

LOOK AROUND

ARCHITECTS GUIDE

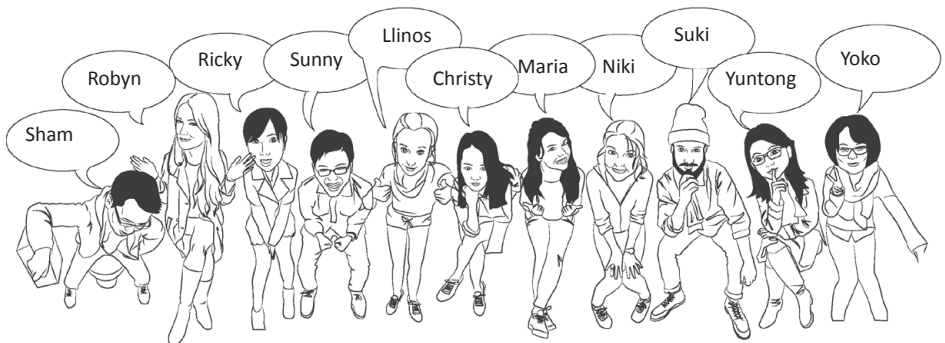


This document has been produced by Students from the Sheffield School of Architecture as part of their 2015 Live Projects module in conjunction with their client 'Around the Toilet'.

'Around the Toilet' is a cross-disciplinary, arts-based research project exploring the toilet as a place of exclusion and belonging. Researchers on the project are based across three Universities: Sheffield Hallam University, University of Sheffield and University of Leeds. This research project is funded by the AHRC Connected Communities programme.

Following five workshops hosted by 'Around the Toilet' their findings were handed over to the Live Projects team who spent the six week project designing various tools for disseminating this research. This document is one of the outputs produced in response to 'Around the Toilet's' research.

The Live Project team is made up a group of 5th and 6th year students from the University of Sheffield. The multi-disciplinary team is made up of students from Architecture, Urban Design, Town Planning and Collaborative Practice. The team's diverse knowledge and passion for these different areas of design enhances their creative responses to 'Around the Toilet's' research.



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1. USE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide is for Architects for use in the design of and for the provision of toilets.

This guide combines the key points relating to toilets and accessibility raised in Approved Document M of the Building Regulations, the 2008 report; The Provision of Public Toilets and the research findings of Around the Toilet. We have amended some points raised in these texts where we felt it was appropriate to do so, these changes are highlighted in *[red italics and within square brackets]*. A glossary of terms can be found in section 12 of our supporting document *The Toilet Revolution: An evaluation and guide to the design of accessible and equitable public toilets*. We appreciate that preferred terminology is always changing and different people have different opinions on what is best. The terminology used may therefore quickly become out of date, but this document uses the preferred terminology discussed in Around the Toilet's workshops in 2015.

This document has not been approved or issued by the Secretary of State but is intended to highlight key points raised in the above documents, raise awareness of “existing powers at the disposal of local authorities” (HoC, 2008: 3) and provide additional guidance on design considerations and the provision of toilet accommodation. The proposed additional guidance is based upon the research undertaken by Around the Toilet.



Figure 1. Who are public toilets for? (2015)

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2. INTRODUCTION

“Lavatory humour is rife in British culture, but the provision of public toilets is no laughing matter; public toilets matter to everybody, regardless of their age, class, ethnic origin, gender, mental ability or physical ability” (HoC, 2008: 3).

2.1 OBJECTIVES

“Suitable sanitary accommodation should be available to everybody, including sanitary accommodation designed for wheelchair users, *[disabled people without wheelchairs, people of all genders, people of all genders]* with babies and small children or people encumbered by luggage” (Part M, 2010: 48). We have chosen to alter the language here because there are more than two genders but this is neither acknowledged in policy or in the spatial layout of toilets. ‘Ambulant disabled’ (as originally used in the text) is medicated language which wasn’t used by disabled people in Around the Toilet workshops. Currently, toilet design isn’t meeting the needs of a diverse section.

The toilet is often thought to be a mundane space, but for those who lack adequate or accessible toilet provision on a daily basis, toilets become a crucial practical issue which can create and reaffirm feelings of exclusion and regulation.

The lack of public toilets contributes to “the isolation of vulnerable groups who feel unable to go out without the assurance of access to public toilets” (HoC, 2008: 3). Although we would contest the positioning of some people as ‘vulnerable’, the absence of suitable provision of toilets means that marginalised and oppressed groups are “prevented from travelling into town centres and spending money which would boost the local economy” (HoC, 2008: 6).

2.2 10 REASONS WHY TOILET ACCESS IS IMPORTANT [By Around the Toilet]

1. While toilets are often taken for granted, overlooked or regarded as mundane, for others access to adequate toilet space is a crucial practical issue on a daily basis.
2. Access for disabled people means more than wheelchair access and ramps (although these are important too). It is also about handrails, hoists, shelf-space and sensory access (such as the avoidance of strip lighting)....among other things. See <http://www.changing-places.org/> for info on **accessible design features**.
3. Public toilets should be about the provision of a **safe and convenient public amenity for everyone**. Toilets should not be a form of social control, surveillance or a policing of gender, disability (i.e. non-visible impairments), bodies and behaviour. Participants with invisible impairments talked about feeling 'watched' when they used the accessible/disabled toilet.
4. 'Ladies' and 'Gents' are not unproblematic terms for many individuals and groups, particularly trans people looking for a **gender neutral option**. Binary gender labels lead some trans people to feel unsafe in either toilet, and can also lead to other toilet occupants feeling entitled to monitor 'correct' usage. One participant suggested a different kind of toilet sign: 'Please use this toilet if you need to, and do not question if others need to.'
5. Some people (including disabled people, trans people, carers, older people) plan journeys around access to toilets. Others don't drink when they go out to avoid needing to find a toilet that is suitable for their needs. Greater access to toilets means **greater access to community and to the world!**

6. Cuts and privatisation have led to the closure of many public toilets. Toilet provision in public spaces, such as city centres, squares, stations, parks and beaches should be a basic necessity for a socially inclusive society.

7. Toilets often reflect the rights of dominant groups to occupy and label public space. Re-thinking toilet access can help us to **re-think definitions** of 'able'-bodiedness, gender and public space. Providing accessible toilets can validate, reinforce and celebrate public culture and our shared 'right to the city'.

8. Different users have different requirements in toilets, and these may be related to issues of disability, gender, faith and age. Toilets are therefore **multi-functional and complex spaces**...places for getting dressed, breastfeeding, administering medicine, caring, washing, privacy, and talking.

9. Toilets have a long and radical history in **design culture**. Twenty-first century toilets need to reflect current and cutting-edge thinking on space, accessibility and design.

10. EVERYONE has a good **toilet story** to tell...but toilet design is often unimaginative, clinical and functional (especially accessible toilets). Accessible spaces can be innovative, stylish and creative too.

3. EQUALITY ISSUES

Different users have different requirements in toilets, and these may be related to issues of disability, gender, faith and age. Toilets are therefore multi-functional and complex spaces. This section does not include equality issues relating to faith, while we acknowledge that these issues exist, they were not discussed at large in workshops held by Around the Toilet and are beyond the scope of this document.

3.1 AGE

Both the young and the old face issues in the provision of public toilets.

Older people rely on the provision and “availability of public toilets so they can go out without fear of accidents” (HoC, 2008: 15). Their independence is sometimes reliant upon confidence that they will have suitable toilet provision available should they require it, a lack of such facilities isolates the ageing population.

Young people and children are also not considered to the extent required in the design of public toilets. Children often use the facilities of the gender of their parent or guardian. In some cases a child will therefore use the toilet facilities designated for people of a different gender of their own. This is viewed as particularly problematic (for children, parents and others using the facilities) as the child gets older, but may not yet be old enough to use the toilet on their own. This signals the need for more gender neutral facilities and ‘family bathrooms’ with equipment such as shelves, hooks and a chair for toddler/small children when a parent is changing a baby.

3.2 DISABILITY

“It has been argued that some local authorities have used the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as an excuse to close public toilets, rather than bring them up to the standards required by the Act” (HoC, 2008:3).

Disabled people face many equality issues when it comes to public toilets. Accessible toilets do not cater for all impairments and consequently a large number of disabled people are unable to rely on public toilet provision. Of the disabled people who are able to use the facilities, some feel segregated as many accessible toilets are offered as ‘special, ‘seperate’ facilities, which position them as ‘Other’. Some disabled people feel that the accessible toilet should be gendered, however, others appreciate that gender neutral space. One advantage of the gender neutral space is that it allows disabled people to be accompanied by a personal assistant of a different gender should they require it. It is also often only the gender neutral space available to trans and other people not catered for by binary gendered toilets.

People who need to use the accessible toilet who do not have any visual impairments are sometimes made to feel uncomfortable as people sometimes comment that they should not be using the accessible toilet.

The inclusion of shelving and hooks in all toilet cubicles must not be overlooked. Shelving in toilets is important for people administering medication and people changing colostomy bags.

Principles in the design of accessible toilets can be found in section 6.4.

3.3 GENDER

Britain's public toilets were established at a time when women's roles in the public sphere were minimal, "men walked, cycled or caught a bus to work and women stayed at home to raise the family" (Greed, 2005: 14). This, alongside the smaller space that urinals take, has resulted in there being more provision for 'men' than 'women' despite the statistical evidence that women frequent toilets more often and for longer periods of time. This may be due to 'women' more often being carers and therefore taking more time, as well as the additional time taken in toilets for 'women' when they are menstruating. Part M currently recommends an increased toilet provision for 'women' but only on the basis of cubicles, urinals are not considered in the allowance recommendations.

Toilets can also present a stark visual and material enactment of a gender binary in ways that can be problematic for trans, genderqueer or non-binary people. Members of the public should be able to use the gendered toilet facilities with which they identify. **There is an urgent need for more gender neutral facilities to meet the needs of a diverse population of people with a variety of different genders.** Sanitary bins should be available in all toilets for all genders to acknowledge that people of all genders menstruate.

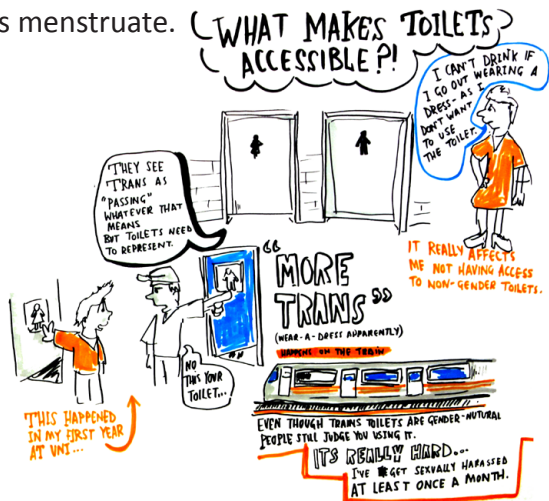


Figure 2. What makes toilets accessible? (2015)

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4. DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 DESIGN COMPLIANCE

Currently in the United Kingdom toilet design requires every toilet provided must adhere to a number of key legislative requirements including:

BS 6465 - parts 1-4

BS 8300

Building Regulations Part M & R

Disability Discrimination Act (now the Equality Order)

British & European Standards

As a code of practice, British Standards takes the form of guidance and recommendations. The guidance in these standards covers a range of impairments and the use of the built environment by wheelchair users who may be resident, visitors, spectators, customers, employees, or participants in sports events, performances and conferences. The guidance fails to recognise many issues relating to gender, age and disability. Section 4 in this document touches on these issues but ultimately each toilet is unique in its context and end users. Architects have the responsibility to consider all users in the design of toilets and it falls upon the architect to question the requirements and aspirations of the client.

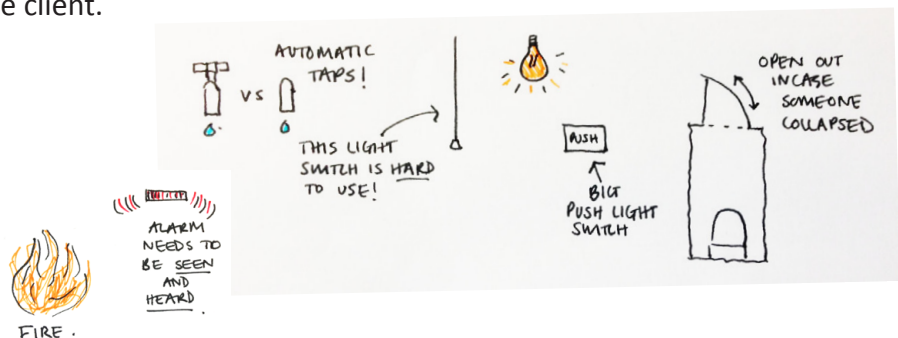


Figure 3. Things to consider in the design of toilets (2015)

4.2 SANITARY ACCOMODATION GENERALLY

Design Considerations

“A number of issues need to be considered in connection with all forms of sanitary accommodation. These relate to the needs of people with visual or hearing impairments, people with learning difficulties and people whose tactile sensitivity can cause them to be injured by touching hot surfaces.

- Taps and WC cubicle doors should be operable by people with limited strength or manual dexterity and doors to cubicles should be capable of being opened if a person has collapsed against them while inside the cubicle.
- Preferably all doors to WC cubicles and wheelchair accessible *[gender neutral]* toilets open out or, if they open in, the door swing should not encroach into the wheelchair turning space.
- Where possible, light switches with large push pads should be used in preference to pull cords” (RIBA, 2010: 48).

Ensuring that appropriate sanitary accommodation is provided is paramount in ensuring a diverse population feel they have toilets that are accessible to them and consequently in the successful design of toilets.

Provisions

Approved Document M lists accommodation requirements on pages 48-49, the following is a list of what we consider to be the most important to ensure people with a range of impairments feel they can use toilets independantly:

- “any bath or washbasin tap is either controlled automatically, or is capable of being operated using a closed fist.
- WC compartment doors, and doors to wheelchair-accessible *[gender neutral]* toilets, changing rooms or shower rooms are fitted with light action privacy bolts so that they can be operated by people with limited dexterity and, if required to self-close, can be opened using a force at the leading edge of not more than 30N from 0° to 30° open,

and not more than 22.5N from 30° to 60° of the opening cycle.

- WC compartment doors, and doors to wheelchair- accessible *[gender neutral]* toilets, changing rooms have an emergency release mechanism so that they are capable of being opened outwards, from the outside, in case of emergency.
- Any fire alarm emits a visual and audible signal to warn occupants with hearing or visual impairments.
- Any emergency assistance alarm system has;
 - visual and audible indicators to confirm that an emergency call has been received,
 - a reset control reachable from a wheelchair and the WC, or from the wheelchair and the shower/changing seat,
 - a signal that is distinguishable from visually and audibly from the fire alarm.
- The surface finish of sanitary fittings and grab bars contrast visually with background wall and floor finishes, and there is also visual contrast between wall and floor finishes” (RIBA, 2010: 48).

It is important to recognise that this list is by no means extensive and does not cater for all. Engagement with a diverse population and end-users is fundamental to ensure the provision of sanitary accommodation is appropriate.

4.3 PROVISION OF TOILET ACCOMODATION

Design considerations

“Toilet accommodation needs to be suitable, not only for disabled people, but for all people who use the building” (RIBA, 2010: 49). In multi-storey buildings, the consistent location of toilets on each floor can help people with learning difficulties *[and we would argue all people]* to locate these facilities easily.... For disabled people, suitable toilet accommodation may take the form of a specially designed cubicle in *[binary gendered]* toilet washrooms, or a self-contained *[gender neutral]* toilet” (RIBA, 2010: 49). In addition to any wheelchair-accessible accommodation in gendered toilet washrooms, gender neutral

wheelchair-accessible accommodation should be provided. Gendered and gender neutral toilets were discussed in section 4, these issues should be considered in the design and provision of toilet facilities.

Shelving and hooks in all toilet cubicles must not be overlooked. Shelving in toilets is important for people administering medication and people changing colostomy bags.

“The provision of an enlarged cubicle in a *[gendered]* toilet washroom can be of benefit to *[some disabled]* people, as well as parents with children and people who need an enlarged space” (RIBA, 2010: 49).

Part M of the Building Regulations recommends that facilities for baby changing should be independent to accessible toilet facilities (RIBA, 2010: 49). We would argue that this recommendation does not accommodate disabled parents who may need to change their children. An enlarged gender neutral accessible toilet incorporating an adult changing table and a hoist should be incorporated into the large building developments (see Changing Places section 6.5).

Provisions

Approved Document M (2010) lists accommodation requirements on page 49, the following is a list of what we considered to be the most important to ensure inclusive design and toilet provision for a diverse population:

- “Where there is space for only one toilet in a building, it should be a wheelchair accessible *[gender neutral]* type.
- At least one WC cubicle is provided in *[gendered]* toilet accommodation for use by *[some disabled]* people” (RIBA, 2010: 49).

It is important to recognise that this list is by no means extensive and does not cater for all. Engagement with the a diverse population and end-users is fundamental to ensure the provision of sanitary accommodation is appropriate.

4.4 WHEELCHAIR-ACCESSIBLE GENDER NEUTRAL TOILETS

Design considerations

“Wheelchair users should be able to approach, transfer to and use the sanitary toilets within a building. This requires the provision of a wheelchair-accessible [*gender neutral*] toilet. The relationship of the WC to the finger rinse basin and other accessories should allow a person to wash and dry hands while seated on the WC (RIBA, 2010: 49). More detailed information on the suggested layout and dimensions

All toilets, regardless of their typology should be payed the same attention, often accessible toilets are the most clinical and the same consideration should be payed to the aesthetics of these as to any other toilet.

It is important to consider that standard accessible toilets do not meet the needs of all disabled people. **This signals an urgent need for more Changing Places toilets** (section 6.5).

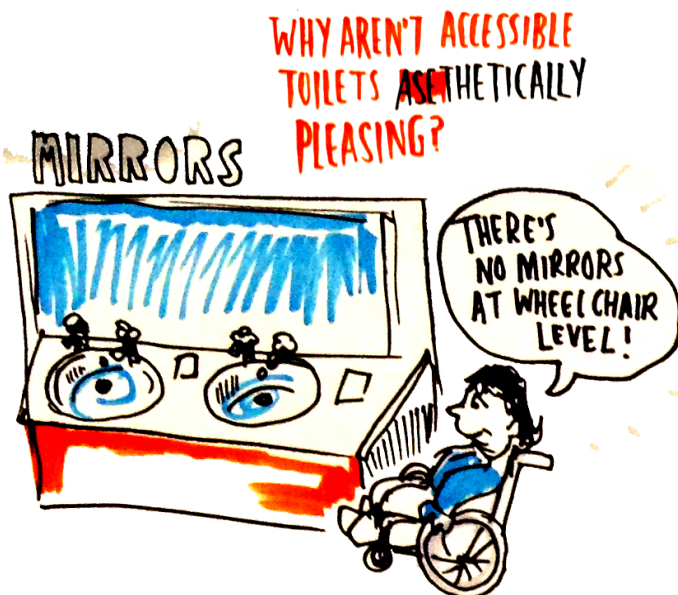


Figure 4. Why aren't accessible toilets aesthetically pleasing? (2015)

Figure 5. Mirror heights in accessible toilets (2015)

4.5 CHANGING PLACES TOILETS

Many disabled people with various different impairments find that the standard accessible bathroom does not meet their requirements. Extra facilities are required for 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.

Each Changing Places toilet provides:

The right equipment

- a height adjustable adult-sized changing bench
- a tracking hoist system, or mobile hoist if this is not possible.

Enough space

- adequate space in the changing area for the disabled person and up to two carers
- a centrally placed toilet with room either side
- a screen or curtain to allow some privacy.

A safe and clean environment

- wide tear off paper roll to cover the bench
- a large waste bin for disposable pads
- a non-slip floor.

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6. IMAGE REFERENCES

Figure 1. Smizz, S. (2015) *Who are public toilets for?* [Online]. Available from: <https://aroundthetoilet.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/toilet-smizz.png> [Accessed 20th October 2015].

Figure 2. Smizz, S. (2015) *What makes toilets accessible?* [Online] Available from: <https://aroundthetoilet.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/toilet-smizz.png> [Accessed 20th October 2015].

Figure 3. Punchline. (2015) *Gloucester Community Toilet Scheme* [Online] Available from: <http://www.punchline-gloucester.com/images/pageimages/toiletsignmain350.jpg> [Accessed 25th October 2015].

Figure 4. Dosbson, C. (2015) *Manchester Community Toilet Scheme* [Online] Available from: <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/toilets-gone-manchester-its-getting-9265784> [Accessed 25th October 2015].

Figure 5. Cubico. (2015) *Accessible toilet dimensions* [Online] Available from: <http://cubicowashrooms.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/wheelchair.jpg> [Accessed 25th October 2015].

7. A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Language and the terms we use are never perfect and always changing. Sometimes we may not discuss an important issue, because we are worried about our choice of language. This is a shame, because it may mean that topics which need to be addressed are being overlooked. On the other hand, the words we choose to use are important and political – they often reflect and feed into wider issues of power, structural inequalities and oppression.

Throughout this project the Around the Toilet team has tried to use the preferred terms of the group which are being referred to. The glossary of terms defines some of the words that you may come across when doing toilet activism.

A full glossary of the terms used in this document can be found in section 12 of our partnering document *The Toilet Revolution: An Evaluation and guide to the design of accessible and equitable public toilets*.

We appreciate, however, that preferred terminology is always changing and different people have different opinions on what is best. This may quickly become out of date, but this is where we are in 2015!

8. SHEFFIELD SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE TEAM

This document was made by students at the Sheffield School of Architecture based on findings from the 'Around the Toilet' project team.

Sixth Year

Masters of Architecture

Suki Sehmbi: sssehmbi1@sheffield.ac.uk

Maria Henshall: mhlhenshall@sheffield.ac.uk

Dual Masters of Architecture & Town Planning

Yuntong Mu: ymu3@sheffield.ac.uk

Fifth Year

Masters of Architecture

Niki Sole: nmsole1@sheffield.ac.uk

Sunny Yuen: myuen1@sheffield.ac.uk

Kah Kiat Sham: ksham1@sheffield.ac.uk

Masters of Architectural Design

Christy Huang: xhuang@sheffield.ac.uk

Ricky Liu: rliu@sheffield.ac.uk

Yoko Tajima: ytajima2@sheffield.ac.uk

Dual Masters of Architecture and Landscape

Robyn Kent: rkent1@sheffield.ac.uk

Collaborative Practice

Llinos Glynn: lglyn1@sheffield.ac.uk

Mentor

Jo Lintonbon: jlintonbon@sheffield.ac.uk

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