

London Borough of Hounslow

BOSTON MANOR ROAD

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Walk

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Walk



Appendix

Relevant policies and documents

- * 'Walking and Cycling: an Action Plan', DfT, 2004.
Describes use of the planning system for improved walking conditions.
www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_susttravel/documents/pdf/dft_susttravel_pdf_029200.pdf
- * DfT 'Walking Bibliography'
www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_roads/documents/pdf/dft_roads_pdf_504818.pdf
- * DETR 'Encouraging Walking', 2000.
Includes table of actions and the responsible authorities. Includes the quote:
'Land use planning is the most important long term solution to our transport needs – We need to change the way that we plan, with greater emphasis on enabling access by walking...'
- * 'Walking in Towns and Cities', Eleventh Report of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee, May 2001.
Recommended the preparation by all local authorities of a local walking strategy, including planning mechanisms as a key part of implementation.
<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200001/cmselect/cmenvtra/167/16702.htm>
- * 'Places Streets and Movement', companion guide to Design Bulletin 32, DETR, 1998.
- * 'Manual for Streets', DfT, 2007.
www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/manforstreets/
- * 'Going to Town: Improving town centre access - A companion guide to PPG6'. DTLR 2002
- * Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: Transport.
DETR March 2001
- * 'Making London a Walkable City: The Walking Plan for London', Mayor of London, Transport for London, 2004 ('daughter document' of the Mayor's Transport Strategy, 2001).
- * 'Putting London Back on its Feet', London Planning Advisory Unit, 1997. Original source of the '5Cs' criteria.
- * 'Towards a fine City for People: Public Spaces and Public Life – London 2004', Gehl Architects for TfL and Central London Partnership.
An analysis of people in public streets and spaces in London, providing techniques and insights, and recommendations.
www.gehlarchitects.dk
- * 'Streets for All: a guide to the management of London's streets', English Heritage, 2000.
- * Guidance leaflet for London Boroughs on 'Personal Security and Walking', TfL, LB Wandsworth and TRL. Undated
- * Guidance leaflet for London Boroughs on 'Information for Pedestrians', TfL, LB Wandsworth and TRL. Undated
- * 'The Benefits of Town Centre Pedestrian and Public Realm Schemes', Mayor of London, TfL Street Management, November 2002.
Reviews evidence of economic and environmental benefits
- * 'The economic benefits of good walking environment' TfL and Central London Partnership, 2003, by Llewelyn Davies.
Summary brochure: 'Quality Streets'. Evidence of economic and commercial benefits of good walking conditions, with 15 central London case studies.
- * 'The London Plan; spatial development strategy for Greater London', Mayor of London, February 2004
- * 'TfL Streetscape Guidance', TfL Streets, September 2005
- * Guidance for submission of Local Accessibility Schemes, TfL/London Councils/Access Company 2007
- * See it Right: Making information accessible to people with sight problems, (2006) RNIB, London.
- * The International Walking Charter
- * Another Sight: Multi-sensory Design in Context The Dog Rose Trust Press 2005
ISBN 0-9528367-3-4

Walk London Steering Group and Route Managers

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Thames Path Jos Joslin	jos.joslin@tiscali.co.uk	01869 340096
Green Chain Mark Budd	mark.budd@greenwich.gov.uk	020 8921 5876
Lea Valley Walk Janet Green	jgreen@leevalleypark.org.uk	01992 717711
Jubilee Walkway Jim Walker	jim.walker@theaccesscompany.com	07801 334915

Technical Guidance

This section gives specifications and main supplier contacts that Walk London has used to help with the successful delivery of the Strategic Walking Network:

House colours and fonts for signage

The Orbital routes (The London Loop and Capital Ring)

Signage manufacturers need to know the technical descriptions of the colours and these should be specified as follows:

Often referred to by Pantone reference number, these are being replaced by a common European RAL system:

- Blue to be used is known as Traffic Blue - Pantone 286 / RAL 5017
- Green to be used is called Yellow-Green - Pantone 368 / RAL 6018
- Signs generally have a yellow-green background. In certain places, such as Conservation Areas, black is used instead to comply with local heritage. Even then, it should still be possible for the logos to use the house colours.
- Any additional text (e.g. walk destinations) is normally white.
- A white border and walking man symbol are normally included.

Fonts

The logo uses Belwe Bold font

Font for signage uses a plain sans serif such as Arial Bold.

South-East Green Chain

The logo uses Light Brunswick Green to BS381C:225

Font: Gill Sans

Thames Path

Font: Gill Sans Bold in white, usually on a black or dark blue ground (signs vary according to borough, often to heritage requirements)

Jubilee Walkway

Font: Dutch 809

Lea Valley Walk London

Font: Helvetica

Posts

Urban: mild steel posts and signs are used in urban areas. The diameter ranges from 76mm around the spigot to 230mm at the base. Signs themselves are aluminium. All new metal signs should be provided with a coating that allows them to be cleaned of graffiti.

The Kingston post by Furnitubes is the main sign post used on the Capital Ring. It has an internal spigot. The signs are attached to the spigot by means of a collar, which can be cut in half if required to allow two to interlock and save space. A "polo" finial is placed on top to show the name of the location.

The post height depends on the number of fingers and number of text lines per finger, but in practice, from ground level to top of finial, would normally be between 3.0 metres (two interlocking fingers with four text lines) to 3.4 metres (six interlocking fingers each with four text lines). Signs should be a minimum of 2.4m above ground level for clearance.

Waymark posts: mark direction area boldly with waterproof felt tip on timber before fixing disc (if it gets removed the indication is still there. Be careful not to spread beyond disc area with the mark). Mark post reference number discretely near base about 150mm above ground level; this helps with future maintenance identification.

Waymark discs - materials

Discs may be either metal or plastic. Plastic discs are either rigid pvc or Fomex, 75mm or 80mm in diameter and 3mm thick. Metal discs are sheet aluminium, 80mm in diameter and 1.5mm thick. Discs should be routed into post and set flush on the surface. If fixing to oak posts use galvanised screws. Generally, it will be obvious whether urban or rural signs are to be used. However, some variations may be desirable in certain locations:

- timber waymark posts may look better in urban parks.
- metal posts may be advisable in some more rural locations where a wooden post may be subject to vandalism.
- plastic discs may be used on wooden bollards in some urban locations.

Waymarking - spacing

Ideally, a waymark or sign should be placed every 400 metres, the equivalent to five minutes' walking at a comfortable 3mph, for reassurance. This may not be necessary or desirable in certain locations so judgement is called for.

Jubilee Walkway discs

AATI produce a prototype disc for the Jubilee Walkway from a composite alloy to replicate the current discs being used on site. The discs have been machined to give an unfinished surface so as not to be a slip hazard. The casting contains three lugs, which take stud fixings to help secure the disc on site. (See figure A).

Step 1

For flags such as York Flag stone, approximately 65mm thick, 600mm square (This stone has been agreed upon because of its strength and is the traditional London paving flag) machine cut a 250mm diameter central hole in the slab. Cut a hole recessed to a depth of approximately 10mm (the thickness of the disc) centred on the first hole to a 300mm diameter (the diameter of the disc). This will create a lip for the disc to sit in and give a minimum of 150mm of stone at any point between the hole and the edge, which should be enough to avoid cracking. (See figure B).

Step 2

Sit the disc into the slab on a bed of cement (tapping gently with a wooden mallet if necessary) and insert three lengths of 6mm diameter threaded bar (stud) into the lugs at the back of the disc. Fit a purpose made T bar to the studs and orientate the disc to sit at the correct angle so that the cross of the crown points in the anticlockwise direction of travel assuming that the walkway begins at Leicester Square travelling South to Trafalgar Square in the first instance. Fix nuts to the stud and tighten the disc to the stone surround. Check the correct angle once more and clean the disc of any spilt cement. (See figure C).

Step 3

Back fill the York flag recess behind the disc and T bar with cement and place the York flag into a pre-cut hole on a bed of sharp sand in the route surface. Ensure the orientation of the disc is right once more and that the flag is set level. Finish by setting the flag with cement to join with the surrounding surface. It is felt that this method of fixing will be appropriate for discs which will need to be set in cobble, tarmac and pavement stone.

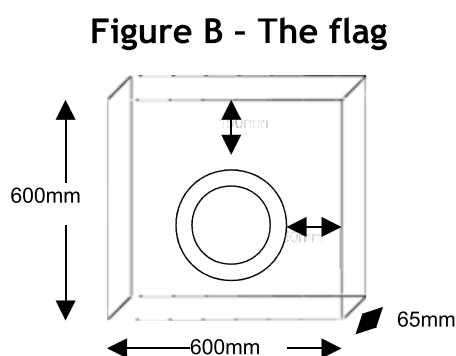
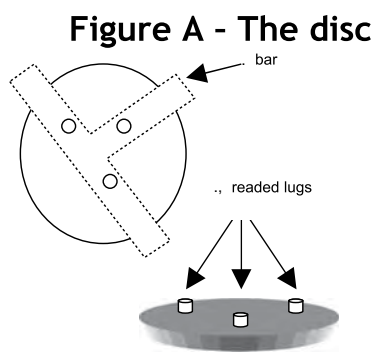
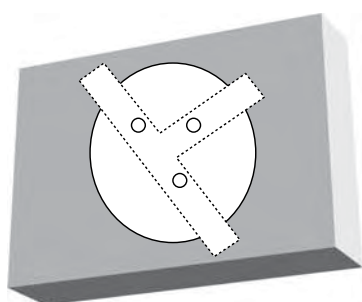
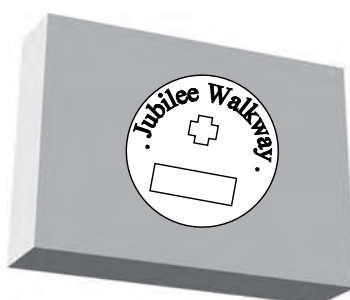


Figure C - Fixing



Back



Front

Suppliers

Subject to procurement rules prevailing in each borough, the following firms and contractors have experience of supplying or working on the London orbital routes.

Design, manufacture and installation of urban (sheet aluminium) fingers, waymarks, specials and text signs.

Morris Gordon (Engineering)
Unit 1, New Mill End Farm
Chiltern Green Road
Luton, Beds.
LU1 3TS

Phone: 01582 460002
Contact: Chris Cleevely
Email: chris@morrisgordon.co.uk

Design, manufacture and installation of rural (wooden) waymark posts, aluminium discs and main signs. Installation is carried out by associate company Holwood Grounds Maintenance.

TJ Systems
22 Highwood
61 Shortlands Road
Bromley, Kent
BR2 0JJ

Phone: 020 8464 2602
Contact: Tim Pickthall
Email: pickthall@talk21.com

Design and manufacture of cast metal urban main signs.

Furnitubes International Ltd.
Meridian House
Royal Hill
Greenwich
London
SE10 8RT

Phone: 020 8378 3200
Contact: David Gowing
Email: DavidGowing@furnitubes.com

Design and manufacture of plastic discs.

Metrosigns 2000 (Bedford) Ltd.
Manton Lane Industrial Estate
Manton Lane
Bedford
MK41 7PB

Phone: 01234 351207
Contact: Jonathan Ward
Email: Jonathan.Ward@metrosigns.co.uk

Design & manufacture of Jubilee Walkway discs.

AATI
11 Swinborne Drive
Springwood Industrial Estate
Braintree
Essex CM7 2YP

Phone: 013276 346 278
Contact: Mervyn George, Engineer and Sales Director
Email: enq@aati.co.uk
Fax 01376 348 480

Providing Inclusive Access to Information

These guidelines have been taken from those prepared by the Dog Rose Trust for Walk London with funding from Transport for London.

They are written in good faith to help with the design and installation of information which is as inclusive as possible to the needs of people, whatever their ability.

Section A: Getting Started

The motto “Nothing About Us Without Us” relies on this principle of participation, and it has been used by Disabled People’s Organisations throughout the years as part of the global movement to achieve the full participation and equalisation of opportunities for, by, and with persons with disabilities.

United Nations, International Day of Disabled Persons 2004

Principles

1. Consultation with the target audience is vital for any information project to be successful. They are the people who best know what is appropriate and what will work.
2. Local access groups should be consulted at the earliest opportunity during project planning.
3. Getting information out to people with disabilities is not easy and takes time. Commitment to a project needs to be long term and maintained over a reasonably lengthy period.
4. Each project should have an accessible Publicity and Outreach Plan.

Suggested outlets:

Soundings, the excellent audio magazine for blind and visually impaired listeners (www.soundings.org); Disability Now; local radio, internet radio; audio information such as Talking Newspapers; and probably most valuably, word of mouth.

5. Information containing tactile and audio material, can be sent out post-free with special labels obtainable from the RNIB.
6. Large print, Braille, tactile and audio information (CDs or cassettes) can be produced for outreach purposes.
7. Pre-visit packs are much appreciated by people who are blind and visually impaired, advising people how to get to a site, what is there for them to touch, smell and listen to and how they find these items. A4 tactile maps of a site together with tactile images of key objects, sights or buildings should be included.

Section B:

Tools For Ensuring Information Is Inclusive

All information for the target audience should be in an appropriate format; this might be large print, Braille, electronic form or audio in a range of formats, and sent out in advance. Resource Centres can assist with the production of clear print, Braille raised images and audio for outreach.

TOOL 1: Clear Print and Plain English

The ability of people who are visually impaired or partially sighted to see and to interpret type is extremely variable. Some can only read large type at very close range and often with only part of the normal field of vision. For this reason the position of printed material is important.

Typeface

1. Some typefaces are easier to read than others. Some are particularly difficult, such as script, display and italicised fonts, and these should be avoided.
2. Sans serif is preferable for clarity.
3. Arial and Helvetica are usually recommended by the RNIB. (They also recommend some suitable serif typefaces, such as Garamond, Times and Palatino).
4. A recent study showed Comic Sans is preferred by people with learning disabilities.
5. The RNIB recommend a minimum point size of 16 for large print.
6. Information panels obviously need to be much larger, with the heading bigger than the main body of text.
7. Justified text is harder to read; left alignment is preferable.
8. Avoid underlined text as well as all uppercase lettering.
9. A mix of upper and lower case helps with the identification of words.

Contrast

1. The contrast between the lettering and the background should be at least 70%.
2. Black print on yellow has been recommended for a long time, but the contrast is thought to be more important.
3. Some combinations should obviously be avoided, such as white lettering on grey which is difficult for anyone to read.
4. Ghosted images and textures behind the text should be avoided.

Further information:

See it Right: Making information accessible to people with sight problems, RNIB London 2006.

The RNIB have brief clear print guidelines on their website: www.rnib.org.uk; under Accessible Information.

Plain English

Avoid jargon, acronyms, and long sentences. The Plain English Campaign has guides, see www.plainenglish.co.uk.

TOOL 2: Tactile Information

“Question everything, assume nothing and good design will follow!”

Matthew Lloyd, Designer and principal of Think Graphic

1. All tactile information, images and Braille, whatever the manufacturing process used, should ensure the raised material is 5mm.
2. Attempts to produce tactile versions of original map or images are rarely satisfactory. Images need to be carefully designed with clear outlines.
3. The design should be tested before production with blind users to ensure that it can be read by touch. This can be done using ‘swell’* paper .
4. A blind person reads an information panel with one hand kept on a ‘locating point’ while the other explores. The information should be able to be comfortably covered with both hands.
5. Textures can be used to differentiate areas, but need a key. The key should be placed preferably on the left.

*Swell paper has micro-capsules of alcohol embedded in the paper which burst when it is passed through the heat of a Tactile Image Enhancer; this makes the surface of the paper swell up. Putting black ink, either by photocopying or drawing, on the paper before a heat process enables control over the raised areas.

CASE STUDY THE COVENTRY MAP

A raised silk-screen printed map was produced for Coventry with the key added below the map to make it easier to reach as the panel had to be fitted on to an already-existing upright stand.

Swell paper copies of a map were tested by Coventry’s Access Group during discussions on the developments of the site and audio descriptions of it made available.



The reaction of visitors has been very positive and it makes the site easier to navigate for all users.
Gary Pittaway, CVOne

CASE STUDY BURY ST EDMUNDS

Example of a metal-etched raised plan of Abbey Gardens, Bury St Edmunds, made by Photocast Products (photo © Matthew Lloyd)



On this plan the key is below to fit with the space of the site. Different colours and textures define the areas.

TACTILE INFORMATION 1 - Raised Images

1. Fingers are poor interpreters. They can tell texture and temperature but, unlike the eyes, they are not good at defining what they are feeling if it is something familiar.
2. Raised images are hard to interpret and therefore some clues are needed, such as captions or audio description, preferably in Braille.
3. Audio description is even better, but not always practical for outdoor sites. Alternatives are to make a CD or to put the audio description on the internet for downloading to MP3; the user can then listen to it in their own time.
4. Clear maps and drawings can be put onto the internet for downloading as large print or raising on swell paper.
5. Images can be raised using a wide range of materials and methods of production. Different tactile manufacturing processes produce different results.
6. The main message is to keep the image simple and clear and provide additional explanation for it.

TACTILE INFORMATION – Braille (and Moon)

Braille holds a special place of honour in the lives of those who use it, not only as a tool for true literacy, but also as a tool for personal dignity, privacy and independence.

Judith Dixon, National Library Service for the Blind, Washington DC

Although there are only around 20,000 experienced Braille users in the UK, Braille is indispensable as most have no other access to a reading language.

1. Braille takes up around two and half times the space of print. There are two forms:

- Grade 1 is letter for letter;
- Grade 2 which is a shortened version.

2. Many people who have lost their sight later in life find Braille hard to learn. They can usually manage captions or a few words in Grade 1, but find Grade 2 complex.

3. The majority of Grade 2 users can read Grade 1, although they think it is slow and awkward.

4. Grade 1 Braille used for the text on an information panel should be kept short with an absolute maximum of 100 words.

5. This could be considered as being too long, but if Grade 1 is used for the captions, which more people might be able to read, then Grade 1 should also be used for the text. Do not mix the two grades.

6. Braille is read with the upper half of the padded part of the forefinger, and the other fingers are used to track the line across the page. The size of the Braille dot always remains the same, even if the printed text is much larger.

7. It is important that the correct dot size is used in the art work that produces the manufactured Braille as this will relate to the way in which the Braille is made. For example, the artwork dot needs to be smaller for etched Braille than for a process which produces a traditional dome.

8. Braille should be aligned to the left of the panel and with a half-circle marking the start.

9. Confine the Braille text within a border so the reader does not have to search for the message.

10. An height approximating to that of the nose or forehead i.e. five feet to five feet eight inches, is recommended by the RNIB for signs and notices.

Barry Ginley, Access Officer at The Victoria & Albert Museum, suggests, 'The specified height from the floor level of the panel should be no less than 700mm and no higher than 760mm. This allows children and wheelchair users who are Braille readers to have access to the information'.

11. A printed text cannot be transcribed straight into Braille; the layout and punctuation need careful consideration.

Moon

An alternative embossed writing is Moon, invented by Dr. William Moon in 1845.

The Moon Alphabet is simpler to read than Braille and relates in some cases to the forms of traditional letters.

Although not so widely used, it is helpful for people with learning disabilities and those who have lost their sight in old age.

Comparative examples of lettering, Braille and Moon. The lettering is 30 pt.

Title:	Church Street
Braille:	
Moon:	

Further information:

See it Right, RNIB, 2006.

The RNIB can provide advice on the production of Braille
<http://www.rnib.org.uk>.

For more information on Moon
<http://www.deafblind.com/moon.html>

TACTILE INFORMATION 2 - Tactile Models

Tactile models are an essential component of any interpretation system. They must be accompanied with information in an accessible format, written specifically to guide the fingers with an explanation of what is being felt.

Eric Sayce, Blind Consultant

1. Three-dimensional models are popular with everyone and so can be considered as one of the best examples of universal design.

2. For people with little or no sight, a tactile model is a valuable way to convey the overall shape and size of large objects, buildings or landscapes.

3. Models can be made of a range of materials, such as wood, resin and aluminium, according to situation and use, but for outdoor models bronze is the only material that can withstand all weathers and most vandalism.

4. Accuracy is important. For instance, if the building has flying buttresses they need to be shown, as they are very difficult features to describe and imagine.

5. The components often have to be pulled slightly further apart than they actually are so that the fingers can explore them and read them as separate items.

6. Surfaces should be smooth to fingers moving over them. (Clear varnish on wood gives a smooth finish as well as with keeping the model clean, but does not obscure the detail).

7. The amount of detail to include is a decision that has to be made. Too much and the model becomes fussy and hard to read; too little and it does not do justice to the building.

8. The overall size of the model is important, especially when the subject is a townscape or landscape. The size is usually determined by the reach of someone in a wheelchair. One hand should be able to remain on a reference point while the other explores the model.

9. Stands need to be as carefully considered for reach and ease of access, as well as being appropriate to their situation and function. It is often helpful to provide a movable stool or bench so that the user can sit down to explore a model or complex plan.

CASE STUDY Bronze model of Downpatrick Museum



This model shows the layout of the buildings of the Old Gaol at Downpatrick which is now a museum. A key to the buildings is around the outside in both Braille and lettering.
(photo © Downpatrick Museum)



The Consultation for the tactile model at Downpatrick, Northern Ireland

CASE STUDY Model of Glasgow Cathedral Precinct

This model was mounted on a plinth which houses the audio system and an infra-red transmitter is on the mast at the end. Sound is picked up on a cordless headset and this enables the listener to walk around the very detailed model without getting tangled up in a cable.



CASE STUDY

The Bronze tactile model of York



York Blind and Partially Sighted Society were consulted by telephone as part of planning the model to learn what routes they usually took into the City. In response these routes were made wider so that fingers could go along them and read the Braille.

York Model consultation

An audio guide was made to accompany the York model. The script combined exploration of the actual model together with what could be seen, heard and felt in the places being described. This was distributed, with a tactile map, by the Blind and Partially Sighted Society and York Minster Visitor Services.

Useful contacts:

Wooden models can be made by Omega Models:
www.omegamodels.co.uk.

Bronze casts by Powderhall Bronze:
www.powderhallbronze.co.uk

TACTILE INFORMATION 3 Tactile Panels

All way markers should be tactile and painted in bright colours and sited to give easy access to blind and visually impaired walkers. Advice from a blind consultant

Information panels, particularly if they include maps, should be part of an overall signage and way-finding system.

1. Be clear about the message; information panels are not always the most appropriate solution.
2. Choose the site carefully; placed back from a main thoroughfare to avoid noise and people passing by but not so tucked away that no one can find it or read the information.
3. Ideally any panel should include information for both blind and sighted users.

1. Etched metal panels by Photocast www.photocast.co.uk

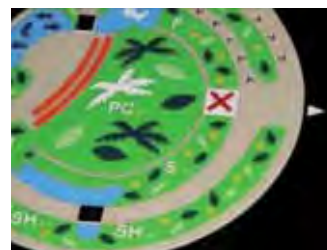
These panels include lettering, Braille and colours. They are produced on heavy-duty metal which makes them weatherproof and are as vandal-proof as anything can be.



Map of Ludlow by Photocast Products

2. Rigid, exterior grade plaster By RNIB Peterborough Tel 01733 375113

Colourful Maps for All



Detail of Sunderland Winter Gardens
Maps for All (photo © RNIB)

3. Raised Silk Screen Print by Matthew Lloyd www.thinkgraphic.co.uk

This technique is able to combine photographs, printed text, tactile information and Braille.



Raised silk screen printed panel for Ham Wall, Somerset

Locating and framing tactile information

Tactile information panels are useful to me if there is time to absorb them and if accompanied by a good verbal audio description.

Reply from a survey of blind users

Any information panel or interpretive sign needs to be placed where it can be read comfortably by users who are blind or visually impaired. Reading with the fingers takes time so the site of a panel with tactile information is as important as the design of the stand itself.

1. The site should be relevant to the information contained on the panel and any maps should be correctly orientated.
2. The ground surrounding the stand should be firm enough for all users to get close to it. The area should be free of litter, puddles and mud.
3. The design of the stand can be simple or elaborate; it can be made of wood or metal, according to the requirements of the site. A rail at the front helps people who need to look closely, to balance.
4. The stands themselves can incorporate Braille or text along the metal edges or images carved or routed into the wood. (Braille in wood is not really feasible for outdoor sites as it shrinks and expands with the weather).

5. Colours can be damaged by ultra-violet light and fade: a position in strong sunlight should be avoided. Make sure the stand is positioned so that the panel has good natural or artificial light, but that there is no glare, either on the panel or in the eyes of the user.

6. The height and form is important, but there are many differing requirements for each situation. The extent of a tactile information panel vertically should be between 750mm and 1200mm with the images being kept within reach.

8. The information panel itself should be either sloping or horizontal; a vertical tactile panel is very hard to read. Wheelchair users should be taken into account, so assume a forward reach of 400mm.

9. There should be some means of indicating the location by studs or raised paving. The use of sensors and sound will help overcome the problems of finding the panels in the future but while they are still being developed, good publicity and outreach will help locate the panel.

Useful contacts:

Arien Signs in Somerset have a wide range of stands in metal and wood, sloping and upright: www.ariensigns.co.uk.



Tactile panels in a wooden stand at Shapwick Heath, Somerset



Tactile panel of Old St Chad's Church incorporating a Uturn Audio Unit in Shrewsbury

TOOL 3. Audio Information

Information in audio form is useful to many people, especially those who are blind and visually impaired. Tactile images are not easy to interpret even for an experienced blind person, so some additional explanation, such as sound, is usually required.

1. CD-Rom and email attachments are increasingly the most common way to send information, together with information on websites and MP3 downloads; text messages are popular with younger people.
2. All electronic and digital forms of communication should be used with caution; a recent survey on theatre-going in Arts Professional showed a higher return of the printed forms of a questionnaire.
3. Careful positioning of the sound unit is essential. If there is a button to press, the height from the ground must be taken into consideration so that all users can reach it comfortably, in particular wheelchair users and children.
4. Ensure that the ground around the sound unit is free from trip hazards and clutter and is firm and dry.
5. The quality of the audio for the recorded message should be as high as possible and the message, clear and straightforward.
6. Whatever is said make sure that it is fit for the purpose intended.
7. Braille, large print and tactile illustrations for use of the unit, should be added if necessary; panels with this information can be made up in a durable material such as metal-etched zinc.

Outdoor sound units

All the sound units listed below have 'public sound', which means that the message can be heard by everyone.

Utturn Hand Powered Audio Unit from BlackBox AV
www.blackboxav.co.uk
Cost from £500



An audio file from an MP3 file is added to the digital memory card for a message of upto 4 minutes. Powered by the turn of the handle the message is replayed for upto 1½ minutes each way the handle is turned. BlackBox also make a range of Listening Posts for indoor use.

"Children especially like the sound box."
RSPB Somerset

Chatterbox from Spotlight Display
www.spotlightdisplay.com
Cost from £117



(photo © Spotlight Display)

A message of up to 3 minutes can be recorded and is activated by either a press button or a Passive Infra-Red option. The unit is battery powered. Spotlight Display also do a range of indoor Chatterboxes.

Talking Boxes from Advanced Thinking Systems
www.ats-heritage.co.uk
Cost from £750



(photo © ATS)

The length of message and amount of buttons on these units is variable. They can be powered by battery, mains or solar power. There is also a range of options for triggering the messages.

Press and Listen Boxes from Horizon Marketing
www.horizon-signs.co.uk
Cost from £425



(photo © Horizon Marketing)

A Press and Listen device which provides a 60 second battery powered 'audio pod'. A tactile plan or picture can be added to the frame and the audio described with Braille.

Audio Wayfinding

'Wayfinding' was first used in 1960 by Kevin Lynch, the leading environmental design theorist, and can be defined as, 'the ability of a person to find his or her way to a given destination'. Although wayfinding depends to a great extent on the design of the built environment, signs of all kinds are important to the wayfinding process and in particular to people who are blind and partially sighted.

Wayfinding clues or icons can be built into an environment. They might be studded paving by road crossings or they could be water features and distinctive planting.

Some of the audio systems used for panels can also be used for wayfinding, but others are specifically designed for helping people to find their way or receive advice in the built environment.

Types of Audio Wayfinder

Speaking Sign by RNIB
Cost from £10



(photo © RNIB)

The Speaking Sign works on passive-infra red which is tripped by body movement. It can be used in entrances to announce the name of the building, tell people if there are steps or automatic doors and give other useful information.

React by RNIB Tel 01733 375345
or busdev@rnib.org.uk.
Price on application



This audio information system is the most widely used in the UK at present and is in operation in York, Leeds and Birmingham. Transmitter units are mounted on existing street furniture and the message is activated by a trigger fob when the user comes within range. The fobs can be borrowed from organisations in the area or bought and will be suitable for all locations where react is installed. The message, which can be of varying lengths in any language, is relayed to the user in the street via public sound, (that is sound that can be heard by everyone).

Talking Sign by Stock Displays
www.talkingsign.co.uk.
Cost from around £699 each.



(photo © Stock Displays)

This solar powered panel with a back-up battery provides a 15 second message and is used mainly for warnings and brief advice. The message is triggered by passive infra-red which senses passers-by.

Further information:

The Joint Mobility Unit Access Partnership has produced Fact Sheets on access to the built environment:

www.jmuaccess.org.uk

Technology is moving on fast and systems, based on satellite navigation are being developed as well as the ability to receive information through mobile phones. However, there is still considerable development work to be done on the mobile phones themselves to make them suitable for people who are blind and visually impaired. For further information: www.tiresias.org/reports/dev_wayfinding.htm

MP3 downloads from the internet is becoming increasingly popular and there are several sites that have walks around cities and the countryside that could be useful for people who are blind and visually impaired. One such site is www.audioguide2go.com.

The content of these walks could give more specific directions which would be helpful to people with sight problems. It is important to note that the script for an audio walk or exploration of an environment for people who are blind and visually impaired has to be specially written; reading out a printed guide or leaflet won't do.

One of the most important pieces of information, which should come at the beginning, is a telephone number of where to get further information. There are some walks for people who are blind and visually impaired on the Dog Rose Sound internet radio site – www.dogrosesound.org.uk.

Evaluation, Maintenance and Commitment

As consultation is important at the beginning of a project, so evaluation is important at the end. Consultation and evaluation give everyone the opportunity to discuss what is possible or not possible within the restrictions of the site and the budget. It leads to a better understanding and therefore a better result.

CASE STUDY Coalport China Museum, Ironbridge



A blind consultant exploring the tactile cups

A display of tactile cups with an interactive commentary was installed together with some tactile images of key pieces of china and some oral history.

As some of this work was innovative it was important to find out what blind and visually impaired people thought about it.

The commentary could not be listened to as the main electrical switch for the display inadvertently had been switched off and no one realised. This emphasises the need for all staff to know how things work and what to do when they do not work.

1. Visual awareness training for all staff is essential if blind and visually impaired visitors are to get the most out of a visit. The staff should know where Braille information is kept, how to work the audio machines and be able to explain them to users, and how to guide blind and visually impaired people around their venue.

2. The batteries for the infra-red headsets need re-charging after several hours use, but this simple job is not always carried out and then the sound cannot be heard. Always have a copy of the audio text available for this situation and for deaf and hard of hearing visitors.

3. Make sure that changes are not likely to take place soon after an audio commentary or guide is produced. If changes are made, publicise them and tell all staff about them so that they can inform visitors.

4. If audio systems are attached to street furniture, make sure that the post or other item is not removed; information on the system will have been put out based on a sequence of transmitters. Update the audio messages as necessary; out of date messages are misleading and could be dangerous.

5. Regularly clean outdoor signs and panels with mild detergent; rain is dirty and bird droppings even dirtier. As blind and visually impaired are exploring these with their fingers, cleanliness is important. Check tactile models for any damage that might hurt the fingers. An outdoor bronze model will require the removal of cigarette ends and an occasional wash.

Above all, be committed to your project and tell everyone about it!