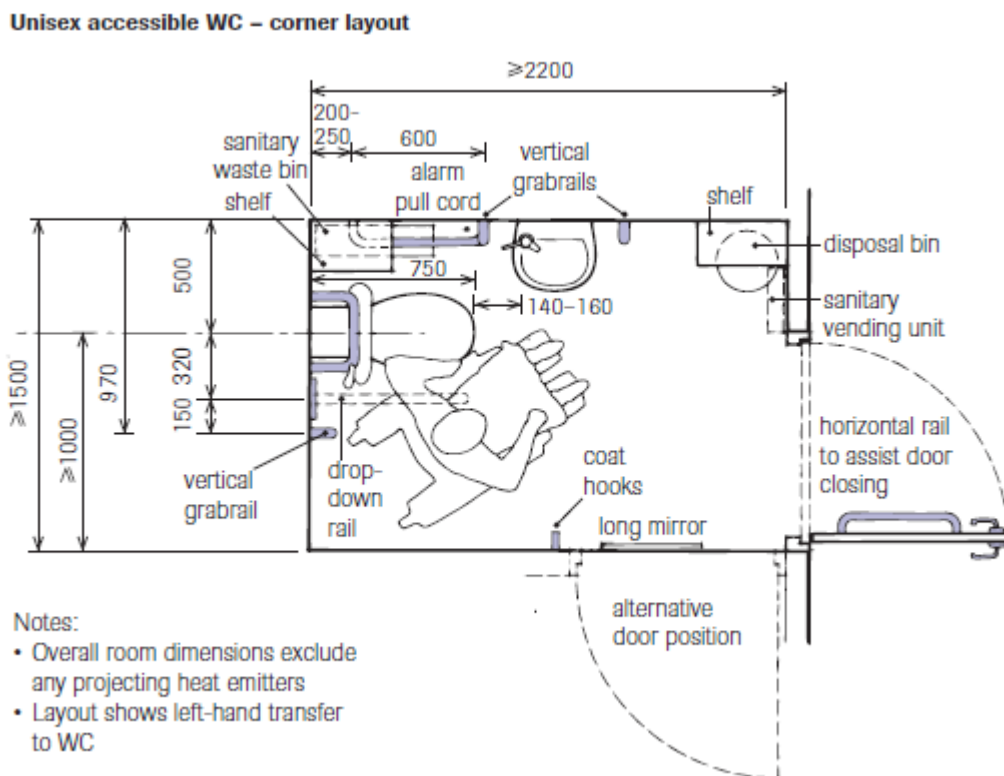
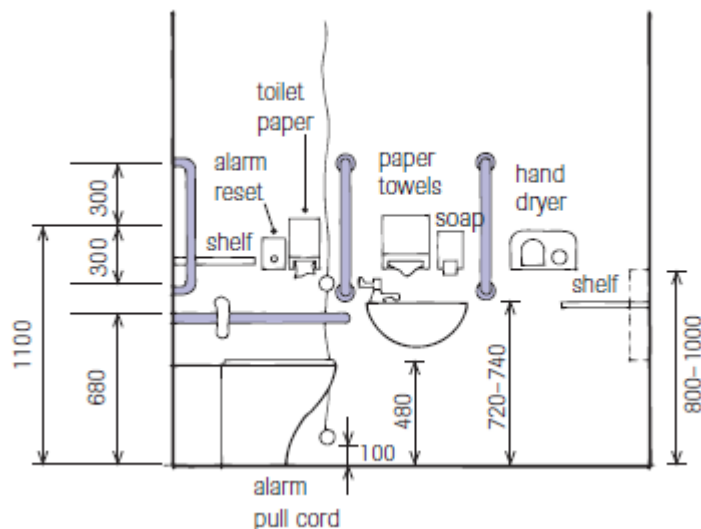


Illustration source: Designing for Accessibility 2012 by CAE



An **ambulant accessible toilet** is similar in size to a standard toilet facility or cubicle but it has a higher toilet pan, grab rails and usually an outward opening door. It will not accommodate a wheelchair and has no facilities for colostomy bag users. Key dimensions are shown below:

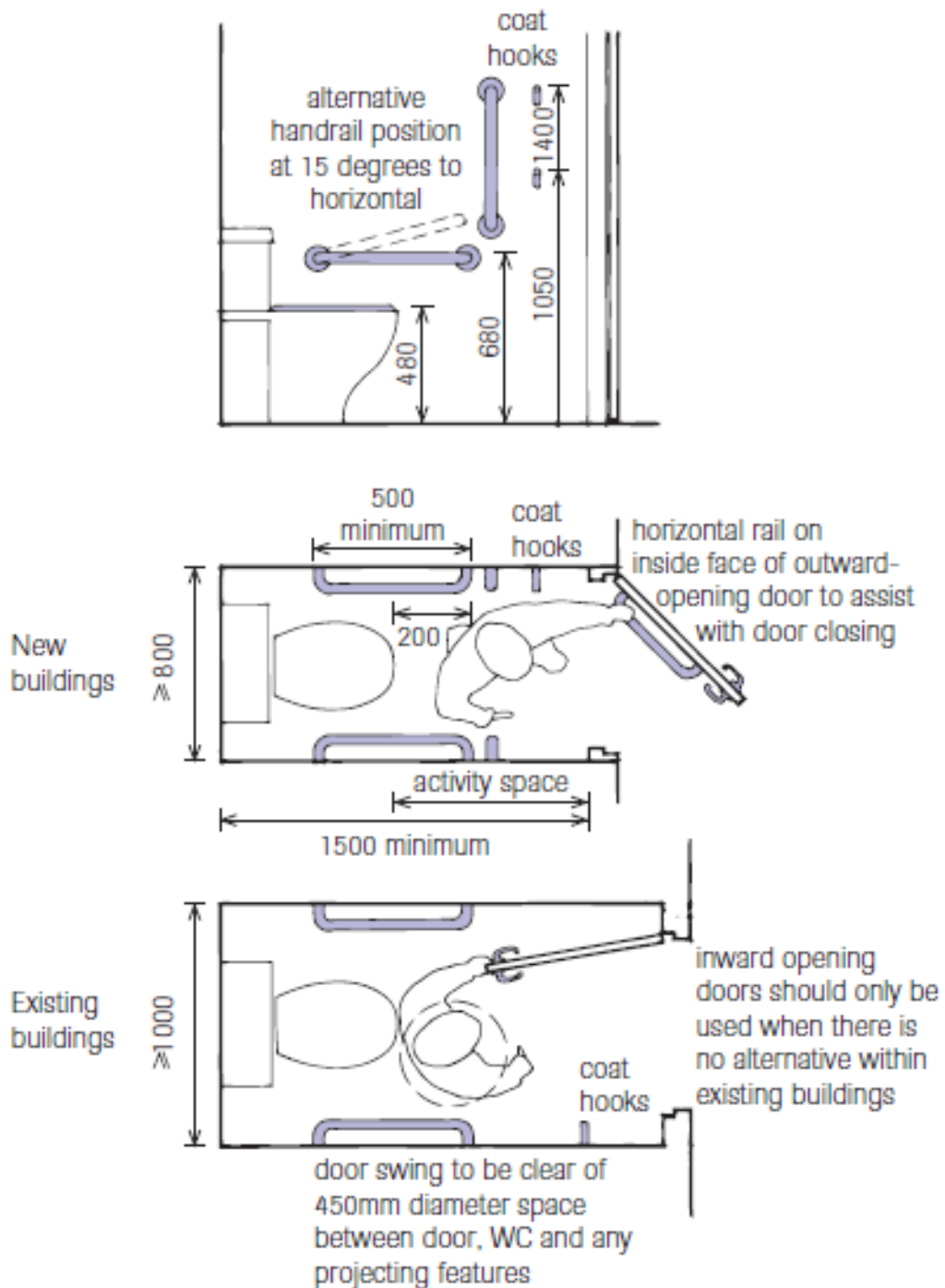


Illustration source: Designing for Accessibility 2012 by CAE

## Key Management Recommendations

The following recommendations should form part of an overall good housekeeping policy:

- Accessible toilets should **never** be used for miscellaneous storage.
- Lighting that is triggered by movement can be dangerous in an accessible toilet, as a disabled user may not have sufficient movement ability to trigger the lights if they go out.
- Cleaning and housekeeping staff should have induction training to ensure they understand the need to keep transfer zones, cistern tops and shelves in accessible WC's clear at all times and **never** to tie up alarm pull cords.
- Boxing in of pipes etc., and the addition of vanity units around basins can compromise important reach and spatial needs.
- Maintenance, refurbishment and decoration of toilet facilities should be scheduled in advance, at times to minimise inconvenience.
- If an accessible toilet is out of order, it is extremely important to notify building users as soon as practicable. They will need to know:
  - How long the facility is likely to be unavailable
  - How to find an alternative suitable facility (including transfer handing and physical distances).
  - Other helpful and relevant information e.g. any other support that can be provided – for some disabled people, this may mean rescheduling a visit or journey or detours to use facilities elsewhere.
- Disabled people often plan their journeys meticulously to ensure that their access needs can be met. Toilets are critical to travel both during the journey and at the destination and therefore every effort should be made to communicate up to date information.

Communication could include:

- Visitor apps for smartphones
- Website
- Electronic displays
- Audio announcements
- Face to face communications

## Additional sources of Information:

### Free Guidance to Download:

“Access for All: Opening Doors” (pp 33-37) free to download from CAE website

**Approved Document Part M 2015:** Access to and Use of Buildings Volume

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-and-use-of-buildings-approved-document-m>

**Equality Act 2010** (<http://equalities.gov.uk/>)

### Guidance to purchase:

BS8300: 2009 “**Design of Buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people**” – Code of Practice – from British Standards Institute *Note: revised edition due 2017*

“**Designing for Accessibility**” 2012 by CAE available via [www.cae.org.uk](http://www.cae.org.uk)

## Useful Links:

**The British Toilet Association**

<http://www.btaloos.co.uk/>

**The IBS Network**

[www.theibsnetwork.org](http://www.theibsnetwork.org)

**Crohns and Colitis UK**

<https://www.crohnsandcolitis.org.uk>

**Changing Places**

<http://www.changing-places.org>

*Standard accessible toilets do not meet the needs of all people with a disability. People with profound and multiple learning disabilities, as well people with other physical disabilities such as spinal injuries, muscular dystrophy and multiple sclerosis often need extra facilities to allow them to use the toilets safely and comfortably. Changing Places toilets are different to standard accessible toilets as they have extra features and more space to meet the needs of people who use them.*

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## The Centre for Accessible Environments

The Centre for Accessible Environments (CAE) has been a leading authority on inclusive design for over 40 years; we provide consultancy, training, research and publications on building design and management to meet all user needs, including disabled and older people. As recognised experts in the field, we help organisations go beyond meeting their duties under the Equality Act 2010. Please see our website for further details. [www.cae.org.uk](http://www.cae.org.uk)