

Accessible Southampton Inquiry - Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusions

Accessibility is key to inclusive cities. By tackling barriers and building inclusive cities it can enable disabled people, and those with access issues, to access services and contribute fully to public life.

Whilst recognising that Southampton is more accessible than many cities, and that improvements have been made, evidence presented to the Panel has proved that Southampton is not a city where all people can live in it and use all things and services without problems.

Cities such as Chester, Liverpool and Derby have shown what can be achieved when a city prioritises accessibility and develops a culture that helps to facilitate this. Southampton has the opportunity to learn from the good practice identified and use this to inform and guide plans for improving accessibility in Southampton.

To make citywide changes to accessibility requires a culture of continuous improvement, leadership and continual engagement with disabled people. It is critical to understand and listen to the needs of our community, to reflect on their perceptions of accessibility and to co-create solutions that bring meaningful changes.

A number of timely developments mean that this is an opportune moment to make the leap forward this city requires to become more accessible. The most significant of these being the refresh of the Local Plan and the opportunity it presents to commit to making accessibility and inclusion central to future development in Southampton.

Improving accessibility helps all residents and visitors, not just older and disabled people, and can deliver significant environmental, economic and social benefits.

GO! Southampton have recently outlined their ambition for Southampton to be an inclusive city that is accessible and welcoming to all. As a City Council we have a moral, financial and legal obligation to the approximately 37,500 disabled people in Southampton to work with them, and others, to make this ambition a reality.

Recommendations

In this report recommendations have been identified against each of the EU Access City Award key areas of accessibility. In summary, reflecting the key findings and conclusions the following actions are recommended to improve accessibility in Southampton.

To improve the accessibility of Southampton's built environment:

1. Enshrine the principles of accessibility and inclusion within the Southampton City Vision Local Plan - The Local Plan presents an opportunity for the city to enshrine within its development principles an overarching commitment to make accessibility and inclusion central to future development. Development standards should include -
 - Requiring all new development to meet the highest standards of accessibility and inclusion.
 - Requiring all new housing to be at least accessible or adaptable housing, with a minimum of 10% wheelchair accessible.
2. Whilst the new Southampton City Vision Local Plan is being developed embed an accessibility checklist within existing planning policy.
3. Update the Streetscene Toolkit to reflect available best practice with regards to accessibility of the public realm.
4. Establish a Southampton Disability Access Forum – Following the approach employed in [Chester](#), the Council should work with Go! Southampton, transport partners and local disability organisations to set-up and facilitate a cross-sector access forum. The forum, building on an existing Spectrum CIL led forum, would play a key role in designing and planning future developments as well as monitoring access across the city.
5. Employ an Access Officer (potential for this post to work across Hampshire authorities) – This post would work across the Council and its private sector partners on all aspects of access improvement and would be, alongside the Access Forum, a focus for all built environment access related complaints received by the Council.
6. Changing Places toilets – Building Regulations have been updated requiring Changing Places toilets to be a condition of new developments that meet certain criteria. To support publicly accessible facilities the Council should apply for funding if the Government announces a new round of grants to develop the provision of Changing Places.
7. Work in partnership with Go! Southampton to deliver their ambition for Southampton to be an accessible and inclusive city.

To improve the accessibility of Southampton's public transport and related infrastructure:

8. Utilising best practice guidance, and the proposed Southampton Disability Access Forum, ensure that good access is built in at the design phase of transport infrastructure schemes, including parking.

9. Analyse the findings from the taxi unmet needs survey and explore opportunities to move to 100% wheelchair accessible hackney carriages and to increase the number of wheelchair accessible private hire vehicles in Southampton.
10. With disabled people, review signage in Southampton, including the Legible Cities signage, to make it more accessible to disabled people.
11. Explore opportunities to establish ShopMobility schemes in Southampton's district centres.
12. Recognise the importance to disabled people of the disabled parking spaces in the Civic Centre Car Park when planning events in Southampton City Centre.

To improve the accessibility of Southampton's information and communication:

13. Adopt an accessible information standard. To support this approach Spectrum CIL has identified information standards that reflect best practice.
14. Incorporate, within the customer service training that is proposed for council staff via the Customer Experience Programme, an element on the 'language of disability'. This will help ensure that Council officers use appropriate language when communicating with disabled people. Once again, to support this, guidelines have been developed by Spectrum CIL.
15. Develop a checklist to ensure that meetings for the general public are accessible.
16. Adopt the standards underpinning the Community Access Symbol to make Southampton more accessible, and improve the lives of people with communication difficulties, and seek to encourage citywide take up and accreditation of the initiative.
17. Work with Go! Southampton and Spectrum CIL on proposals to produce access guides on a city-wide scale for Southampton, mirroring the approach followed in Sheffield. This will help to improve choice, control, independence and inclusivity.

To improve the accessibility of Southampton's public facilities and services:

18. Engage disabled people, potentially through the proposed Southampton Disability Access Forum, in the development of Equality Impact Assessments when it is expected that a new policy, development or decision will have an impact on disabled people.

19. Through the proposed access guides, undertake access audits of the City Council's public buildings and take recommended action to improve the accessibility of the buildings where practical and reasonable. All new public facilities should be fully accessible.

To improve the ownership and culture of accessibility:

20. Include a commitment to accessible services and facilities in the next iteration of the Council Plan and adopt, for the city, the simple but strong statement that Southampton aims to be the UK's most accessible city by 2040.

21. Update the Council's Equality Policy and re-confirm the commitment to the social model of disability.

22. Ensure that disability equality training is incorporated within the Council's diversity and inclusion training.

23. Appoint a permanent Diversity and Inclusion Lead who has an internal and external focus, enabling them to be proactive and to advocate for equality and diversity in Southampton and raise awareness of accessibility obligations under the Equality Act.

24. To promote good practice and to raise awareness of accessibility issues across the city, work with Go! Southampton and Spectrum CIL to establish an annual Accessible Southampton Awards.