

ACCESSIBLE THRESHOLDS

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Timber Thresholds
3. Transitional Units
4. Door Size
5. Additional Note

INTRODUCTION

Part M of the Building Regulations has been extended to relate to new dwellings. The new provisions are intended to make access easier for disabled **Visitors**. The Approved Document covers a number of different provisions, including the need to provide accessible thresholds to the **principal entrance** to the dwelling.

Further guidance is available in a DETR document entitled ‘Accessible thresholds in new housing – Guidance for house builders and designers’. The purpose of this note is to clarify those aspects which may have to be considered by manufacturers of timber door frames and door assemblies.

TIMBER THRESHOLDS

Nothing in the Approved Document or guidance document specifically prohibits the use of the current timber threshold.

- The current use of a rounded or eased leading edge and a weathered slope to the sill are still acceptable. The angle of slope should not exceed 15°.
- The standard weatherbar is not specifically excluded, but is unlikely to be acceptable because it is not able to adequately fulfil two other criteria.
 - a) Although within the 15 mm maximum vertical rise criteria it is unlikely to have a sufficient rounding to ease the ride of a wheelchair.
 - b) It is expected that the bottom of a door should be able to provide some degree of weather resistance. Reference is made in the guidance document to the Performance Requirements set out in PAS 23 (published April 1999).

The Guidance Document provides advice to the builder on raising the external approaches to ease access over the sill. Timber sill members are permitted and advice is given to designers on external detailing around a timber sill.

TRANSITIONAL UNITS

The designer/builder has to give consideration to the location of the sill relative to the internal finished floor level. Unless the floor can, in simple terms, be finished within 15 mm of the top of the sill element some form of “transitional” unit must be provided.

The size of the transitional unit will be dictated by the difference in height to be accommodated and inclination of the ramp.

Although not made clear in the guidance document this “transitional” unit does not have to be a permanent fixture. The following conditions apply:-

- Must be provided by the builder as a fitting.
- Must reduce any height difference to 15 mm or below.
- Must be inclined at not more than 15°.
- Must be capable of supporting a wheelchair in use.
- Must be stable.

It should not be permanent because:-

- a) an incline of this type can cause problems to some ambulant disabled.
- b) In some circumstances, it could cause a hazard to the permanent occupiers.

Should door manufacturers be asked to provide the transitional unit the BWF's recommendations regarding the design of the transitional unit is:-

- It should be designed to provide the optimum inclination.
- It should reduce abrupt height changes to a minimum.
- It should, where practical, be provided with a method of locating to the sill to avoid undue movement.
- It should be provided with a permanent storage location when not in use for example, in a cupboard, cloakroom or garage.

DOOR SIZE

The other aspect to be considered is that the **clear opening width** of the door must be a least **775 mm**. This is measured between the door stop and the face of the door when it is opened to 90°. Any door fittings or weatherboard projections are ignored.

Selecting from the current range of standard doors, the doors which will provide a clear opening of 775 mm are:-

Metric	906 mm
Imperial	2'9" (838 mm)

In practical terms the optimum solution is the imperial door at 2'9" x 6'6". Fitted into a frame to take the imperial width but with a 2100 mm overall frame height, sufficient space is left between the bottom of the door and the surface of the timber sill to enable a proprietary weather resistant sill unit to be fitted.

ADDITIONAL NOTE

Provision for an accessible access does not necessarily only apply to the front door of a dwelling. The regulation applies to the 'principal entrance storey'. By implication the provisions should also be considered for other entrances on this floor.

It is also possible that the siting of the dwelling may, for practical reasons prevent the 'front door' being the entrance for wheel chair disabled.