

SCC scrutiny meeting

Hello My name is Jemma Brown I want to start by giving you a rundown of who I am so you have context for what I am sharing. I live with multiple disabilities, I'm blind, I live with chronic illness that causes chronic pain and fatigue meaning I use a electric wheelchair part time. I also have complex post traumatic stress disorder... PTSD is a SEMI (sever enduring mental illness) so I tick all the boxes.

This gives me a unique perspective into the accessibility of the city. However I have struggled to write this because of the sheer number of problems and issues I face on a every day basis. Also the area of built environment encompasses so much of the city it is hard to narrow things down.

In my view SCC is failing its citizens with a disability we are left out of planning decisions and given very little thought when making decisions and planning on how the built environment impacts us.

In my opinion SCC are following a medical model of disability that is outdated and harmful, SCC expects me as a disabled person to adapt to force my body to work in environments that it was not designed for. I'm going to give a few examples.

The area around the station is one example of poor planning both in terms of traffic management and the impact on disabled people. Decisions to have the road and the pavement in the same colour scheme and have tactile crossing points but not actual crossing put pedestrians at risk.

Here is a real life example that has put me at risk. At the moment I don't have a guide dog so I am using a white cane, I use my cane to look for the area with a tactile, indicating I should cross there. I stop and attempt to cross the road as Taxis do u turns in the middle of the road, people are stopping and dropping people off at the station parking on the pavements, there are bikes and e scooters. I need to physically stop and take a minute to look and listen while I am doing this a lorry approaches it stops on my right it is bright orange, it blocks that lane of traffic and immediately cars and bikes just go round it. The

driver of the Lorry then starts to shout at me saying I need to move off of the pavement at a tactile crossing point which lets remember should be a safe space for me because he wants to park there to do his delivery.

The pavement should be a space where I am safe but around the station this is not the case.

Before I move on I will make one additional point about this area of the city, and that is when I had a guide dog and the changes were implemented initially, my guide dog had a great deal of trouble learning the location of crossing points. For this reason on one occasion coming home late at night I asked a member of staff to help me find the tactile place to cross the road, because I was unsure my guide dog would be able to find it. The fully sighted member of staff could not locate the tactile markings, they blended in too well with the surrounding area... if someone fully sighted can't find them what hope have I got?

Next a real life example of how poor planning in infrastructure is having a negative impact on my life.

SCC is investing in its road networks but I have to tell you that in doing this they have not considered the accessibility implications, in many cases the level of the road has been dropped and the difference in level has not been fixed when it comes to dropped curbs meaning that in some cases what looks like a dropped curb is actually a step. This is the case for many of the roads along hill lane between atherly bowling club and Taunton's college. It is incredibly difficult to get between the roads mentioned and just this week I had to drop councillor Fielker and Councillor Payne a message as I fear roadworks on Kingsclere avenue will lead to the same thing happening. As I have said to them I have little trust that if I had not brought the issue up it would be noticed, during the work the council have already had to raise with the foreman that putting cones blocking the only dropped curbs in the area is a problem... I was stunned the foremen did not already know this.

Sadly there are many shops and businesses in Southampton that are not wheelchair accessible and are also not offering reasonable adjustments to accommodate disabled people meaning that there are areas that are totally no go.

With a guide dog I have been asked to leave shops in the city centre.

For me the biggest problem is there is no easy way of reporting accessibility issues like a broken dropped curb, there are no policies or programs in place. It is really difficult to report issues.

It is to the point that I now report issues directly to Councillor Payne if they are in Weston. This takes up his time and I shouldn't have to message him! As another example when West Quay south was built before it even opened I raised with both Guide Dogs, sensory services, and West Quay that the steps are incredibly dangerous there were no tactile markings and they are curved quite frankly it scared me one wrong step and there would be a serious accident I was so concerned I actually did a phone round of all the blind and visually impaired people I know in Southampton.

West quay and its contractors did nothing... it was about a year later the tactile markings were retrofitted but even these have been fitted not

following best practice. They are the same colour as the paving around them best practice for urban design is that they are a high contrast between the tactiles and the pavement around and to my utter dismay tactiles have only been placed at the top off the stairs there should be more at the bottom.

While we are at it multiple times I have got stuck because I have used the lift to get down a level in west quay south only to be then stuck at the bottom in a dimly lit area with no one around and the doors locked and no way out. When I have questioned this with west quay staff, they have told me to use the ramp... this more than doubles the walking distance if for example I want to go to Bills. Furthermore I challenge those here at this meeting to hire a wheelchair from motorbility and self propel all the way up the ramp... its exhausting.

I believe SCC should be holding the designers of planned works accountable where a public building is designed and proposed at a planning level SCC should be prioritising accessibility and where reasonable (e.g. public buildings) refusing planning applications that go against best practice.

Right now it takes me an unpaid (and unemployed) individual to affect change and put quite simply it is often too late by the time I flag it often takes years of me saying the same thing to multiple organisations to effect change it is exhausting and takes a lot of energy and time.

Add to this there is a cost in correcting mistakes and retrofitting, it often takes years of me sending emails, tweeting and as you have seen making tiktok videos.

SCC needs to be pushing for inclusion and equality with a joined up approach.

Here's what I think is needed, I think SCC needs to implement new systems of reporting accessibility issues. Here's why – I spent years reporting a gravel footpath that has worn away to highways in Weston, I watched the path deteriorate over a period of 10 years no one ever responded to me. It was only when I made a tiktok and councillor Payne took up the issue, I learned all the time I had been reporting it to highways it was the wrong department as it's housing land so it's up to housing to sort out. Either highways

were seeing my reports and passing them on to housing who were not contacting me or actioning anything or highways were going its not our problem and binning them. There is no record of the reports I made.

Gosport where I grew up has an accessibility forum, that just looks at the high street area disabled people can anonymously report issues and it can then be followed up by the forum, if the forum identify a problem and are able to confirm the report then the business or public building is contacted and the problem is raised. If there is a reasonable adjustment that could fix the problem the store is asked to fix it. If no action is taken the forum have the power to then raise it with the local council who will then ensure the issue is resolved.

I have used this ability to report to the access forum as a now visitor to Gosport. I was trying to find a cold remedy in a chemist in Gosport high street, I couldn't find it, I asked a member of staff to help me apologising and pointing out it was the only thing I needed. The member of staff said they didn't have time to help me they then continued serving other

customers and complained that my guide dog took up too much space. They essentially refused to help me then ignored my existence... I was able to report this to the forum, they were able to contact store management and keep me anonymous. Management promised the forum to retrain its staff on disability issues and how to treat disabled people as human beings. Volunteers from the access group then at a random time visited the chemist in question and asked for help to check that these changes were implemented.

I will finish by saying this I want to go to Mayfield park... I live very close to it but I have never been why? It is too far for me to walk and the only pedestrian crossing leads to a series of steps upwards and a ramp only suitable for push bikes.

My choices are limited by decisions made lack of infrastructure and joined up thinking and to be honest I am fed up of this.

I have more suggestions, I feel SCC should be employing disabled people to test accessibility

features and review potential problems, this member of staff can also start an access forum for the city centre, my dream would be for this to become something city wide.

When you go out for a walk new rule if you are out canvassing next election you are only allowed to cross the road where there is a dropped curb suddenly your choices are limited.

I would like to finish by inviting you all to come on a walk with me I propose we meet at the station and walk up hill lane very quickly.