

Case Study: The Treasury, London

Government

The buildings in which people work not only have a powerful impact on efficiency, but also on the culture and perception of the organisation occupying them. With this in mind the Government determined, when it decided to adapt the Government Offices on Great George Street, that the completed project should convey a message of openness and inclusiveness. The decision to sacrifice private space for large scale and welcoming communal space was key to the new design, resulting in spaces that not only improved personal interaction, but also simplified the incorporation of inclusive design.

The Treasury department is housed in the buildings known as New Government Offices, Great George Street. These buildings, known as GOGGS, were designed by the Scot, John McKean Brydon, known to be 'competent in

classical design' in 1898 and completed, on his death, by Sir Henry Tanner, Chief Architect in the Government Office of Works. The buildings are Grade II* listed.

The refurbishment proposals for the Treasury Building included detailed consideration of access for staff and visitors with disabilities. This was an anticipated requirement of the recently introduced Disability Discrimination Act (1995) as well as reflecting the aspirations of the Treasury as a Government Department and as an employer.

In the first instance David Bonnett Associates was appointed to assess the west half of the Treasury building, from the circular courtyard to St James' Park. Using our standard Access Audit tool of reviewing the 'journey' to and through the building, we were able to provide



The Treasury, London

strategic comment on access problems in the existing building. The resulting audit report was used to explore all opportunities for setting best practice standards in the new development.

The GOGGS building is typical of other buildings in Whitehall, its ground floor raised by a flight of steps, between 10-12 in number, precluding direct access into the building. Once access to the ground floor area is gained horizontal circulation to upper levels is easily achieved with wide access corridors and large double doors complete with vision panels. It is noteworthy that ease of access to all parts of the building, for the passage of deliveries, equipment and mail, has been afforded by hoist, ramp, automatic door opening devices and the provision of kickplates and vision panels.

These features were not however designed for the benefit of wheelchair users, despite the convenient overlap of requirements. The access audit demonstrated that the existing building fell well below standard. Security requirements, the importance of the heritage fabric and the sheer scale of the building and distances to be travelled had resulted in a building inaccessible not only to wheelchair users but also to ambulant disabled people and those with sensory impairments.

The completed scheme has resolved the apparent conflict between accessibility and security while physical alterations touching on the listed status have been sensitively incorporated. The considerable size of the building will inevitably stretch the limits of many mobility-impaired people. By providing a suitable distribution of lifts, WCs and other key access features the new scheme minimises unnecessary travel.

Project Details:

Location	London
Completion	2002
Architects	Foster + Partners
Clients	HM Treasury Exchequer Partnership
Awards	British Council for Offices - London Refurbished / Recycled Workplace Award