

## Accessible Cities - GO! Southampton Response

1. Overview of Go! Southampton's view on the accessibility of the built environment in Southampton and your ambitions regarding improving the accessibility of the built environment and public spaces.

GO! Southampton views the issue of accessibility as part of the wider local and national debate on inclusion & diversity. Prompted by its members, the BID intends to feature the issue of inclusion & diversity in its second-term programme, with a new Inclusive City workstream. The BID's ambition is for Southampton to be an inclusive city that is accessible and welcoming to all. If you design a city with accessibility in mind, you can remove barriers and enable everyone to experience the city in a positive way and bring significant environmental, economic and social benefits. It is currently perceived that accessibility has not been at the forefront of decisions on the built environment, with many barriers still in place for residents and visitors to navigate the city independently and safely. Southampton has the potential to learn from best practice across the UK and Europe as seen in our report we commissioned from SPECTRUM Centre for Independent Living. It is critical to understand and listen to the needs of our community, to reflect on their perceptions of accessibility in the city and co-create solutions that bring meaningful value.

2. Rationale for Go! Southampton commissioning SPECTRUM to undertake an Access Audit in 2020 (did it reflect feedback from Disabled People / your members?)

It was important to capture feedback from a diverse mix of users with different accessibility needs to broaden our understanding of the accessibility challenges facing our city. By partnering with SPECTRUM CIL we were able to independently gather feedback from users and non-users of the city to understand their experiences or the barriers they face that limit their opportunities to visit the city and our businesses. The audit reflected feedback from individuals with accessibility requirements and there is further opportunity to gather further perspectives. The findings of the report have been discussed with our members and hence has subsequently become a significant area of our next five-year business plan to take on board the recommendations within the report to make changes in the city to become more inclusive. We also shared the report with Southampton City Council as several of the recommendations related to areas of activity that SCC have responsibility for.

3. GO! Southampton's response to the Access Audit – Actions undertaken, plans in development, engagement with partners etc

Working with Kate Martin it was agreed that an accessible city task and finish group would be set up in partnership with GO! and SCC, with representatives from SPECTRUM CIL and other relevant parties to address the actions recommended in the report. This task and finish group has yet to be established but GO! Southampton is committed to support this group. It is imperative that users with accessibility requirements are represented in this forum, to ensure interventions bring the most meaningful value.

4. The role that GO! Southampton and the business community can play to improve accessibility

GO! Southampton is committed to working with the business community to make individual premises more accessible through interventions such as the introduction of hearing loops and providing training for businesses to become more accessible by understanding different visitor requirements, to informing store layouts and providing enhanced facilities. The BID also intends to work with Southampton City Council to tackle opportunities and barriers in the built environment and to inform future developments. The report was shared with the agency developing the masterplan for the Mayflower Quarter to encourage future developments to be built with accessibility in mind.

#### 5. Examples of good practice related to accessibility that you want to highlight and celebrate

Best practice can be seen within the report by understanding the approaches adopted by cities across the world.

There are a number of best practice examples of accessible cities around the world. None could, or would, claim to be completely accessible. But, what they all share in common is a commitment to inclusion and a long-term approach to making their cities accessible to all.

These cities also provide examples of particularly innovative access solutions ranging from the use of digital technology (e.g. Seattle) to repurposing existing infrastructure to improve access while, at the same time, maintaining the integrity of historical heritage sites (e.g. Chester and Breda).

Probably the best of example of an accessible city in the UK is Chester, which in 2017 became the first British city to win the European Commission's Access City award.

#### 6. Recommendations for the Inquiry Panel

The key recommendation is for Southampton City Council to acknowledge the need for Southampton to become more accessible and inclusive. To commit to working with the wider community including businesses and users with accessibility requirements to implement and address the recommendations highlighted in the report. It is important to establish a vision and set clear criteria for future developments that can be incorporated into the local plan to inform future accessibility arrangements in the city.