



CITY IDENTITY

City name

Chester

Country

UK

City size: (number of inhabitants)

95100

Short description of city

Chester is an historic city which is famous for its Roman heritage, the Rows (unique, elevated walkways above the main four streets), its distinctive architecture including its famous black and white buildings, but is perhaps most famous for its City Walls, which are the most complete circuit of Roman, Saxon and Medieval walls in the UK . The city is located in the North West region of England, in the county of Cheshire, close to the border with Wales. Chester is the largest and most populated city within the unitary authority area of Cheshire West and Chester (CWaC) which has a total population 329,000. 18% of the total population of CWaC have a disability. 21% (69,000) are age 65+.

SCOPE OF THE INITIATIVES

Accessibility to the built environment and public spaces

The City Walls are a Scheduled Ancient Monument. The majority of the 3km circuit was made accessible via ramps and level access routes at 11 locations throughout the 20th century. Where full access is not possible due to heritage/financial constraints, the Council's recent approach (since 2008) has been to follow the principal of 'least restrictive access', making the walls as accessible as possible for people ambulant disabled and people with sight loss. E.g. new handrails & tactile paving. All sections of the famous Rows are accessible via combination of ramps, level access routes, lift and an escalator. Access points are advertised on city centre panels, 'DisabledGo' guide, and in the city centre access leaflet. Since 2010, 4 Changing Places facilities have been provided to enable people with multiple and profound disabilities (with their family/friends/carers) to visit the city for longer periods. At 12sqm, they are larger than standard accessible toilets (3.3sqm) and include specialist equipment - ceiling hoist, adjustable height changing bed, wash basin & shower. There is no statutory requirement to provide these facilities - the council is aiming to ensure that the most severely disabled people can visit and enjoy the city's leisure, heritage and culture facilities.

Accessibility to transportation and related infrastructures

Council policy requires that all of the city's 192 licensed 'hackney' taxis (which can be accessed from 20 ranks, pre-booked or hailed on-street) are wheelchair accessible. These taxis also have other 'accessibility' features e.g. hearing loops & contrasting grab rails. Frodsham Street car park provides 63 spaces reserved for blue badge holders. 170 designated accessible parking bays available within council operated car parks. Shopmobility scheme enables older & disabled people to access shops and facilities 7 days a week. 'Ability Angels' provide shopping companions to assist people. 3000 bookings per year. 45 wheelchairs/scooters available. Passport scheme enables 650+ members use of Chester scheme and in 3

other towns in borough. Bus Transport – 100% of 129 public transport buses operating within Chester are fully accessible. Council commissions the PlusBus dial-a-ride scheme which provides 'door-to-door' transport for people unable to use conventional public transport. The scheme operates 8 wheelchair-accessible vehicles which make 27,500 trips each year. Park & Ride Scheme (in 4 locations at the edge of the city) provides bus transport every ten minutes to and from the city centre. 100% of the buses are wheelchair accessible and with audio/visual information.

Accessibility to information and communication, including information and communication technologies

Council's website aims to comply with World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) Version 2.0 'Double A' standard, as a minimum. Vast majority of pages meet this standard. Website has ProReader which allows users to listen to the text. Local Offer Online Directory of Services has provided information to people in West Cheshire since 2016, including details on accessibility, public transport and car parking. DisabledGo have been commissioned since 2011 to produce & maintain an online access guide providing access information to over 1000 venues. Information within the guide enables disabled people/carers to make informed decisions whether to visit a venue. 'Deep links' directing people to the DisabledGo Access Guide are provided within the Council/partner's websites to ensure that people have easy access to this information. The award-winning iTravelSmart app is the official award-winning journey-planning app for Cheshire West and Chester. With up to date travel information, interactive maps and transport timetables, it assists people with/without disabilities to find new job opportunities and make existing journeys easier to access. 88,000 downloads in 15-16. All council written information is available in alternative formats on request.

Accessibility to public facilities and services

The Equality Act Public Sector Equality Duty requires all public authorities, when developing or implementing policy, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity between different groups, inc. people with&without disabilities. New public facilities & services are all designed to be fully inclusive. The vast majority of existing public buildings have been adapted over many years. E.g. Grosvenor Museum has platform lifts at entrances, accessible WC, hearing loop system in lecture theatre. The city's Forum Customer Service Centre offers a 'one stop shop' for all enquiries relating Council services, inc. social care, planning, education, leisure & culture etc. The centre's entrance has powered doors, low-level counters & equipped with hearing loop. iConnect video kiosks have been installed at 12 Libraries across the borough enabling people to speak face-to-face to Council customer service staff. BSL interpreters can be booked in advance to support customers with accessing Council services and all information is also available on request in alternative formats including Audio, Braille and large print. Adult Social Care Survey (2014) - 90% of people said that Council services helped them to have a better quality of life.

OWNERSHIP / LEVEL OF COMMITMENT

Please describe your overall approach and global strategy to improve accessibility in your city and how the policy is implemented.

The Council Plan 2016-2020 - 'Helping the borough THRIVE' outlines the priorities for the Council. Three of the priorities relate to accessibility: P3: Older people and vulnerable adults compassionately supported to lead fulfilled and independent lives; P6: A well-connected and accessible borough; P10: Vibrant and healthy communities with inclusive leisure, heritage and culture. The Council has a dedicated Access Officer who works across the Council & with its partners in public & private sector to improve access for disabled people, in keeping with the TEAMWORK value in the plan. The CDAF has demonstrated INNOVATION in the way it has involved disabled people and their representative orgs in the design of new buildings and facilities. The Chester 'One City Plan' (2012) is a single co-ordinated strategy that sets out

the direction we want the city to move in over the next 15 years. It contains a number of aims established to guide the city in achieving its vision. One of the aims is to 'Be accessible, easy to travel around and welcoming – encouraging and promoting sustainable travel and meeting the needs of less mobile people'. The Council has one, overarching E&D priority: 'To maintain the requirements of the Excellent level of the Equality Framework for Local Government'.

IMPACT

How has the city's policy improved equal access and the quality of life of people with disabilities?

It is difficult to fully assess the extent to which city's policies have improved equal access & quality of life for disabled people. Many initiatives are still in their infancy, while others are still in the planning stages or under construction. However, there is (and has been for many years) a long term commitment by the Council to improve the accessibility of the city's services and facilities for everyone, regardless of disability. 100% of respondents of the Shopmobility Customer Satisfaction Survey said that the service has a 'very positive' impact on their ability to stay independent and avoid isolation. 100% of respondents said the service had a 'positive' (6%) or 'very positive' (94%) impact on their health and wellbeing. Recent surveys carried out by the Council indicate Council services are having a positive impact on people. E.g. 90% of respondents in the Adult Social Care Survey (2015) said that council services helped them to have a better quality of life.

How do these initiatives benefit, beyond persons with disabilities, also wider parts of the population?

The UK's 11.9 million disabled people are said to have a disposable income collectively worth £80bn. The Council recognises the value of the 'purple pound' at a local level and is keen to ensure that city is able encourage people to visit and spend time in the city. The recent (2015) Shopmobility Customer Satisfaction Survey identified that the average amount spent in Chester by Shopmobility customers is £79 per visit, demonstrating the positive impact that disabled people have on the local economy. Based on the Shopmobility usage data, it is estimated that Shopmobility customers alone spend approximately £237,000 annually. The amount spent in the city by disabled people who are not Shopmobility users is likely to be much greater. The Council's various initiatives to improve accessibility are having a positive impact on carers. Feedback from groups e.g VIVO Care Choices and Profound Intellectual and Multiple Disabilities Group (professionals and carers) indicated that prior to the new CP facilities being provided, carers of disabled people with profound disabilities were previously travelling out of Chester to access retail and leisure facilities. The provision of CP facilities means that carers (and the people they care for) are now able to visit Chester for longer periods.

QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF RESULTS

How do you ensure the quality and sustainability of accessibility measures?

Chester Growth Partnership will deliver a programme of improvements in Chester as part of the One City Plan, the 15 year strategy which guides the future regeneration of Chester. The aim of the plan is to create a reinvigorated city centre, making it a distinctive and desirable place in which to live and visit. The Corporate Disability Access Forum ensures that disabled people and their representative organisations have a strong voice in ensuring that these new developments meet the varying needs and expectations of disabled people. The Council's Development Control Team ensures that new developments comply with local/national legislation (e.g. Equality Act/DDA) and with national design standards (e.g. Building Regulation Part M). The Council has employed a dedicated Access Officer (since 1991) with a corporate responsibility for improving accessibility and independence for disabled people. The AO, along with CDAF, works with architects/designers to go 'above and beyond' the minimum standards and comply with national & local 'best practice' e.g. British Standard 8300(2009). The Access Officer investigates and responds to all access related complaints received by the Council and works with internal & external

partners to implement changes to buildings, facilities and practices.

What are your plans and initiatives to continue these efforts in the future?

The Council Plan 2016-2020 clearly demonstrates the Council's aim to continue its efforts to make the city more accessible for disabled people, carers and the wider population. Due to be completed in January 2017, Storyhouse is the new Cultural Centre for Chester. It will be a venue of national importance and is unique in providing an inclusive theatre (800 seats), studio, cinema, library, food and beverage facilities, all under one-roof in heart of the city centre. A Changing Places facility will be available. The Chester Northgate Scheme is a £400m mixed-use development of retail, leisure and cultural facilities and is expected to be completed in 2020. Accessibility is at the forefront of the design, and will include two Changing Places and the city's (and region's) first hotel with rooms with ceiling track hoists. The scheme will have significant impact on the overall accessibility of the city. The new Bus Interchange will be completed early 2017 and will provide improved access to the city centre & bus network. Internal facilities include a Changing Places. Frodsham Street will be resurfaced in 2016 to provide a well-designed 'shared space' to access into the city centre. CDAF has been and will continue to be involved in all of these schemes at the appropriate stages.

INVOLVEMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND RELEVANT PARTNERS

Please describe the involvement of persons with disabilities, their representative organisations and accessibility experts in both the planning, implementation and maintenance of city's policies and initiatives aimed at increased accessibility.

The Council has employed a full-time Access Officer since 1991. The current post holder has been in post since 2005 and has developed strong links with the disability community. The Access Officer has a specific role to improve access for disabled people through provision of specialist advice & design guidance (e.g. in relation to major projects) and via the commissioning of access-related services (e.g. Shopmobility Scheme, DisabledGo Access Guide). The Access Officer co-ordinates the Corporate Disability Access Forum, a pan-disability group comprising 16+ local disability orgs & access groups. CDAF was established in 2013 in response to requests from local disabled people and their representative organisations to have greater involvement in the design of major new developments. The Chair and Vice-Chair of CDAF are elected members on the Council which has proven to be effective in 'championing' the needs and aspirations of disabled people and adding strength when negotiating access provision in new schemes. This innovative approach to engagement has proven to be an effective method of involving disabled people and their representative organisations in the design of major public facilities and was recognised by Government in the Accessible Britain Challenge Awards 2015.

Do you carry out awareness raising or information activities around accessibility? Do you exchange and share experience and good practices with other cities at local, regional, national and/or European level?

The Council's Access Officer is a full member of the UK Access Association - a network of access professionals - passionate about improving access, inclusive design & knowledge sharing. Membership is funded by the Local Authority. In 2015, the Council's CDAF was the winner of the Accessible Britain Challenge Award (Improved Mobility category). The Awards Ceremony took place at Houses of Parliament and had national profile. In recent years the Council has developed strong links with other Councils e.g. Liverpool City Council. Reciprocal learning visits have taken place involving the respective Access Forums and local authority officers to assess completed schemes and to discuss ideas/options for future schemes. The Council has invested heavily in accessibility in recent times and we are proud of these achievements, many of which have been delivered during a prolonged period of national austerity and reductions in local government funding. Apart from the chance to be recognised by the European Commission for our efforts

in relation to accessibility, another key reason for this application is the chance to share our experiences and good practices with our European colleagues and to develop stronger links and learning opportunities with other cities in relation to accessibility.

WHY DOES YOUR CITY DESERVE THE AWARD?

Please provide a short presentation of your overall accessibility policy and actions. Please explain why your results and your city's accessibility policy are extraordinary and why you believe to deserve the Award.

The Council Plan 2016-2020 sets out the Council's vision which includes specific priorities around making the borough accessible, the provision of inclusive leisure, heritage and culture, and supporting people to lead fulfilled and independent lives. We are proud of all of our efforts and achievements in making our historic city accessible for people with a range of disabilities, particularly since 2013, when disabled people and their representative organisations were given greater input into the design of major new facilities through the establishment of the Corporate Disability Access Forum. However, we are especially proud of our efforts to ensure that people with multiple and most profound disabilities - and their family and friends - are able to visit our historic city, and for longer periods, due to the provision of four Changing Places facilities. These facilities, which are four times larger than standard accessible toilets, include specialist equipment such as ceiling track hoist & adjustable-height adult changing bed. Without Changing Places facilities, the alternative is to restrict the length of any visit, or not visit at all. A further two CPs will open in 2017, and two more by 2020, further enhancing Chester's ambition and growing reputation as an accessible city.

SUPPORTING MATERIAL

- (1) Job Description - Senior Access Officer (2010) - explains the role and main responsibilities of the post holder.
- (2) Chester City Centre Access - a guide for disabled people leaflet (2012) - designed by the council and available from Shopmobility, DIAL House and the Visitor Information Centre. Also available online on the Council's website.
- (3) Council Plan - Helping the Borough Thrive 2016-2020 - outlines the council's vision and priorities for next 5 years, including three priorities around accessibility, inclusivity, and supporting people to lead fulfilled and independent lives.
- (4) Equality Framework for Local Government Narrative Report (2014) - includes disability/access related examples of how the Council achieved its 'Excellent' rating - the highest possible rating.
- (5) Equality Peer Challenge - 'Excellent' Level Report (2014).
- (6) Feedback from Chester Visitor Centre - email regarding access in Chester and access guide leaflet (2013).
- (7) Report by the Profound Intellectual and Multiple Disabilities (PIMD) sub group of the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board (2014). Report highlighting the main aspirations of people with profound disabilities and their carers. The need for more changing places facilities was highlighted in this report.
- (8) Chester Shopmobility Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire Report (2015) - shows satisfaction levels among service users. Shopmobility is a key accessibility service which enables people to access city centre shops and facilities by hiring wheelchairs and mobility scooters.
- (9) Visitor Feedback from E.Rhodes (2009). A Shopmobility service user who used the city centre access guide leaflet during a two day visit to the city.
- (10) Access City Award 2017 - Chester UK - Power Point Presentation - Provides an overview of the city's strengths from an accessibility perspective and a selection of images

Chester city centre access guide leaflet.pdf
Council Plan - Helping the Borough THRIVE 2016-2020.pdf
Equality Framework for Local Government Narrative Report.pdf
Equality Peer Challenge Excellent Level Report.pdf
Feedback from Chester Visitor Centre.htm
PIMD Report May 2014.pdf
Shopmobility West Cheshire Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire Report CHESTER - COMPLETE.doc
Visitor Feedback from E.Rhodes.htm
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dZx33V2bD_Q
20160823-AccessCityAwardChesterUK-V01.ppt

CONTACT PERSON, WEB LINKS AND POSTAL ADDRESS

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Official city website

<http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk>

Organisational webpages devoted to accessibility

DisabledGo Online Access Guide: <http://www.disabledgo.com/organisations/cheshire-west-and-chester/main-2>

Accessible Britain Challenge: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/groups-honoured-for-life-changing-work-at-house-of-commons-ceremony>

Changing Places Consortium (Chester search results):

<http://changingplaces.uktoiletmap.org/find?toiletLocation=chester>

Local Offer Online Directory:

<http://www.westcheshirelocaloffer.co.uk/kb5/cheshirewestandchester/directory/home.page>

Chester One City Plan: <http://chester.westcheshiregrowth.co.uk/one-city-plan/>

iTravel Smart website: <http://itravelmart.co.uk/>

Chester Shopmobility: <http://www.dialhousechester.org.uk/Shopmobility.html>

Chester Park and Ride Service: <http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=309>

PlusBus (accessible community transport): <http://ectcharity.co.uk/services/areas/cheshire/plusbus#view>

Corporate Disability Access Forum: <http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=17491>