
SCRUTINY INQUIRY PANEL - ACCESSIBLE SOUTHAMPTON
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 NOVEMBER 2021

Present: Councillors Coombs, Rayment, Streets, Vaughan and J Payne

Apologies: Councillors Guest

5. **APOLOGIES AND CHANGES IN PANEL MEMBERSHIP (IF ANY)**

It was noted that following receipt of the temporary resignation of Councillor Guest from the Panel, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, acting under delegated powers, had appointed Councillor J Payne to replace them for the purposes of this meeting.

6. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (INCLUDING MATTERS ARISING)**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 October 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

7. **ACCESSIBLE SOUTHAMPTON - ACCESS TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SPACES**

The Panel considered the report of the Service Director – Legal and Business Operations detailing an introduction to the inquiry’s context and background and noted the following presentations.

Southampton’s built environment and public spaces - What is the experience of Disabled People? – Ian Loynes, Chief Executive, Spectrum Centre for Independent Living

- A presentation was delivered by Ian Loynes, summarising the key issues raised at the Accessible Southampton Focus Group meeting held on 11th November 2021. Additional detail was provided as written evidence.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
 - In Southampton there are plenty of examples of good access, particularly in retail areas. On balance accessibility has improved.
 - More space allowed since the pandemic: Great for access.
 - City Centre is good generally: But isn’t good in other retail areas.
 - City Design - Street furniture, seating design, pavement design and condition were identified as key challenges that impacted on Disabled People’s ability to get around the city.
 - Challenges accessing cafes, bars, restaurants, shops and public buildings were identified.
 - Audio Loops - <http://letsloopsouthampton.co.uk> have spent 3 Years trying to get audio loop systems fitted in premises. Only 4% have actually got loop systems installed. 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. Lets Loop Southampton 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.

- Homes - All new houses should be built to be accessible. 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.
- Lack of accessible toilets and few Changing Places compared to other cities. It should be a requirement in public spaces and new buildings. Even though not many exist, they are not used simply because people don't know they exist.
- Planning & Building Control - Should be building in good access at the design phase of new builds. Perception that guidance is routinely ignored. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Solutions - All public meetings should be held in accessible premises; Accessibility Checklist - Developed by City Council & Disabled People (Event organisers expected to use accessibility checklist to follow to avoid regular access mistakes); Equality Impact Statements - Should be completed by people from different equality groups themselves, not just done by an officer; 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 to make this happen – City Centre Masterplan; Local Plan vision; City of Culture 2025 bid.

Personal experience of navigating Southampton's built environment – Jemma Brown

- The Panel viewed two videos produced by Jemma that highlighted some of the challenges she faces trying to get around the city – Link to videos: <https://youtube.com/shorts/YfyhG3VCV5w?feature=share> & <https://youtu.be/6nrtuXVdF7s>
- Connection problems prevented Jemma from outlining some of her experiences at the meeting. A written statement from Jemma has been provided. Key issues raised by Jemma include:
 - 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. These decisions limit our choices.
 - 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 crossings put pedestrians at risk.
 - SCC is investing in its road network but 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 Atherley Bowling Club and Taunton's college.

- 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. The design and accessibility of West Quay South is an issue that continues to cause challenges.
- SCC should be holding the designers of planned works accountable. SCC should be prioritising accessibility and where reasonable (e.g. public buildings) refusing planning applications that go against best practice.
- SCC needs to be pushing for inclusion and equality with a joined up approach
- The biggest problem is there is no easy way of reporting accessibility issues. It is really difficult to report issues.
- Gosport has an accessibility forum and disabled people can anonymously report issues and it can then be followed up by the forum. If the forum identifies a problem then the business or public body 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Overview of best practice: Chester & Liverpool – Mark Pirnie, Scrutiny Manager, SCC

- A presentation was delivered by the Scrutiny Manager highlighting key issues raised from Chester's 2017 EU Access Award submission and following conversations with officers from Cheshire West and Chester Council and Liverpool City Council.
- Key success factors for Chester included the following:
 - Corporate Priority for years – Accessible Chester in Council Plan
 - Political Leadership and ownership
 - Engagement with Disabled People – Corporate Disability Access Forum (CDAF) key component
 - Access Officer – Expertise, influence, corporate resource
 - Robust Equality Assessments – Engagement with Disabled People is expected.
 - The Access Officer, along with CDAF, works with architects/designers to go 'above and beyond' the minimum standards
 - 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.
- Liverpool – City has 37 Changing Places (compared to a handful in Southampton) and all new developments must meet the highest standards for

accessibility not just the minimum standards under building regulations. Liverpool's Accessible Housing Policy says new homes must be at least M4(2) - accessible & adaptable, and 10% of new homes to be wheelchair accessible.

- Moral, legal and financial rationale for the approaches applied in Chester & Liverpool - Average cost to the NHS of a trip or fall where ambulance required is £14,000. Improving accessibility of the built environment saves money. In 2015 Shopmobility customers alone spent approximately £237,000 annually in Chester.

Go! Southampton written evidence: Rebecca Handley, Deputy Executive Director and Operations Director at Go! Southampton

- Written evidence was provided by Go! Southampton, Southampton City Centre's Business Improvement District.
- Key points in the response from Go! Southampton:
 - 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.
 - Working with Kate Martin, Executive Director – Place at SCC, 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.
 - 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 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.

How the Council contributes to making Southampton's Built Environment accessible to all – Place Directorate, SCC

- A presentation was delivered by Amber Trueman – Strategic Planning Manager; Stephen Harrison – Service Manager, Development and Wade Holmes – Transport Delivery Team Leader.
- Key points raised in the presentation included the following:
 - Current planning policies date from 2006 relating to accessibility. SDP 11 Accessibility and Movement states that Planning permission will only be

granted for development which contributes to an attractive network of public routes and spaces for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles; secures adequate access for all pedestrians including people with mobility and sensory difficulties such as elderly people, disabled people, the very young and those using prams and wheelchairs.

- For all Major development (10dwellings/1,000sq.m) and new dwellings in Conservation Areas there is a requirement to produce Design & Access Statements that set out the applicant's case.
- Plenty of evidence that this in itself doesn't deliver inclusive development.
- Building Regulation applications are checked against Part M standards at plan approval stage and via site inspection at completion stage prior to occupation.
- Higher standards can be applied subject to Planning conditions / Local Plan Policy. Recognition that most developers will work to minimum accessibility standards unless required to do otherwise.
- There is definitely scope for planning policy as it relates to accessibility to be updated and reset. SCC is currently refreshing the Local Plan. This provides an opportunity to secure higher accessibility standards for future developments which require planning permission.
- Whilst the new Southampton City Vision Local Plan is being developed there is an opportunity to add to the existing policy to include embedding an accessibility checklist as referenced by Ian Loynes.
- The service recognises the need to engage more effectively with Disabled People, potentially via an access forum, and would welcome the opportunity to consult an Access Officer to help inform policy and decisions.
- Highway design is based on the Streetscape Toolkit, and relevant DfT guidelines. The Streetscape Toolkit was last updated in 2013 and a refresh is due to commence shortly.
- An independent road safety audit is carried out on all schemes. The audit will take into consideration access for a scheme and make recommendations if the scheme is not suitable. There are also other assessment tools that are used to determine if a scheme is suitable – one of note is Healthy Streets which asks questions in relation to surface quality, crossing points and ability to walk – this tool gives a score which allows comparison of before and after.
- Most highway schemes trigger the need for an Equality and Safety Impact Assessment to be carried out. This requires the project manager to consider how the scheme will impact on different groups of people, of which people with a disability is one such user group. When changes are made to the highway network, a Traffic Regulation Order is required to be consulted on, and there are disability representatives on the standard distribution list for consultation.
- The Council has recently increased its funding for footway repairs. The footway budget is £1.5m until the end of 2022/23 (an increase on previous years, normally £500k p.a).
- Accessibility for Disabled People is growing in importance and is the subject of an Active Travel funding bid in the next funding round.
- The refresh of the Streetscape Toolkit provides an opportunity to incorporate best practice with regards to accessibility in the Council's highways design standards moving forward.

- An improved mechanism by which Disable People are engaged and consulted on highways schemes and policies is also required.