Thermae Spa: Making a listed building accessible
Being on a restricted site and amalgamating several listed buildings, there were obvious restrictions to what could be achieved. Lifts were installed wherever possible, but at two points where the old and new buildings abut ramps were the only option and are now used as the main walkway for all visitors.

Treatment rooms were designed to accommodate wheelchair users. Treatment beds can be raised or lowered as needed, there are hoists/assisted seating into all the pools and shallow step access. All signage is tactile and is in Braille. Three private changing rooms for wheelchair users and groups were added to the changing suite on the upper ground floor.

Overcoming barriers

“We are working hard to improve our accessibility within the confines of the building” says Charlotte Hanna, Sales and Marketing. “We are pleased now that we are listed in the Rough Guide to Accessible Britain. In the last few months our Access Statement has been updated and pictures added for the first time. Pictures help reassure potential visitors and also act as a marketing tool.”

Thermae Spa opened to the public in 2006. Its story starts many years previously when Bath and Northeast Somerset Council decided it would like to breathe new life into a historic area of Bath, housing some heritage spa buildings no longer open to the public. The current building, designed by Nicholas Grimshaw, is a dramatic fusion of Georgian buildings and a new wing housing new pools, treatment rooms and the iconic roof top pool.
Involving disabled people

From inception the local disability group ‘Access Bath’ were involved in the design process. However, as Charlotte Hanna, says, “It’s important to constantly get feedback as a way of improving what you can offer. For example, at the outset there were teething problems and the Spa asked some of its earliest disabled visitors to act as ‘professional friends’ and provide advice on what needed improving.”

Growing the market

The Spa actively encourages visits from people with impairments. Anyone requesting a look around to check out the facilities is given a one-to-one tour. Disabled people and one friend or carer are both given a 50% discount on the ticket prices. There are close links with the hospitals in Bath and patients are offered temporary discount deals.

Thermae Spa has also had visits from journalists working on specialist magazines such as Disability Now and Able. Says Charlotte Hanna, “Not only has this brought us some very good coverage but the journalists have been really helpful in making suggestions about things we could improve. For example, in the accessible changing rooms the seat benches were too narrow and slightly too high and so we have replaced them.”