

Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 & Neighbourhood Plans

1. Introduction

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) applies to Public Sector bodies. As of September 2020, the law requiring us to provide accessible content has started to be enforced. Since September 2019 it has been a legal requirement to provide accessible websites and content. The legislation relates to any downloadable content such as PDFs and Word documents that have been published or updated since 23rd September 2018.

As a local authority we must comply with the WCAG 2.2 guidelines, but it is important to remember that these guidelines also apply to Parish and Town Council websites.

As Neighbourhood Plans in Broadland and South Norfolk are produced under the ownership of the respective parish or town council, it is important that any Neighbourhood Plan documents that are published on the parish/town council website or associated Neighbourhood Plan website, prior to the Neighbourhood Plan documents being submitted to Broadland District Council / South Norfolk Council, must also conform to these standards. The documents that are eventually submitted to the local authority must also be in a web accessible format so that the District Council is able to publish them on its own website, in accordance with the legislation.

2. What is in WCAG 2.2?

The WCAG requirements are split into four main principles:

1. **Perceivable** – users can use your service
2. **Operable** – users can find and use your content
3. **Understandable** – users can understand your content
4. **Robust** – content can be interpreted by different user agents (such as assistive technology and browsers)

These four principles are then broken down into **13 guidelines**:

1. Text alternatives
2. Time-based media
3. Adaptable
4. Distinguishable
5. Keyboard accessible
6. Enough time
7. Seizures and physical reactions
8. Navigable
9. Input modalities

- 10. Readable
- 11. Predictable
- 12. Input assistance
- 13. Compatible

These guidelines are further broken down into what's called '**success criteria**'. This is where we find out what we need to do to meet AA standards. [Find out more about Understanding WCAG 2.2.](#)

This is a very large subject area and whilst we cannot cover everything, below is a guide on how to deal with different elements of producing accessible documents.

3. Headings & Bookmarks

Why do headings need to be accessible?

Let's start by thinking about what headings do. Headings organise content and they give us an idea on what we're about to read.

Imagine there is a page you want to read in a 20-page document. How would you find that page? Chances are you would look at the contents or quickly scroll through, skim-reading until you find what you need. If you were blind, partially-sighted or couldn't use a mouse for navigation, how would you find information?

People that rely on assistive technology and other accessibility tools benefit greatly from headings and bookmarks that are marked up correctly.

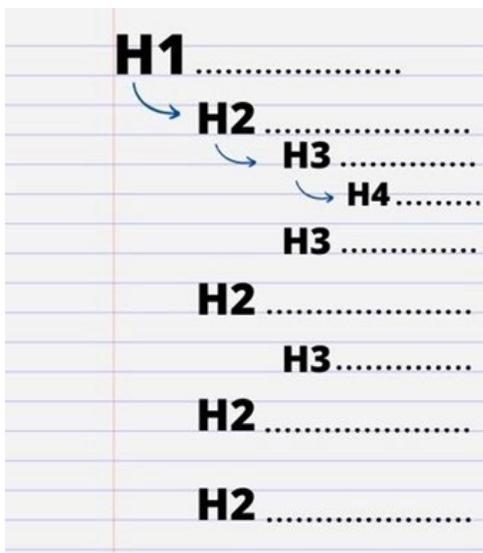
It's important we properly apply styles to headings so all our readers can find what they need.

Heading ranks

There are **six** different heading styles. The first, Heading 1, is the most important through to the sixth, Heading 6, which is the least important.

When do I use each heading?

Headings should always be used in rank order – this is called **nesting**.



Heading 1

Use H1 once for the name or title on a page or in a document.

On some occasions it might benefit readers to have more than one H1 but this should only occur if both headings have the same level of importance.

Heading 2

H2 is used for sub-headings.

H2 can be used out of rank as **it indicates a new section** on a page. For example, if a sub-section closes with a H4 you can start the next, new section with a H2.

Heading 3

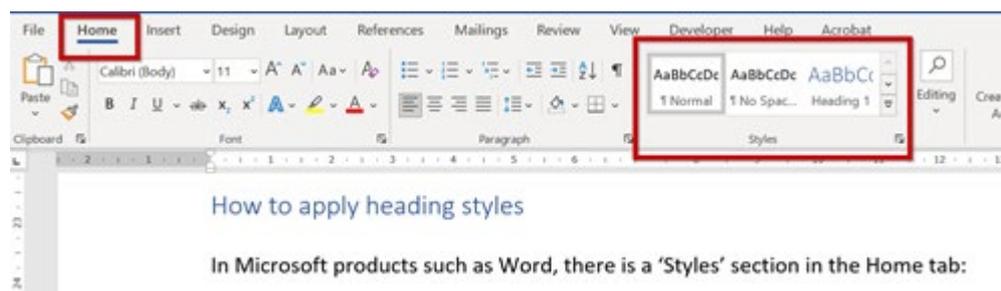
H3 is for sub-headings within a H2 section.

Headings 4, 5 and 6

Use headings 4 to 6 when you need to start new subsections at a lower rank. H4 always follows H3, H5 follows H4, and H6 follows H5.

How to apply heading styles

In Microsoft products such as Word, there is a 'Styles' section in the Home tab (see screenshot below):



It is possible to change the format of the heading style, if you would rather use a different font, colour, size text etc. Once you have selected the formatting you are happy with, you can right click against the relevant style in the 'Styles' section and select 'Update <style> to match selection'.

More help and advice on using headings

Read: [How to apply styles in Word](#) and [how to customise or create new styles](#).

Documents and PDFs:

[How to add a heading in Microsoft products](#)

[Use the navigation pane in Word](#)

[Providing headings by marking content with heading tags in PDF documents](#)

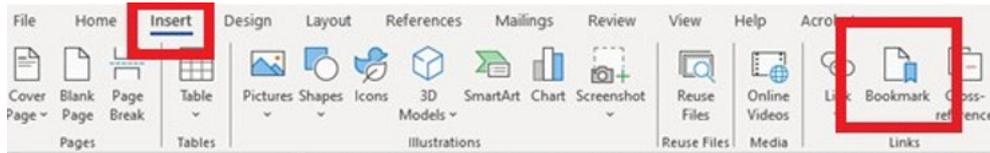
[Creating bookmarks in PDF documents](#)

Using Bookmarks

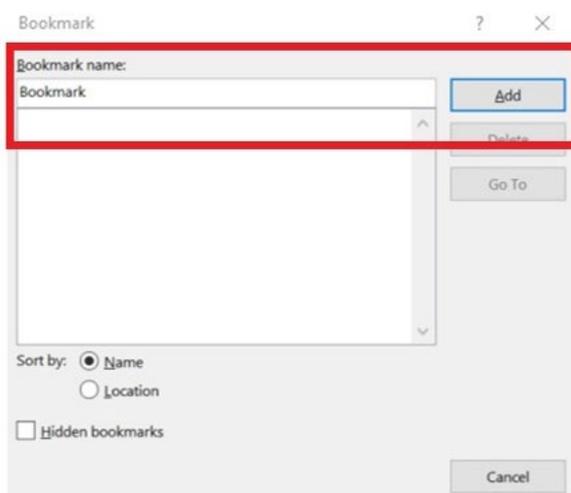
Bookmarks are extremely useful in helping to navigate documents. They allow a user to mark key locations in documents, navigate quickly to key passages, and can help save time scrolling document. Screen readers will use bookmarks to navigate through the document, so it is important to make sure these are properly used.

How to apply bookmarks in Word

Add a bookmark by selecting text, a picture, or a place in your document, and clicking Insert and choosing Bookmark from the options.



Give the bookmark a name and click Add.



4. Alternative text

Alternative text, or alt text, is the textual description that's added to an image, chart or diagram. It describes what the image is showing as an alternative for those who can't perceive images. If you are using images, make sure it is one composite image. If it is made up of separate parts created in word processing software for example, this can cause problems and mean that all the components need alternative text, including things like arrows and outline boxes.

What will happen if I don't add alt text?

If there is no alt text:

- screen readers can't describe what the image is showing
- if an image can't be loaded on a webpage then nothing will be displayed in its place
- search engines can't index the images
- images won't meet the required accessibility standards (WCAG 2.2 AA)

What do I write?

The alt text you write depends on what the image is representing.

- the aim is to provide the information or function of the image in an alternative way
- alt text should be specific but not long-winded
- don't write 'Image of...' or 'A photo of...' because screen readers announce that an image is present

It is very important not to use AI to auto generate text as this is often inaccurate. Sometimes alt text can be added automatically and it is important to check what text has been added.

Decorative images

If an image is purely for decoration, i.e. it doesn't provide information for the user, then you don't need to write alt text (you just put the null alternative `alt=""`).

Images that contain text

Images shouldn't contain text but if they do, the text must be included in the alt text.

For example, here we have an image with the phrase 'Helping to find work that's right for you' after the brand name 'work4all'. The following image has been blurred deliberately. If you saw this logo and a screen reader only read out 'work4all', you are going to be left with no way of knowing what the rest of the image says.



For this image, the following alt text should be added and therefore will be read out loud:

'work4all, helping to find work that's right for you, showing a man at a laptop on a virtual call'

Images that contain useful information

Maps, infographics, charts and graphs show useful and detailed information, so the alternative description is best to be written as textual content.

Currently maps are exempt from WCAG but we must still make an effort to include a textual description, to not exclude anyone from being able to access content. There are things we can do to make maps more accessible, such as use contrasting colours for different layers and provide addresses in a different format.

I'm still not sure if I need to add alt text- what can I do?

To help you decide if you need to add alt text, take a look at the [W3C's alt decision tree](#). The key questions to ask yourself are:

- does it contain any text?

- if it's on a link/button, would it be difficult to understand what this does if the image wasn't there?
- does it add meaning?
- is it for decoration?

More information and tools that can help with imagery and alternative text

[Images in 'Content design: planning, writing and managing content'](#) by GOV.UK

[Everything you need to know to write effective alt text](#) by Microsoft

5. Tables

Tables need to be accessible just like anything else in a document. Tables organise data in a logical way and should have headings to tell you what the data means.

Sighted users can quickly scan a table to associate data with the right row or column headers. If you rely on a screen reader to navigate it for you, and if the table isn't marked up properly, chances are it's going to be really difficult to find the information you want.

For example, let's pretend you use a screen reader and want to find out when your recycling is collected. You go to the web page and hear this:

Table with 5 columns and 13 rows. Month, Rubbish collection, Recycling collection, Garden waste, Food waste, April 2022, 11, 25, 11, 25, May 2022, 9, 23, 9, 23, June 2022, 7, 20, 7, 20, July 2022, 4, 18, 4, 18, August 2022, 1, 15, 30, 15, September 2022, 12, 26, 12, 26, October 2022, 10, 24, 10, 24, November 2022, 7, 21, 7, 21, December 2022, 5, 19, 5, 19, January 2023, 9, 23, 9, 23, February 2023, 6, 20, 6, 20, March 2023, 6, 20, 6, 20.

From hearing this information, would you be able to tell when your recycling is collected?

Even if your screen reader is in table reading mode, it could still be confusing to work this out if the table isn't marked up correctly.

How do I make a table accessible?

Word tables

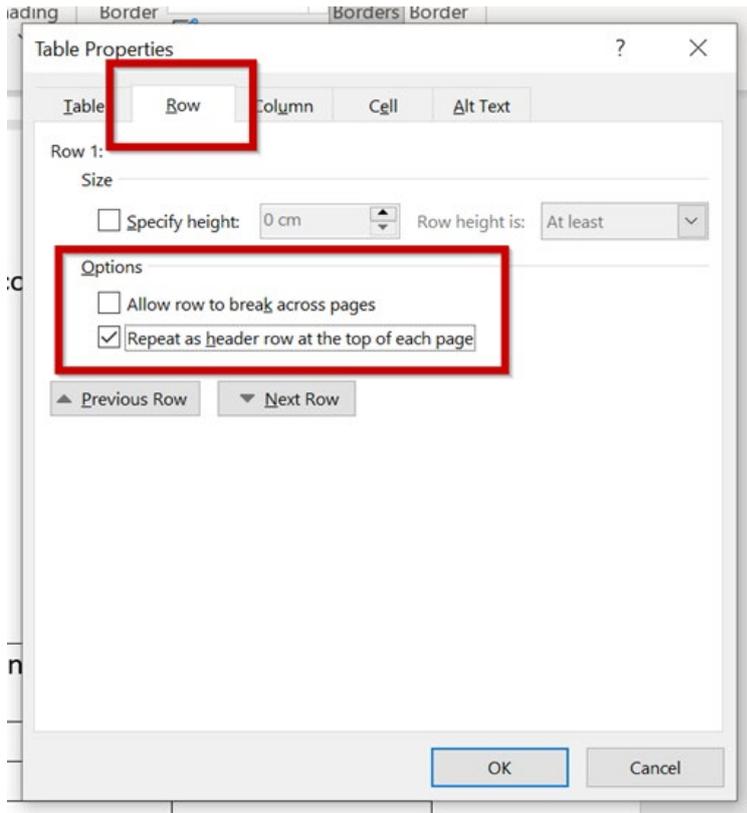
There are five key things to check for tables in Word documents:

1. Check there are no merged or split cells
2. Select the 'Header row' box under *Table Design*
3. Un-tick the box 'Allow row to break across pages' under *Table Design*
4. Select the box 'Repeat as header row at the top of each page' under *Table Design*
5. Add a title and description in the 'Alt text' section of *Table properties*

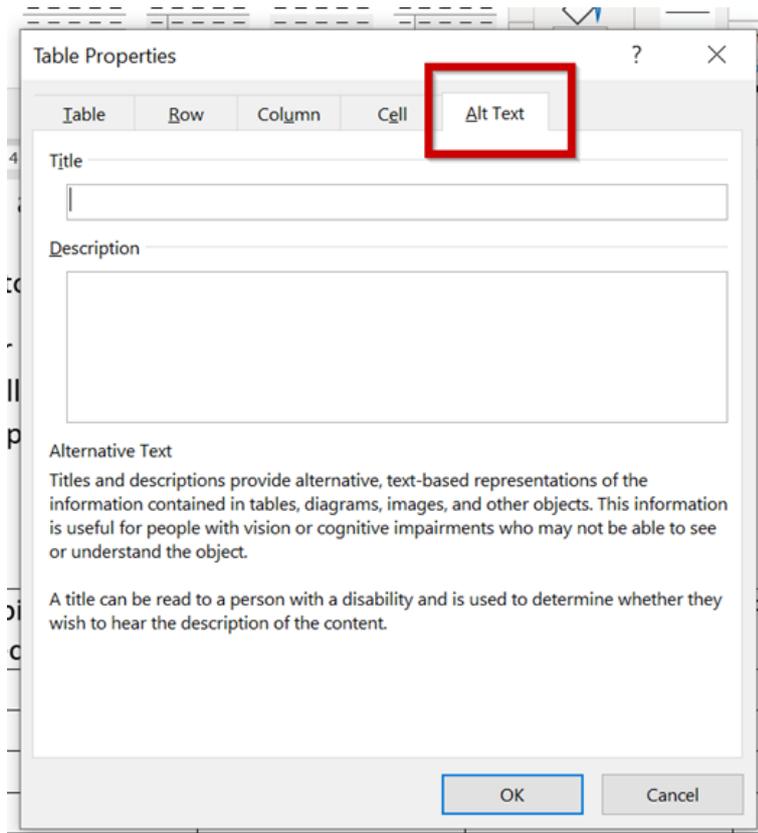
Where the 'header row' option is located in *Table Design*:



Where the checkbox options are in *Table Properties*:



Where to add a title and description in *Table properties*:



Excel tables

To help make an Excel spreadsheet more accessible you can:

- use the built-in [accessibility checker tool](#) to help identify issues
- give all sheet tabs unique names
- remove blank sheets
- add meaningful link text to hyperlinks and alternative text to graphs and pictures
- if your spreadsheet has multiple sheets, use sheet 1 as a contents page
- save the spreadsheet with a meaningful file name
- warn users if filters, freeze panes and track changes are being used – and advise how to turn them off

Is there anything else I should know about tables?

- It is recommended to have a brief description before or after the table to summarise its contents.
- Check any background colours have enough contrast with the text.
- Remember to use the built-in [accessibility checker tool](#) which can help identify table issues.

More information and tools that can help you with tables

[How to create accessible tables in Word](#) - Microsoft

[Make your Excel documents accessible to people with disabilities](#) – Microsoft

[Creating accessible Excel spreadsheets](#) - RNIB

[SCULPT tables - structure tables for accessibility](#)

6. Colour Contrast

Colour contrast is the term used to describe the difference in light between font (or anything in the foreground) and its background. In the world of digital accessibility, colour contrast is measured by **ratios**.

What do I need to know about colour contrast ratio?

As a public body we must comply with the latest accessibility law, which currently says colour contrast needs to be:

- Minimum **4.5:1** ratio for normal text
- Minimum **3:1** for headings, text larger than size 18pt, or text at 14pt bold or larger

What colours should I avoid?

This depends on the background/foreground colour. For example, it's good practice to avoid green on red and red on green as in the example below from the WebAIM contrast checker.

Normal Text

WCAG AA: **Fail**
WCAG AAA: **Fail**

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

Large Text

WCAG AA: **Fail**
WCAG AAA: **Fail**

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

Colours that share the same brightness should not be used together, such as a bright yellow on a bright blue as in the example from the WebAIM contrast checker.

Foreground Color
 #DAFF1F 
 Lightness

Background Color
 #00E9FA 
 Lightness

Contrast Ratio
1.3:1
[permalink](#)

Normal Text

WCAG AA: **Fail**
 WCAG AAA: **Fail**

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

Large Text

WCAG AA: **Fail**
 WCAG AAA: **Fail**

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

Graphical Objects and User Interface Components

WCAG AA: **Fail**

Text Input 

Another example is with shades of the same colour. In the example (WebAIM contrast checker) below two different greys are used which have a ratio of 4.03:1. These choices pass for 'large text' but the contrast isn't great enough for 'normal text'.

Foreground Color
 #D0D1CC 
 Lightness

Background Color
 #616161 
 Lightness

Contrast Ratio
4.03:1
[permalink](#)

Normal Text

WCAG AA: **Fail**
 WCAG AAA: **Fail**

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

Large Text

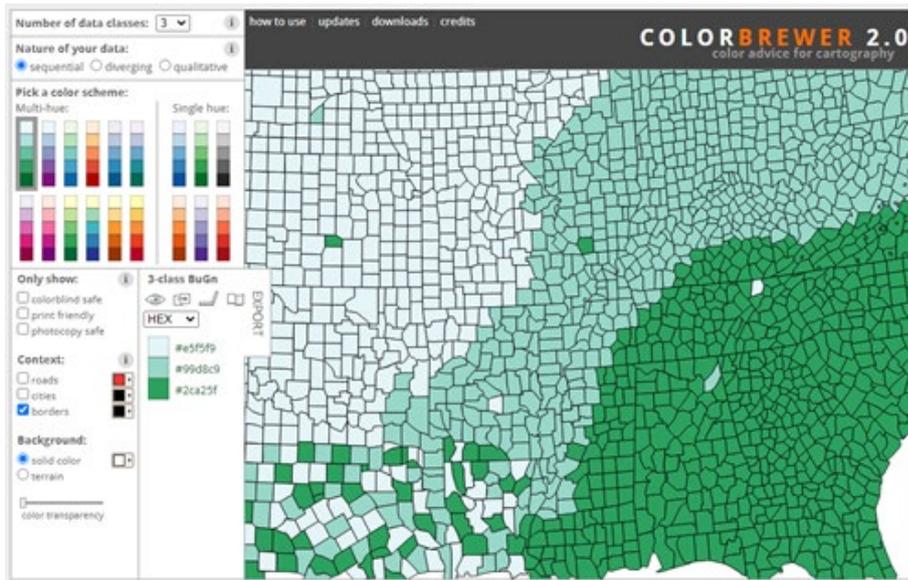
WCAG AA: **Pass**
 WCAG AAA: **Fail**

The five boxing wizards jump quickly.

How can I check what ratio my colours are?

There are lots of online tools you can use to check for colour contrast. The screenshots used above were taken using the [WebAIM contrast checker](#).

The [Color Brewer](#) website can be used for colour combinations – particularly useful for graphs, charts and mapping.



7. Submitting the neighbourhood plan documents to us

A couple of other things to bear in mind when producing the Neighbourhood Plan and supporting documents for submission is to ensure that security is not added to them prior to submission. Adding security constraints at this stage restricts our ability to run the checks on the documents.

We use Adobe Acrobat Professional when checking documents. We would highly recommend, where possible, that you or your consultants utilise this software when creating your documents. Adobe have a useful website that explains accessibility and how to use their software - <https://helpx.adobe.com/uk/acrobat/using/create-verify-pdf-accessibility.html>.

We also have a file size limit on all documents of 64mb, so any submissions must be under this size. If you are using Adobe Professional or equivalent, then there is an option to reduce the file size.