



SPECTRUM Centre for Independent Living



Access Inquiry – Meeting 2

Built environment and public spaces

What is the experience of Disabled People

Ian Loynes, Chief Executive, SPECTRUM

Think you know Disabled People ... Think Again



Presentation Contents

- City Design & Getting About (Not Transport)
- Building & Spaces
- Planning & Building Control
- Events
- Solutions

NB: Impossible to cover everything in this Presentation



City Design:

What's good about Southampton

- There are plenty of good examples of good access, particularly in retail areas – simply because they have a financial incentive to encourage Disabled People to spend their £
- Most shops allow assistance dogs and shops make a lot of effort (9/10)
- Audio Loop Systems are really making a difference to hearing impaired people *[NB: only very few installed/operational in shops and public buildings]*
- More space allowed since the Pandemic: Great for access
- City Centre is good generally: But isn't good in other retail areas, (eg Shirley, Portswood, St Marys, Northam)



City Design: Getting Around the City (1)

- **Street Furniture:** most common barrier
 - Billboards, inconveniently placed bollards, rubbish bins, cafe/restaurant pavement tables
 - Particularly dangerous for people with visual impairments.
 - More guidance/checks about how much space should be left for pedestrians, boundary clearly marked
- **Pavements:** obstructions. sudden changes in width or height of the pavement, lack of dropped kerbs, cracked/broken paving, (even small gaps),
 - Not defining pavement space from road space
 - Paving with cobbles may look authentic, but you try wheeling on in in a wheelchair, or walking on it with crutches , or if you're in pain
- **Seating:** with backrests, and armrests (to aid sitting down, continual support and standing up or transferring to scooter)
 - NOT “artistically designed” form over function
 - integrated spaces for wheelchair and scooter users



City Design: Getting Around the City (2)

- **Not everyone uses wheelchair or has walking difficulties**
 - Mental Health Conditions or Autism, people who use Assistance Dogs.
 - A busy and crowded city centre can be a very disorientating, or even hostile, environment for many people
 - Ambient noise of thousands of people, mixed with music can make life very difficult
 - To the extent: reluctant to go to the city centre at all

Other issues:

- Cyclists, electric scooter and skateboarders
- Lack of accessible signposting
- Poorly phased pedestrian crossing



Buildings & Spaces – Retail & Public

Cafes, bars and restaurants

- Internal steps put in for purely aesthetic reasons
- Current fashion for high tables and stools

Shops & Public Buildings

- stepped access at entrances
- narrow and cluttered aisles or queuing lanes
- poorly sited or designed displays
- shortage of accessible lifts
- poor lighting for people with visual impairments
- lack of accessible changing cubicles in clothes and department stores
- lack of working hearing loop systems & staff trained in their use
- Lack of accessible toilets or hearing loop systems - remain even after recent refurbishments
- Even some council owned leisure facilities do not have full access



Buildings & Spaces – Audio Loop Systems

- LetsLoopSouthampton.co.uk. 3 Years trying to get audio loop systems fitted in premises
- Only 4% have actually got loop systems installed. Ridiculous because hearing impaired people won't go into shops if no loop system - completely unable to communicate.
- 23,000 deaf and hard of hearing people who live in Southampton
- LetsLoopSouthampton even has a grant fund of £30,000, available to meet cost of installing a loop system (they cost about £200): isn't even a financial case



Buildings & Spaces - Homes

All houses built from now should be built to be accessible, not just a small percentage for Disabled and Older People. This should happen for two main reasons:

1. Disabled and Older People want to visit their friends and family and neighbours just as much as everyone else
2. If all homes had a basic level of accessibility built in, it would be less costly to adapt as people grow older or become Disabled

There's no real evidence that it costs more to build accessible homes when they are built at scale. **It's a Myth**



Accessible Toilets

- often poor design, flush handles inaccessible, high dryers, high mirrors
- often full of junk, cleaning materials, huge bins, badly maintained
- poorly provided in many cafes, restaurants – no monitoring
- West Quay South: not one of the toilets complied with legislation
- **Landlord equally liable**
- **Why Radar Keys?:** Accessible toilets locked (with a Radar Key)
 - Why lock accessible toilets when 'ordinary' toilets are not locked.
- **Changing Places Toilets:** more space, hoist, adult changing place
 - Compared to other Cities, Southampton has very few
 - It should be a requirement in public spaces & new builds
 - Even though not many exist, they are not used simply because people don't know they exist
 - Need to raise awareness of where these are



Planning and Building Control

Should be building in good access at the design phase of new builds

- Guidance is routinely Ignored
 - The mantra of “Approved documents - they are guidance only and do not have to be followed” is repeated across the industry and within the Planning Dept
- Often no access or bad access in new buildings and access reduced when buildings are modified
- Access considerations should be put in place, and planning officers should ensure access rights are preserved – but they don’t
- SCC’s Buildings control is a major contributor to the lack of access
 - Inaccessible provision is routinely granted permission**
 - Planning officers don’t appear to ‘police’ access requirements**
- Left for individuals to make a complaint
- Used to be an Access Officer Role, and there used to be a relationship with the Access Group [Group of Disabled People] to vet plans before approval



Events

Mind Set: Disabled People can be watchers, but can also be performers – often access considerations don't allow this

Car Parking at the Civic Centre should be maintained at all times

- Currently, if there's an event going on they close the Civic Centre car parks
- Quite annoying because it's the most accessible one
i.e. when there's a cycling event in town, they closed the Civic Centre car park.
- These are the best spaces in the City because it's not like end to end parking where people block you in, resulting in inability to access your vehicle.



Solutions

- 15% of the UK population, or 37,000+ in Southampton, are Disabled People – Economic & moral case

Policy considerations:

- All public meetings (Council, MPs) should be held in accessible premises. Then accessible to everyone – including Disabled People
 - Time and again I've been to even MPs surgeries and not been able to use them because not accessible.
 - Enough public buildings that are accessible,
 - Would encourage the design of accessible venues as buildings that aren't accessible, would find they are losing money.
- Accessibility Checklist: Developed by City Council & Disabled People.
 - Event organisers expected to use accessibility checklist to follow to avoid regular access mistakes
 - Often, simple things that make all the difference. Cost is often not a factor
- Equality Impact Statements: Should be completed by people from different equality groups themselves, not just done by an officer that may, or not, know the issues that these groups experience.



Solutions

- Fully accessible transport systems – If you can't get there!
- A shared commitment to full inclusion
- Universal benefits – everyone benefits
- A broad view of Disability and accessibility
- An emphasis on communications
- Innovation
- A commitment to co-production
- A Learning City knowledge retained when officer leaves

Levers

- **City Centre Plan**
- **Southampton Local Plan Vision** local community organisations
- **City of Culture 2025** should be used to promote Southampton as an accessible and welcoming City. A real opportunity for the City Council to lead by example



Centre for
Independent
Living CIC

Email: Ian.Loynes@SpectrumCIL.co.uk

Website: www.SpectrumCIL.co.uk

Facebook: [@Spectrum.CIL](https://www.facebook.com/SpectrumCIL)

Twitter: [@SpectrumCIL](https://twitter.com/SpectrumCIL)

Think you know Disabled People ... Think Again