

Footstreets and accessibility: an open community brief

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Introduction

This brief represents the varied perspectives of the thousands of York residents who face barriers getting to, moving through, using and enjoying York city centre.

Its first draft was prompted by the impact of the footstreets expansion, implemented in line with [government guidance](#) to provide the space for York to reopen and its economy recover while protecting the health of residents. The first draft was published in November 2020 following a drafting process involving the York Disability Rights Forum. Open briefs are designed as working documents, to be tested and refined through ongoing community engagement.

This second draft is published following further phases of engagement over the last twelve months and ahead of the decisions over the future footstreets arrangements in York. The detailed results of these further engagement exercises, and the minutes of public meetings and workshops, are also available to view.

www.york.gov.uk/AccessConsultation

www.york.gov.uk/MyCityCentre

These briefs are all live documents and will be updated with the full results of the engagement of autumn 2021.

Background

The council's understanding of the impact of removal of access to the footstreets has been built through a series of engagement exercises which started in 2019, when counter-terrorism specialists and police strongly advised the council to put in place measures to protect areas where large numbers of people gather from attack from hostile vehicles.

The council identified Blue Badge Holders and city centre business as key stakeholders to engage with in order to understand the impact of potential removal of access and explore any potential mitigations and reasonable accommodations. While this has remained the case throughout three years leading up to this report, engagement over the impact of the COVID-restrictions have brought requests for additional access from delivery couriers, from cycle campaign groups and from businesses responding to changing customer behaviour.

Following the engagement with Blue Badge Holders over the approach to phase one of the counter-terrorism measures, the council committed to holding open conversations to explore issues, impact and mitigation prior to implementation. However, COVID-19 restrictions quickly brought to an end the first incarnation of the My City Centre engagement vehicle, and required urgent action based on nationally set, public health driven rules.

Re-opening engagement

The council was unable to follow its usual proactive approach, instead having to implement changes in response to central government's reopening timetable and national rules following lockdown in spring 2020.

The engagement that followed was therefore designed to make sure the Council fully understood the impact of its decisions, both positive and negative, and inform changes to policy which responded to those impacts. The city centre reopening following COVID-19 prompted the most extensive engagement with disabled residents and review of access to York's city centre since the footstreets were introduced in the 1980s.

Insight has been built during layered and extensive engagement since the initial consultation of counter terrorism measures in spring 2019. This has included over 170 attendees at twelve workshops covering access to the city centre and impact of counter-terrorism and COVID-19 changes (150 at nine workshops since start of COVID-19). Our surveys have attracted 620 responses from disabled residents - including 540 from Blue Badge Holders – to four surveys available on and offline before the autumn engagement. This is an ongoing conversation and the brief remains a live document. We will publish details of this engagement and add to this community brief ahead of the Executive decisions in November 2021.

Changes to the Blue Badge exemptions have been advertised to all Blue Badge Holders in York whose contact details we hold, and three freepost return surveys distributed to every York household through Our City.

The surveys have been advertised through extensive media coverage and social media activity, tagging Disabled People's Organisations to enable sharing. Council officers have also given regular briefings through a growing 'keep in touch' mailing list and attended groups convened by groups including York Disability Rights Forum, My Sight York, the Advocacy Forum, and Age friendly York Citizens Group.

The engagement has been made accessible through initial workshops co-facilitated with York Disability Rights Forum, the use of British Sign Language translators, published Easy Read version and information distributed through partner networks.

The major themes

The competition for space

One of the key issues underpinning the conversations about current arrangements has been the 'competition' for the limited space available in York, and differing perspectives – particularly relating to personal safety – of uses. It is essential that engagement reveals and reflects the different experiences,

perspectives and opinions about access to the city centre, especially where those perspectives differ.

While some respondents believe this can – and indeed be used in order to – create division or opposition between groups, the engagement approach is designed to surface tensions in order to increase understanding, communicate the constraints on council policy (such as finance, law and guidance over transport, security and COVID19 restrictions), and of course the perspectives of others. This practice has led to constructive rather than adversarial work across physical and digital engagement platforms across the council’s regeneration schemes. This approach was taken to produce the original Community Open Brief last year.

The council does not treat any group as homogenous. The council’s engagement has attempted to draw out the range of access barriers and needs which need to be addressed. Where two needs would appear to conflict (such as a desire for vehicle-free streets against a desire for Blue Badge Access), the council has a duty to understand those impacts. It then explores the issues arising and potential mitigations with those affected groups.

All engagement has reinforced need for an array of solutions to be implemented. Many groups continue to call for the reinstatement of Blue Badge Access until these are identified and implemented.

This diversity of opinion is replicated within the business community. With post-COVID purchasing habits altering business models, we now have areas of the city centre where businesses desiring increased pedestrianisation to enable outdoor seating operate next door to retailers who would prefer continual access throughout the day to enable multiple deliveries to and from their premises.

Benefits of the footstreets (to those who can access them)

The community open brief summarises the potential access benefits of increased pedestrianisation, as revealed through surveys and workshops. Additional space and fewer vehicles increase perceptions of safety, while the

use of wider, flatter road surfaces is more accessible and navigable than the city's often narrow and uneven pavements. While some disabled residents felt that the footstreets extension for COVID-reopening had made moving through the city 'much easier', others feel very strongly that the potential benefits will never be felt by them as the removal of the Blue Badge exemption has effectively excluded them from entering the footstreets.

While the council's engagement has rightly focused on those people most likely to be negatively impacted by the changes, the potential and perceived benefits of the further removal of vehicles has still featured within our engagement. The differing perspectives were again evident in the workshops over accessible routes held in June 2021, with disabled residents offering opposed positions on the impact of reopening Goodramgate to traffic, while one disabled respondent referenced benefits of the extension when submitting in support of the traffic regulation order to remove the Blue Badge exemption.

Barriers to realising the access benefits

Blind and partially-sighted residents and older people had initially expressed stronger support for the reduced traffic and congestion. My Sight York and Sight Loss Council members have more recently expressed concerns at the loss of Blue Badge and taxi access and indicated support for the reinstatement of the Blue Badge exemption.

Council officers also joined a city centre tour organised by the Sight Loss Council, as well as on-site workshops organised as part of this summer's engagement. Pavement café furniture, barriers, signs and bollards present an ongoing challenge to many disabled people. Responses to the engagement request consistent use of accessibility measures, such as tap rails and large, bold signage, backed up by enforcement action against businesses which do not consistently meet them. The York Access Hub has asked for its [collection of personal experiences](#) to be considered as part of the response to consultation over the footstreets.

Changing relationship with the city centre exclusion

Among the disabled respondents to last year's surveys, Blue Badge Holders were far less likely to agree with the positive sentiments about the footstreets changes, both compared with the general population and those identifying as disabled. Even beyond the additional Blue Badge parking and November 2020's decision to reinstate Deangate and College Green, for a group of Blue Badge Holders the changes have massively disrupted, and in some cases ended, their relationships with the footstreets.

The consultation responses and related campaigns reflect the fact that a group of Blue Badge Holders believe that the changes represent a permanent exclusion from York's city centre, and discrimination against their rights under the Equality Act 2010. Consultation cannot determine whether discrimination has taken place - this matter will be addressed through the decision-making process.

It is, however, clear that the changes have led to stressful disruption to long-established routines and relationships with specific shops and services, including leisure activities, post office services and formal social groups. This group believe there is no available mitigation against the removal of the Blue Badge exemption. This has been raised throughout all the access and city centre engagement which has taken place, and is a position supported by the York Human Rights City Network.

The Blue Badge Holders point to several factors in concluding that the exemption cannot be mitigated against:

- A Blue Badge is a mitigation in itself against inaccessibility, and can offer life-changing independence to those who have access to a car or taxi.
- A car is independence, not a transport preference. To some it is an essential safe haven and a place to store medicines and equipment.
- Among other criteria, A Blue Badge is given to people who are unable to walk a certain distance, although there is an acceptance that the law is not definitive over when and how stated alternatives to parking - such as rest points - are appropriate.
- Mobility aids are not appropriate for some people, including one respondent who reports that using one would contradict medical advice.

Driving as independence, not convenience

Decisions over parking and alternatives need to reflect the fact that travel by car is more than a transport preference for many, and represents an essential need to some. A car can be a safe haven; something which allows control and independence to be exercised, a place to store medicines and give the opportunity for spontaneity. Carrying purchases vary far can be a problem for people using crutches or walking aids for example, so a few short trips to and from the car can suit some people's needs better.

A Blue Badge can give life-changing independence and is in itself a mitigation against inaccessibility. Alternative parking or access often require additional efforts and processes. Booking appointments to use a train, barriers which require a third party to give access, waiting for a ramp or a specially adapted taxi can lead to stress, feelings of dependence and 'being special'.

Waiting for unknown lengths of time, away from facilities like accessible toilets and suitable seating, is a source of great anxiety for many. Some need to be able to leave an area quickly for a variety of reasons.

The same principle needs to be applied to alternative transport options for those who don't have access to a car, to Blue Badge parking or would simply prefer to travel another way.

The alternative measures

The alternative measures introduced in York following the first lockdown were not deemed adequate by many, leading to changes following November 2020's Executive. 80% of disabled respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that there were enough parking places close enough to access the city centre, and 9% believed the free taxi shuttle was a useful service.

The workshops highlighted several issues to consider when looking at other potential mitigations or accommodations, including the lack of flexibility of a single drop-off point, the need for cover, and the need for seating and accessible facilities in any place where disabled people are expected to wait for any length of time. There were also issues with being dropped off in areas used

by delivery drivers, and a sometimes painful process associated with transferring between vehicles.

Challenging the risk

Respondents have challenged several of the assertions that the presence of Blue Badge Holder parking and driving on the footstreets leads to increased risk.

Usage levels

Several respondents and disabled groups have questioned the council's justification for removing access to Blue Badge Holders while continuing to offer exemptions to a number of other users.

At a recent meeting hosted by the York Human Rights City Network, disabled people's organisations asserted that relatively few Blue Badge Holders would need to use the closer-proximity access. The group has asked the council for details of parking figures in the previously permitted footstreets areas. A pre-COVID survey found that between 80 and 120 Blue Badge vehicles parking on the affected streets per day, with peak demand in the morning at around 11:30 but remaining high until 14:30.

However, it is unclear how the council could determine which Blue Badge Holders would or should be given preference, by what means, and if indeed this practice may be considered discriminatory or arbitrary by other Blue Badge Holders either within or outside York.

There is no way of telling how much of the previous parking has now been displaced to other areas of the city centre, where Blue Badge parking remains increasingly popular. The absolute minimum use of Blue Badge parking in the city centre between 451 and 686 (including 75 to 119 in on-street Blue badge bays) uses per week since the beginning of June. The figure is likely to be much higher, as these figures are based on a count of use at a single point in time each day. Also, it does not include any parking on double yellow lines, including the parking on the large area of College Green and Deangate which was restored following the Executive's decision in November 2020.

Counter-terrorism

It is largely but not universally accepted that counter-terrorism measures could represent a 'legitimate aim', as envisaged within the Human Rights Act, for limiting access. However, there is a degree of cynicism regarding the level of risk from the type of attack which the Hostile Vehicle Measures are designed to prevent. The police's counter-terrorism expert for the region has countered this, stating that the measures have saved lives in events such as the London Bridge attack of 3 June 2017. The terrorism threat in the UK is 'Substantial' – meaning an attack in the UK is likely - and York's unique combination as an iconic symbol of British Christianity and culture, coupled with large volumes of people using the city centre every day, mean protection is necessary.

The Human Rights City network asks the council to consider how two other cities with similar historic features and large volumes of visitors are allowing Blue Badge Holder access to some parts of the areas protected by counter terrorism measures. Chester is allowing access through a staffed barrier, while Bath has recently consulted on proposals to allow access to one of three protected areas using access controlled through CCTV cameras.

While some workshop respondents asked if temporary measures could be used at peak times and events to prevent permanent removal of the exemption, others referenced large issues over access through the national asset barriers which York will once again have to use to keep the city safe during Christmas 2021 events.

Other accessibility issues

The extensive engagement has captured access barriers and considerations beyond the removal of the Blue Badge exemption. These themes have informed a large part of the work programme leading to the recommendations being considered by the Executive. More recent engagement over some of these issues has highlighted that York is currently falling short of expectations in some of these key areas.

There are many parts of York's medieval city centre which are viewed as 'no go' for many disabled users, with streets like the Shambles combining crowds,

cobbles and narrow pavements. Narrow or poor quality pavements and cobbles, like those at College Green, can often force people into the road. While there is a general acceptance that York's special historic character presents some barriers, there remain many opportunities to improve accessibility in the rest of the city.

Quality of footways and pavements in York need to improve

Disabled residents report that many of the surfaces and pathways are slippery, uneven and narrow, providing trip hazards and making journeys using mobility aids and wheelchairs painful and difficult. They often take the 'path of least resistance', which can involve the road itself. Some kerbs are not 'properly dropped'. The location and proximity of a parking space is only useful if the journey is smooth.

The My City Centre summer survey shows that **quality of pavements** ranks highly in disabled access priorities, but scores poorly when rating the city's current provisions. While using the street surface may be preferable to the narrow and often uneven pavements in York, good quality dropped kerbs and other accessibility measures – such as tactile pavements – are essential to allow disabled people to use shops and services. These need to be in the right place and of the right volume to make sure disabled people are not forced to regularly turn back on themselves to take a long way round street furniture.

Level routes to town are preferred, and are more important than proximity for some people - especially for those propelling or pushing a wheelchair. Some routes don't have any dropped kerbs, some are too steep, and some have a dip between the pavement and the road where the wheel gets stuck.

Electric wheelchairs can help overcome the issues of distance, but the poor surfaces can still lead to discomfort. Tactile surfaces can be difficult with mobility aids, these are not necessarily viewed as the ideal solution by Blind and Partially Sighted residents, but they are accepted as the only real option. Lighting and coloured surfaces have been suggested in past consultations.

Frequent **rest points** are vital, along with a system which identifies priority for those with mobility needs, (requested every 15 metres). There are too few

places to stop and rest in York city centre, and routes from access points like car parks should be prioritised.

An **accessible land train** moving through the city centre has been raised both in the survey and workshops. The idea of an **accessible shuttle service** was developed at the summer's accessible routes workshops. While it would not be a solution for all users or replace Blue Badge parking in the city centre, it could be part of the range of measures to improve access to the city centre.

Accessible toilets are ranked as a priority by 60% of disabled respondents to the summer's city centre survey, only 3% of respondents believe the current provision in York City Centre is adequate.

Information makes a journey possible

Planning a journey requires detailed and accessible information, and a level of confidence that the journey will be straightforward and that the preferred transport option will be accessible. Ease of journey, coupled with greater access, is leading many to choose 'out of city' locations. Maps detailing the location and type of rest points (detailed down to whether benches have backs) would be best practice, with Chatsworth House's [accessibility map](#) identified as a positive example.

Organisations need to provide lots of detail about services to give people the independence to choose the one that best suits them. This includes where to get the service, how much it costs and times, rather than refer to a phone number to call for more information.

Many use Google Street View to establish arrangements and to plan routes. Future communications need to include pictures or very detailed maps, as Google Street View may not show a contemporary picture (for example, Dundas Street's google street view was taken in August 2019). Detailed descriptions must also be made available to Blind and Partially Sighted people.

The fast-changing picture and lack of detail around the shuttle taxi service in the initial communications undermined confidence of some potential users. Information on the COVID-secure procedures, the taxi operators, and the

process for booking a return trip and the vehicle types made at a later date were all added to the web pages, and the use of the service has grown.

Private hire taxis and Hackney cabs (as opposed to the taxi shuttle service)

Concerns regarding coronavirus risk, the accessibility of vehicles, and the reduced capacity to be dropped closer to desired shops and services are highlighted in general discussions of taxis. One respondent reported anxiety caused by experience of taxis failing to turn up on time or be accessible when they arrived. The lack of availability of wheelchair taxis at school pick-up and drop-off time was raised. Users would like to see pooled information from on available vehicles and check understanding of what 'accessible' means, as many are suitable for some wheelchairs but not others. Respondents encouraged the council to facilitate communication between taxi and private hire associations and disabled groups following this feedback.

Accessible parking is about both place and type of space

The majority of respondents are unable to comfortably walk very far. Government guidance states that applicants who can walk more than 80 metres and do not demonstrate very considerable difficulty in walking through any other factors would usually not be deemed as eligible for a Blue Badge. This means a relatively small increase in the footstreets area – for example extending the walk from Castlegate to Castle Car Park - could be the difference between making a journey possible or not.

It is also clear that many people have chosen their medical practitioners, shops and services because of the historic availability of close parking, and others have 'set routes' based on knowledge of routes, pavements and obstacles to avoid. As one respondent puts it, they have learned the 'path of least resistance'. Moving parking, adding street furniture and other changes could force a change in well-established behaviour.

The replacement parking at St Saviourgate, Carmelite Street, Dundas Street and Duncombe Place is welcomed, but as it was introduced after the main changes

means that not everyone knows about it. However, despite some of the new parking being very close to the lost parking, there is general consensus that the new parking is not 'on the edge of the city centre' in the way Blake Street, Lendal and Goodramgate are. This has been reinforced in the consultations over the additional parking proposed as part of the process to remove the Blue Badge exemption. It may be useful for some people to access some places, but it is not deemed a mitigation or replacement for the parking which has been removed.

The new temporary parking closer to the city centre is also limited in numbers, leading to anxiety over the possibility that it will be full. One respondent reports that they had never struggled to park in York city centre prior to the Blue Badge footstreets exemption being removed, but now they have been unable to find parking and had to shop elsewhere.

The type of space is as important as place

The location of the parking bays, bus stops, taxi and shuttle taxi drop-off is only part of the story. The city centre offer is compared unfavourably by some to the experience at purpose built out-of-town shopping centres like the designer outlet. However, out of town shopping centres were identified by blind respondents as being potentially dangerous, as pedestrians have to cross many open and unmarked roads. Parking needs to accommodate a 'nose-first' approach, with space to unload from the side and back of the vehicle. Unloading a mobility aid onto busy roads or pavements can be very difficult and stressful, and places those doing so in direct conflict with other road and pavement users, whose lack of understanding can often lead to abusive language and behaviour. Drop off points and bus stops also need to be designed to reflect the need for space.

The ongoing engagement has highlighted frustration with the use of **shared parking bays** and a perceived lack of enforcement of abuse by other users. The Duncombe Place bays are highlighted as an extreme example, with delivery drivers occupying spaces leading to aborted visits to the city centre. In contrast, these shared spaces are appreciated by the delivery drivers and couriers.

Disabled people without a Blue Badge also share a sense of danger using parking bays. For those with guide and assistance dogs there can be limited space to get their dog in and out of the car safely, especially if they cannot hear traffic behind them.

Buses

Blue Badge parking is important, but disabled residents use a variety of transport modes which require attention. Buses are the most popular mode of transport used by disabled respondents to the summer city centre access survey, with Blind and Partially Sighted residents in particular relying on them. There is currently no way to guarantee that the bus you are waiting for has room on it for a wheelchair. Even though all of York's buses meet accessible standards, there is sometimes difficulty with space for larger wheelchairs and wheeled walkers. York Bus Forum hope that it will prove possible to include more information on future versions of bus apps.

Many Blind and Partially Sighted people rely on buses. While some are confident travelling on buses and enjoy the fact that they are not busy, many are not traveling due to concerns about judging a 2m distance or being able to follow social distancing arrangements. York Bus Forum support further action, for example by offering explanatory leaflets in braille.

Wheelchair users report an inconsistent and unpredictable experience on public transport, which depends largely on the attitudes of fellow passengers and the confidence and willingness of drivers to implement the priority of space for disabled people. York Bus Forum will continue to work with bus operators to address this issue.

Removing time restrictions on the disabled bus pass, or removing park and ride fares, could make it a more attractive option for some.

One respondent reported that their bus pass is useless as they 'have not been able to find out how to make an appointment to get the 'training' to be able to take my scooter on buses.' York Bus Forum urge the council and bus operators to work together to ensure there is clear guidance on how to access this

training and to make this more widely known. Another referenced limited evening and Sunday service.

Bus apps have reduced waiting times, and visual display schemes would be useful in district/secondary shopping areas. Age Friendly York have discussed piloting a battery operated screen that if successful could be rolled out into the suburbs, as the main cost implication was installing an electric cable.

Dial and ride provide a mini bus service which will meet some of the identified needs but is not considered appropriate by all.

Cycling as a mobility aid... and a perceived risk to others

The foot streets extension for disabled cyclists is potentially very positive, providing they can be allowed in – and appropriate locking facilities are available. Cycling has never been allowed in footstreets. Cycles are a mobility aid for many, so a blanket ban on cycling in the footstreets may either remove access for them or force them to switch behaviour to drive, park and use a wheelchair. This is less convenient, adds to congestion and discomfort – both as a result of transferring from vehicle to vehicle and due to the suitability of York’s street surfaces when using any wheelchair. There are also concerns that introducing some cycles will lead to a ‘free-for-all’ of bikes on the foot streets, and that a blue-badge style scheme may have to be operated and effectively enforced.

Any trial would need to be accompanied by an education campaign; for rangers and other security or enforcement staff to understand who and why cyclists are in the foot streets, and the public so disabled cyclists do not receive complaints or abuse while legitimately using their cycles. The shared space around York Minster is identified as unpopular and dangerous. Notably, there was confusion over whether there is a marked cycle path in this area.

The perceived risk of cyclists in pedestrianised areas is a serious concern highlighted by both Blind and Partially-Sighted respondents and the Age Friendly York group. One suggestion is to clearly mark cycling routes using textured surfaces, and for cyclists to be asked to use bells to warn people that they are approaching junctions. There are also differing perspectives on shared spaces. Some believe the shared spaces slow cyclists down, which has been the

council's rationale for using them, while others believe physical lines segregating the areas work better. One participant observed that it is often pedestrians in the cycle lane that will often force cyclists onto the pedestrian side of the paths.

Cycling in general

Cycling in the city centre is remains a divisive issue amongst residents. While some cycle campaigners would like to see the restriction on cycling through the city centre removed entirely, others have proposed a dedicated route through the city centre.

However, such shared pedestrian spaces are unpopular with some residents, who already feel less safe as a result of cycling through shared areas like the Minster or New Walk.

Residents also feel perceptions of safety is a major barrier to increased cycling to the city centre, with roads like the inner ring road in particular deemed unsuitable if travelling with young children. The workshops also identified that safe and segregated cycle routes are welcome, but often require cyclists to navigate less-safe roads in order to reach them.

Regardless of routes and exemptions, many residents believe that active travel to the city centre would increase with improved, secure cycle parking which responds to the variety of sizes, weights and wheelbases of modern bikes.

Couriers and delivery

The pandemic has potentially changed delivery patterns and demand forever. The increase in volumes and a business model driven by remote and impersonal app-based businesses has caused anxiety for both the couriers and delivery drivers, as well as other city centre users.

Participants suggested that, without refined governance and clear cycling lanes, the volume of delivery cyclists and e-cyclists could become unmanageable for both the delivery drivers as well as the pedestrians and vehicles navigating around them.

Cycle couriers asked for exemptions in order to reduce delivery times and improve performance, although many of the problems outlined by couriers were issues with the apps and processes that the council could not solve. A self-organised 'union' offered to sign up to code of conduct to reassure the public that they would use this responsibly.

Delivery hubs for larger deliveries were proposed to avoid bottle necks in popular delivery points across the city centre. It was also referenced that other cities are investing in cargo bikes and breaking deliveries into smaller, more regular deliveries, particularly to offices and small businesses.

The dual use of loading bays in Duncombe Place was welcomed by participants, contradicting the views of some disabled residents who find the location dangerous due to high levels of activity.

Walk York provided supporting feedback from a pedestrian's viewpoint, expressing frustration at delivery bottlenecks in the city centre, particularly the market, due to the large number of vehicles making it difficult to walk through the centre before 10.30am.

Off-street parking

One Blue Badge Holder requested an increase in the amount of Blue Badge parking in Piccadilly. Well-lit, open car parks are preferred but those closest to town, like Castle, have the worst surface and smallest spaces. Non Blue-Badge holders highlight the cost of parking in York, and the size of spaces in Castle car park as major factors pushing them to shop in cheaper, non-pedestrianised centres nearby.

The council's multi-storey car parks offer proximity to the city centre, but several issues need to be addressed before they are viewed as an option by many.

There are several design features which need to be considered:

- Some of those concerns are common to all drivers, in particular concerns about security and a risk of being trapped by a failed lift. If a lift

is not working, this information should be available before a driver enters the car park, and preferably before they start their journey.

- Ticket machines need to be accessible.
- Type of space is as important as place (see below)
- Disabled parking in an area where there is no through traffic between the vehicle and the exit
- Visibility to/of drivers backing out is essential
- Height restrictions in all car parks exclude some models of adapted vehicles. Where the height barriers are removed, this needs to be communicated to Blue Badge holders.

Shopmobility and scooters/wheelchairs

Shopmobility is identified as a useful and good service within workshops over the foot streets and counter-terrorism, but is clearly not viewed as an option for all. The city centre surveys in summer 2020 revealed that Shopmobility in York is highly valued by its users but as a service is not well understood. Shopmobility is a key factor in the award-winning accessibility provision in Chester.

For a number of residents in York, it has been used as an introduction to mobility scooters and power chairs before buying one. Limitations to the service have been highlighted throughout the engagement. Its location in Piccadilly multi-storey puts some off using it, but is valued by others. The cost and opening times are also highlighted as barriers to use. One user has identified an issue that doors to reach the lifts in the car park are not automatic, so present difficulties if also operating a mobility aid.

One participant commented that hiring a mobility aid 'where I park' would be useful, with others highlighted the hubs in Amsterdam and London. The independent review has suggested that 'parking hubs' could be created and if this suggestion comes to fruition, mobility scooter/ wheelchair hire at these points could be considered. Previous engagement has highlighted the need for more concerted marketing of Shopmobility to residents, with a more effective web presence a key priority. The pandemic interrupted this work.

Buying your own electric wheelchair or mobility scooter is expensive, requires home storage and may require a second person or expensive vehicle adaptations to load and unload it.

Time and timing

Time is a limiting factor. Previous consultations have identified that many Blue Badge holders feel the three-hour restriction on double yellow lines is not long enough to do several things, especially engage in leisure like eating out or going to the cinema. Others felt that the time limit on these badges should be greatly increased because car parks, as opposed to City Centre Blue Badge parking bays, often entail a longer and timelier journey into town when needing to use mobility aids. The suggestion of providing more seating on routes also demonstrates that the journey into the centre will take longer.

Some disabled people are able and choose to visit the city centre before the morning footstreets restrictions begin. However, this is not an option for many for a variety of reasons, including set times for carer support, and many shops open at 10am so this only allows 30 minutes to access shops and services before leaving.

They will often be competing with delivery drivers looking to do the same. The extension into the evening makes accessing the shops before they close more difficult. This is a particular issue with services like banks, many of which have shortened their opening hours. The evening extension has affected some user's ability to attend evening groups on Spurriergate and at Friends' Meeting House, and once lockdowns are finished with, the 8.00 pm finish will have a greater effect on Blue Badge Holders. Most city centre evening and cultural events start before 8.00 pm, meaning Blue Badge user cannot park centrally to attend them.

A changing city

The footstreets extension is not the only thing which has changed in the city centre. City centres have been changing rapidly, with key services like banks, post offices and many retailers altering services as customer behaviours change. The coronavirus has accelerated some of the anticipated impacts on city centres, and the true long-term impact on customer behaviour and the market's response will continue to emerge in the coming years.

Some banks, for example, have shortened opening hours and the Co-op is closing its city centre branch, a trend which is expected to become increasingly common as more and more services move online. These will exacerbate the impacts of the changes to the city centre and the foot streets. One shop which many residents reference as a major reason to visit the city centre had announced plans to down-size its premises even before the pandemic.

Major regenerations of the Castle Gateway, York Central and other parts of the city will provide new public spaces, destinations, transport routes and places to work for all residents, and the locations and types of shops and services will change alongside these.

City Centre residents

An increasing number of people now live in the city centre, including above commercial buildings. Some residents welcome the footstreet extensions, noting improved access and safety, a more pleasant environment and better air quality (St. Leonard's Place, Museum Street and St. Leonard's Mews Residents Group). However, some residents living in the city centre think footstreets add complications of access and delivery arrangements.

This includes disabled people, who feel the restrictions limit important visits to their home by vehicles, including deliveries and taxis.

One city centre resident describes several issues linked to the evening times, including access for tradespeople, key services like vets, trips to the recycling centre and dropping off shopping. A resident also suggested that the fact tradespeople can no longer leave properties within the footstreets at 5pm each day is having an impact on the maintenance of their listed building.

What enables and what stops me

Around half the respondents to the online survey (September Our City) identified barriers to enjoying the city centre for the full range of what it has to offer; working, learning, shopping, leisure and accessing services and healthcare. The majority of these cite the new parking measures as the main barrier, but there are other reasons identified to consider.

As well as the quality of surfaces identified above, the shops themselves feature heavily. Many of the shops in town, even modern buildings and recent conversions, are inaccessible. Getting a shop's attention to utilise temporary ramp access, if available, is often difficult. A campaign to increase local shop's awareness of the size of the disabled market, accommodations they can make to attract the purple pound, and use of AccessAble guides to promote good businesses, could encourage businesses to act. The council and Make it York have worked with the York Disability Rights Forum to share some initial information and guidance with businesses.

Kindness and empathy

The engagement is littered with examples of respondents reporting hostile behaviour towards them. This ranges from general impatience to verbal abuse, and a failure of many to consider disability in their daily behaviour.

Human Rights considerations

Police advisors originally framed the need for counter-terrorism measures as a human rights issue, and the council has recently been asked by the city Human rights Network to reconsider the proposals to remove Blue Badge exemptions through a human rights lens.

Future relationships

Whatever the outcome of the November's decisions, and despite the extensive efforts to create an in-depth and accessible engagement to understand and find solutions to the issues facing access to the city centre, there is clearly a need to rebuild trust between some several stakeholders and the council.

Throughout engagement and the surrounding narrative played out through campaigns, media articles and responses to consultations, the distrust of motives is as strong as the frustration with outcomes. While the council has attempted to replicate it's 'My' engagement methodology, which surfaces existing tensions and attempts to resolve those by connecting those stakeholders in the process of making change together, this has been perceived as an attempt to create conflict between stakeholders.

Cycling groups, delivery drivers, Blue Badge Holders and some disabled people's organisations have all identified areas where they believe the engagement process can be improved, including criticisms of too much consultation, not enough deep listening, a lack of co-design of solutions and framing questions to generate a certain response.