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OBJECTIVE

To determine a Community Access Policy in conjunction with the Social Planning and Community Development Policy (C65.1).

POLICY

- Social and Community Plan be adopted.
- Social and Community Plan be reviewed every two (2) years.

Definition

Access can mean different things to various disability groups, for example:

- to people with a physical disability, access can mean being able to enter a building in a wheelchair and being able to use all parts of it, including the toilet, hand-rails, well-graded ramps, non-slippery surfaces;
- to people with a visual disability, access can mean good lighting, clear signing as well as auditory and tactile aids;
- to people with a hearing disability, access can mean assisted listening systems, TV captioning and good visual aids;
- to people with intellectual disability, access can mean clear, unambiguous signing in building and streets, and considerate assistance;
- to people with a psychiatric disability, access can mean social acceptance and understanding.

Access also involves opportunities to participate in decisionmaking, management of services, training, employment, cultural, social recreational and political activities and to obtain needed information in an appropriate format.

Who Needs Access?

The number of people requiring better access to facilities is increasing each year due largely to improvements in survival rates following accident trauma and growth in the elderly population. A 1988 survey of disabled and aged persons revealed that 2,543,000 people (15.6% of Australia's population) have a disability (Source Australian Bureau of Statistics). Based on these figures, it could be estimated that there are approximately 7,000 disabled or frail aged people residing in the Cessnock Local Government Area. There are currently more than 300 "disabled" parking authority permits on vehicles in this area. Add to this list those people who have temporary impairments, such as damaged limb, and parents pushing prams/strollers.

It has been reported that whilst the severity of disability varies widely, mobility is the activity for which a need for help is most frequently reported.

What is Good Access?

It is crucial in planning good access for people with restricted mobility to consider the formation of one Continuous Access Route. This provides overall freedom of movement and choice within that environment. For example the most ideally located "disabled" parking space is of no use if there is no access from gutter to footpath, or if the entrance to the building is inaccessible.

The following areas can be important:

Physical access

- Parking
- Kerbs
- Pathways
- Ramps
- Steps
- Passageways
- Toilets
- Utilities, telephones, drinking fountains

- Signs
- Lifts
- Furniture/fittings

Sensory access

- Lighting (eg well lit corridors)
- Contrasting textural cues (eg tactile tiles on floors)
- Audio inductive loop system
- Signs
- Appropriate colours (eg avoiding busy patterns in walls)
- Appropriate typefacing (clear and bold)

Typical Faults with Access Design

There are many examples where developers have the right intentions to provide adequate access but make basic errors. Known examples include:

- standard size car park spaces designated for disabled people, other vehicles park alongside preventing any return to the vehicles by wheelchair;
- good access around a building except for a high kerb from the carpark;
- ramp too steep;
- inability of people with poor vision or small stature to read signs high up on a wall;
- a toilet block on top of a grass hill with a toilet accessible by a wheelchair user but no hard surface/path;
- lack of audio-inductive loops for hearing impaired in theatres and other entertainments.

Philosophy

Council will adopt and implement strategies which aim to ensure that the Cessnock Local Government Area becomes an accessible community to all people, regardless of their abilities/disabilities.

Council interprets an “accessible community” as one in which the transportation systems, physical environment, communication systems, technological systems, political, cultural, bureaucratic, corporate, social institutions and employment practices are open and available to people with disabilities, providing them with the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities enjoyed by all other people in the community.

Principles

- No person who lives or works in, or visits the Council area, shall be denied access to any Council facility or service on the grounds of personal disability or disadvantage.
- All new facilities operated by the Council shall be designed to be fully accessible to persons with all types of disability.
- Existing facilities operated by the Council shall, where possible, be progressively modified to optimise their accessibility.

- Programs and services provided by the Council should have operating guidelines which optimise their availability to persons experiencing disability or disadvantage, and those guidelines shall be publicised.
- Council staff should be given the opportunity to undertake in-service training related to disability.
- No suitable applicant for employment with the Council shall be rejected on the basis of disability.
- Council shall adopt principles which facilitate the employment of people with disabilities, and this Policy will be noted in employment advertisements.
- Council shall, where possible, make available its resources to bodies in the area, to assist in community education and the integration of persons with disabilities into all aspects of life in the community.
- Council shall encourage developers to optimise the accessibility of their projects and incentive schemes to encourage this shall be investigated.
- Council shall encourage all non Council bodies to maximise the accessibility of their facilities programs and services.
- Council shall actively enforce the relevant building regulations and Council requirements for the provision of access to new and existing buildings.