



Recommendations from Imtac on public realm proposals for Banbridge town centre

(October 2019)

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About Imtac

The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (Imtac) is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Its role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

The aim of the Committee is to ensure that older people and disabled people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Infrastructure (hereafter referred to as the Department).

About this report

This report has been developed by Imtac in response to a meeting hosted by Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon District Council in Banbridge on the 6th August 2019 to discuss proposals for public realm improvements for a number of streets in the town. Following the meeting Imtac undertook a street audit of the streets proposed for improvement. This paper highlights the findings of the audit, identifies many current issues and challenges on the streets concerned and includes key recommendations from the Committee designed to ensure future improvements benefit older people and disabled people in particular.

Street audit findings

The main streets included in the proposed scheme are Church Square, Bridge Street and Newry Street (Church Square and Bridge Street are located within the Area of Townscape Character, with many listed buildings). In addition the scheme proposes improvements to sections of a number of streets including Commercial Road, Scarva Street, Dromore Street, Downshire Place and Windsor Terrace (leading to Castlewellan Road). Finally the scheme includes a number of small streets, multiple vehicle entrances and other linkages to off street car parking close to the town centre.

Dromore Street/Church Square

The eastern footway of Dromore Street approaching its junction with Church Square and Church Street is relatively narrow but uncluttered. There is a vehicle entrance on the footway meaning surfaces are not consistently level. This is a significant issue throughout the town centre.



There is a controlled crossing across Dromore Street at the junction with Church Street/Church Square. Access to the western footway is via a small triangular traffic island which will very difficult for some disabled people to use independently. Tactile paving and control boxes have been positioned correctly.



There is an uncontrolled crossing at the junction with Burnview Terrace. The tactile paving is laid correctly but damaged in places. There are sections of dropped kerb without tactile paving presenting a potential hazard for people with visual impairment. Contrast between the tactile paving and surrounding pavement could be improved.



The footways on Burnview Terrace linking to the car park are narrow and in poor condition. Shop displays create obstructions on the northern side.



The eastern footway on Church Square broadens close to The Coach public house. One of the main bus stops for services from Belfast is located at this point.



There is a controlled crossing across Church Square approaching its junction with Windsor Terrace (leading to Castlewellan Road). The crossing is staggered with a traffic island at the midpoint. Tactile paving and control boxes have been correctly positioned at the crossing.



Although the footway is broad approaching the junction with Windsor Terrace steps to a B1 listed building and a vehicle entrance present potential hazards to people with visual impairment. Pedestrian railings along the kerb line suggest traffic levels impact significantly on the amenity of this area.



There is a controlled crossing at the junction of Church Street and Windsor Terrace. The crossing is split with a traffic island at its mid point. Tactile paving and controlled crossings have been positioned correctly, although the tactile tail at the northern side does not extend to the building line.



Footways on Windsor Terrace are narrower and in poorer condition compared to Church Square. A junction without tactile paving and A Boards create potential hazards on the southern footway.



There is a wide section of footway approaching the bridge on the eastern side of Church Square. The positioning of street furniture including trees does little to make this a welcoming or accessible space.



There is another vehicle entrance approaching the bridge on Church Square. The absence of tactile paving presents a potential hazard for people with a visual impairment. The footway on the bridge itself is wide and uncluttered.



There is a controlled crossing across Huntly Road at its junction with Bridge Street and Church Square. The positioning of a lighting column on the northern side of the crossing obstructs access towards Church Square. Pedestrian railings emphasise the impact of traffic in the area.



The footway on the bridge on the western side of Church Square is broad and uncluttered.



The western footway is significantly narrowed by building works after the bridge. This is no ideal on what is a very heavily trafficked area. Traffic signage poles create additional hazards.



Pedestrian railings reappear approaching the controlled crossing across Church Square. The entrance to Water Street means there is a kerb show on the footway by the carriageway. This is replicated at the entrance to Seapatrck Parish Church.



There is a bus stop shortly after this point on Church Square serviced by buses travelling to Belfast. Given the importance of this service the current footway width is narrow. The location of the traffic sign support obstructs a straight line access.



The vehicle entrance to Seapatrck Parish Church near the junction with Church Street has been constructed with a raised table with variable kerb shows at either side of the footway and no tactile paving, presenting significant hazards for disabled people.



There are a series of complex controlled pedestrian crossings across Church Street at its junctions with Church Square and Dromore Street. Although tactile paving and control boxes have been installed correctly, the angular design of crossings at the junction means some disabled people will find using it very difficult or impossible without assistance.



Bridge Street

The eastern of footway of Bridge close to the junction with Church Square is cluttered with street signage poles, some of which appear to be redundant.



There is a controlled crossing across Bridge Street close to the junction with Church Square. The crossing is staggered with a traffic island at its mid point. Pedestrian railings have been provided on the island. Tactile paving and control boxes have been installed correctly.



Although the eastern footway is broad the lack of consistency in the location of street furniture including bollards and lighting columns as well as vehicle entrances with kerb shows close to the carriageway create potential hazards for people with visual impairment.



There is an uncontrolled crossing across the junction with Bridge Street East. The tactile paving does not contrast sufficiently with the surrounding pavement and lacks sufficient depth of tile on the southern side of the junction.



The surfaces on the footways on Bridge Street East are good. The provision seating and trees provide attractive links to and from Solitude Park and a nearby off-street car park. A mix of seating types would make the area more inclusive.



Shortly after this junction there is a controlled crossing across Bridge Street. The crossing is staggered with a traffic island at its mid point. The traffic island includes pedestrian railings. Tactile paving and control boxes have been installed correctly.



The gradient of the footway increases significantly after this point, approaching the historic bridge. A vehicle entrance with some kerb show and clutter from shops create potential hazards and the position of street lighting columns impact on clear footway width.



The western footway on Bridge Street is partially obstructed by ramped access to a B1 listed building close to the junction with Huntly Road and Church Square. Further street clutter impacts on access in the area.



Bollards, a vehicle entrance, a parked motorbike and an A Board all create hazards for people with a visual impairment on the western footway.



Two linkages either side of the Imperial Public House provide access to the Downshire Place off street car park. The area is dated with poor surfaces and in need of improvement. One access point to the car park is stepped although a step free alternative is available via a dropped kerb without tactile paving provided.



The gradient of the western footway increases approaching the bridge. Vehicle entrances, a pavement cafe and shop displays on the pavement create potential hazards for people with a visual impairment.



There is an uncontrolled across Bridge Street at the junction with Victoria Street. Although tactile paving has been installed correctly, it does not contrast sufficiently with surrounding paving.



Victoria Street provides a linkage to the off street car park. A footway is provided on the southern side only and was obstructed on the day of the audit by a bin.



The gradient of Bridge Street increases significantly after this point. Vehicle entrances and steps into building create potential hazards for people with a visual impairment.



Access around the B1 Listed Downshire Bridge

Bridge Street, Newry Street, Rathriland Street and Scarva Street all converge at the top of Downshire Bridge. The area is heavily trafficked and a raised table as been created on the bridge to slow traffic which has resulted in no kerb delineation in the area. Pedestrian sight lines are poor in places due to parked cars.



A series of uncontrolled crossings have been provided for pedestrians to cross the streets adjacent to the bridge. Stick down tactile tiles have been used on the bridge because of its listed status.



Uncontrolled crossings have been provided across Scarva Street and Rathfriland Street. Tactile paving layout does not meet standards. The tactile paving does not sufficiently contrast with surrounding pavements in places. The associated bollards do not include a strong visibility strip.



The area around the bridge is a hostile environment for most pedestrians but completely inaccessible for many disabled people

Scarva Street

There is a Zebra crossing close to the Post Office on Scarva Street. The footway and tactile paving condition is not as good as on other streets in the town centre.



The southern footway on Scarva Street is narrow and uneven in places. Bins and shop displays on the pavement create potential hazards.



There is an uncontrolled raised table crossing at the junction with Commercial Road. Tactile paving is of insufficient depth and only partially covers the section of flush surface between footway and carriageway. The design of the junction makes it inaccessible to some disabled people.



On the northern footway there is no uncontrolled crossing across Downshire Place. No dropped kerbs or tactile paving has been provided at this junction.



The northern footway is narrow and uneven in places. There are a number of vehicle entrances associated with the post office but no tactile indicators for people with a visual impairment.



Downshire Place

The footway on the western side of Downshire Place is uneven in places. There is a redundant uncontrolled crossing at a building site entrance without tactile paving.



There is a dropped kerb without tactile paving on the western footway level with the entrance to the car park on eastern footway. A parking bay on the eastern carriageway obstructs access to the dropped kerb on the eastern footway.



There is an uncontrolled crossing across the junction with Victoria Street. No tactile paving has been provided and the entrance to cinema on the northern side of the crossing obstructs access.



The northern footway on Victoria Street is wide and uncluttered. The southern footway is uneven and obstructed by security bollards around the old courthouse building.



The eastern footway of Downshire Place is wide and uncluttered. However there is a significant gradient on the footway adjacent to the off street car park.



Ramped pedestrian access to the car park is provided close to this point. A handrail has been provided on one side but the surfacing and gradient of the ramp should be improved.



The positioning of traffic signage and a vehicle entrance to the post office are potential hazards for people with visual impairment on the eastern footway close to the junction with Scarva Street.



Newry Street

Vehicle entrances and A Boards create potential hazards for people with a visual impairment on the eastern footway of Newry Street close to the junction with Rathriland Street.



A Boards and unscreened pavement cafes are potential hazards along the eastern footway, although some effort has been made to locate these close to the building line.



There are two controlled crossings across Newry Street. Both are staggered with pedestrian railings provided on the island. Tactile paving and control boxes have been installed correctly. The surface of the carriageway has been raised on both crossings providing level access for pedestrians but also leaving some sections of the footway flush with the carriageway without tactile paving.



Some seating has been provided along the eastern footway. Whilst welcome greater thought is required into the design and positioning of seating and other street furniture away from pedestrian desire lines.



There is a gated alleyway (Poplar Row) linking the eastern footway from Newry Street with the bus station. Bollards with no visibility strips have been placed to prevent vehicle access.



There is an indented uncontrolled crossing across Old Kenlis Street. Appropriate tactile paving has been provided. However this does not contrast sufficiently with the surrounding pavement.



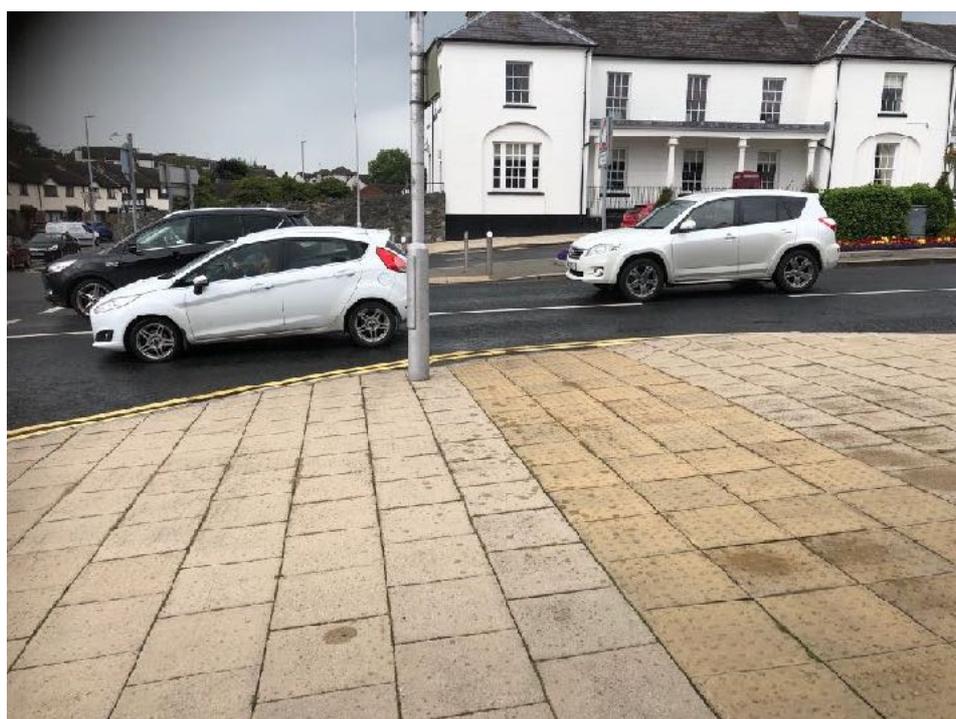
Old Kenlis Street links to the bus station. Its footways are very narrow and in poor condition on the southern side.



On Newry Street the carriageway is raised flush with the footway close to the Cenotaph, giving the impression this is an uncontrolled crossing. However no tactile paving has been provided making this a potentially hazardous place for people with a visual impairment. The visibility strip on bollards needs to provide a stronger contrast.



There is an uncontrolled crossing close to the roundabout at the end of Newry Street. The paving has not been laid to standard as it extends to the building line. The tactile paving does not sufficiently contrast with the surrounding pavement.



There is a series of uncontrolled crossings including a central refuge across Kenlis Street, Newry Road and Commercial Road close to the roundabout. The tactile paving is not be laid in accordance with standards. Even it was the heavy traffic levels at the roundabout means many disabled people cannot cross without assistance.



On the western footway at the Downshire Arms Hotel (B1 Listed building) there is a vehicle entrance with a rough cobbled surface.



There is an indented uncontrolled crossing across the junction with Linenhall Street. Although the tactile paving has been installed correctly it does not contrast sufficiently with surrounding pavement.



The footways on Linenhall Street are narrow, with street furniture on both sides further reducing available width, and in poor condition. There is no step free access along the length the southern footway.



There is ramped pedestrian access to Commercial Road and to the adjacent car park. Provision of both ramps falls short of acceptable inclusive design standards. The presence of bollards illustrates the significant numbers of vehicles using Linenhall Street despite it being a no through road.



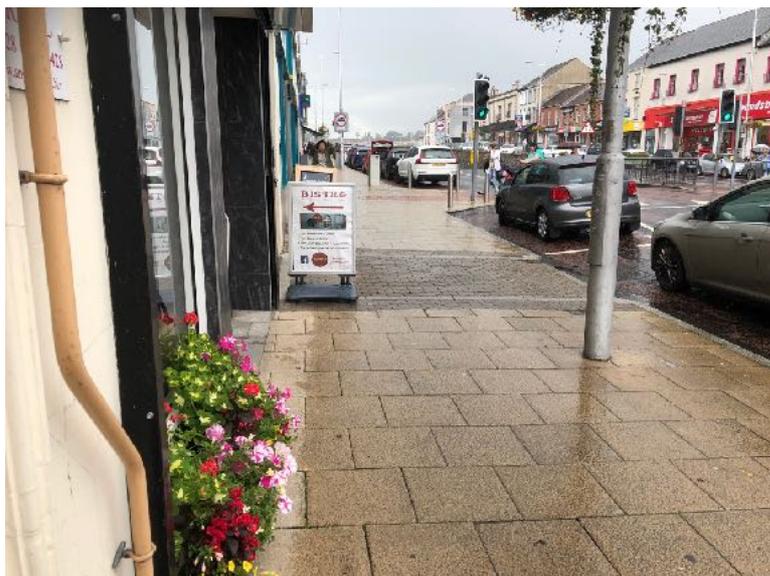
The western footway of Newry Street close to the junction with Linenhall Street is cluttered with A Boards, unscreened pavement cafes and street furniture, all potential hazards to be people with a visual impairment.



The Mall provides a linkage between the car park on Commercial Road and Newry Street. Currently the area is uninviting (despite floral displays). Surfaces are uneven in places and bollards at the Newry Street end do not include a visibility strip.



A Boards, shop displays and a vehicle entrance are potential hazards for people with visual impairment on the western footway of Newry Street approaching the bridge. The gradient of the footway increases significantly at this point approaching Downshire Bridge.



Commercial Road

There are two vehicle entrances along the western footway of Commercial Road. Although the kerbs are dropped no tactile paving has been provided.



The footway is broad but uneven in places. Traffic calming measures are an indication of the high traffic levels in the area.



There is a pedestrian crossing across Commercial Road close to the junction Linenhall Street. Tactile paving and control boxes are installed correctly. Pedestrian railings around the crossings again indicate the impact of high traffic levels in the area.



Pedestrian railings continue for a significant distance on the eastern footway of Commercial Road approaching the entrance of the car park.



There is ramped access from Commercial Road onto Linenhall Street. Although this is step free it does not meet acceptable inclusive design standards.



There is a broad paved footway on the eastern side of Commercial Road. Grass and trees provide a buffer from traffic levels on this side of the street. There is a vehicle entrance to the Downshire Arms Hotel on this footway - the dropped kerb is not completely flush, no tactile paving has been provided and the surfacing at the entrance is rough and uneven particularly along the pedestrian desire line.



Town Centre car parking

There are four off-street car parks, operated by the Council, located on the periphery of the main town centre streets associated with the scheme. All these car parks have accessible parking bays, although these are not designed to modern inclusive design standards with regard to dimensions and markings. Car parks are all pay & display.



Although step free access is available to and from all the car parks, surface finish and ramp provision is generally far from ideal, falling short of inclusive design standards.



There are a significant number of free on-street parking bays in the town centre streets. A small proportion of these bays are designated accessible parking. For the most part accessible bays have included a dropped kerb although others rely on proximity to a controlled crossing for access to the footway.



Public Transport provision

Banbridge is served by local town services and regular bus services that operate between Belfast and Newry, as well as services to Dublin. Currently bus stops are located at either end of the town (Church Square and Kenlis Street) with the bus station located at the junction of Kenlis Street and Townsend Street. The bus station is connected to Newry Street via Poplar Row and Old Kenlis Street. The stops on Church Square and Kenlis Street are located on narrow footways, completely unsuited to the volume of passengers using the services.



Current issues and challenges

The area encompassed by the public realm scheme is large. The main streets are in general broad and the condition of the footways on these streets is generally good. In contrast the condition of the footways on the smaller side streets is poor and in need of an upgrade as are the linkages to the town centre car parks.

Although the footways on the main streets are broad, pavement clutter is a constant problem in the town. Clutter creating problems/potential hazards includes the location of street furniture, lighting columns and traffic signage. Numerous pavement cafes, none of which are screened, also contribute to the clutter and obstruction. Finally, as with every town and city across Northern Ireland, A Boards are a ubiquitous feature on the footways throughout the town. The sheer amount of clutter on the footways in the town creates a difficult environment for pedestrians in general but impacts most directly on people with a visual impairment.

A number of controlled crossings have been provided along the main streets of the town centre which is a positive. For the most part these crossings have been installed to inclusive design standards as have uncontrolled crossings in the towns. However there are a number of locations in the town where the design of crossings makes their use by some disabled people difficult or impossible without assistance. This is particularly the case at the two major junctions in the town centre. To the north is the Church Square, Church Street, Dromore Street junction where there is the use of a triangular traffic island and to the south a series uncontrolled crossings at the busy roundabout at the end of Newry Street. In both locations vehicle movements have been prioritised over pedestrian accessibility

The topography and built environment of the town create specific difficulties for disabled people and older people. Topography means many of the main streets contain steep inclines, challenging for many older people and disabled people. The historic built environment also means there are frequent vehicle entrances along the main streets as well as stepped access to some of the older buildings. These create potential hazards for people with a visual impairment in particular.

The treatment of many vehicular accesses (eg at Seapatrick Parish Church) with a raised paved table to create a section of level footway having ramped vehicle approaches on one or both sides. This results in trip hazards on either side of the footway. At most, if not all, of these accesses there is no tactile indication for people with a visual impairment that the footway may be shared with vehicles.

The most significant impact on pedestrian access is, however, traffic levels and the priority afforded to vehicles in the town. The frequent use of pedestrian railings, traffic calming measures and the generous provision of free on-street parking all point to an environment where vehicles are prioritised over pedestrians. The impact of this priority is evident across the town centre. In some locations parking restricts pedestrian sight lines at crossings, and represents a significant road safety issue. Other interventions such as the use of raised crossings and junctions designed to slow traffic, specifically impact on the accessibility of the pedestrian environment for people with a visual impairment.

The area around the B1 Listed Downshire Bridge exemplifies the issues created by topography, built environment and traffic and is particularly problematic. The area is very heavily trafficked with many vehicles seemingly using the bridge and the surrounding streets to avoid the town centre or to circulate looking for a parking space. There is generous provision of on-street parking in the streets around Downshire Bridge to the detriment of pedestrian sight lines in places. Inadequate, poorly designed, uncontrolled crossings have been provided in and around the bridge. High traffic levels and poor design mean many disabled people struggle to navigate the area without assistance. In an effort to slow constant traffic movement a raised table has been installed over the top of bridge. This has effectively created a shared surface in the area with no delineation between footway and carriageway. In summary the entire area around the bridge is extremely challenging for pedestrians in general but is a hostile environment for older and disabled pedestrians in particular.

Recommendations

The following paragraphs summarise the main issues that Imtac recommends that the Council and its designers should address in developing proposals for the Banbridge Public Realm Scheme.

Public realm schemes offer the opportunity to make positive improvements to the accessibility of our towns and cities. Schemes offer the immediate opportunity to improve surfaces, providing even, step free access. In Banbridge problems with surfacing are particularly acute in some of the smaller connecting streets and on the linkages between the main streets and the off street car parking. Imtac recommends that priority be given to improving the accessibility of these smaller streets and linkages, removing current barriers identified by this report and giving pedestrian access priority over vehicle access.

Footway clutter is a persistent problem in the town centre. As part of the works it is essential that the current provision of street furniture is rationalised. This includes the rationalisation of traffic signage with the removal of redundant signs and the implementation across the town centre of a clear furniture line, ensuring lighting columns, seating and bins are located to minimise obstruction.

Given the topography of Banbridge the provision of good quality seating along the main streets is an essential component of an accessible and inclusive pedestrian environment. Seating should be located in areas away from the main pedestrian routes. It is essential that the design of seating reflects the requirements of different users and include as a minimum some seating with armrests. Currently seating provided in the town, although welcome, does not meet inclusive design standards¹.

As with many towns there are problems with street clutter associated with shops including A Boards, shop displays on the pavement and pavement cafes. As with other places Imtac recommends that the Council work with other agencies to introduce a ban on “illegal” shop displays and A Boards similar to the successful prohibition on A Boards recently introduced by Edinburgh City Council. With regard to pavement cafes, the Council must ensure that all pavement cafes in the town have the appropriate license and that each site has achieved clear access requirements. From Imtac’s perspective it is essential that every pavement cafe has appropriate screening and that there is a minimum of 2m unobstructed footway remaining.

¹ Reference BS 8300

There are a number of areas in the town where access problems for pedestrians are particularly acute. Imtac is aware that in one of these areas, the junctions of Scarva Street with Commercial Road and Downshire Place, DfI Roads has plans to introduce traffic signals. It is essential from Imtac's perspective that these plans include the provision of controlled crossings to enable pedestrians to cross what are currently extremely busy roads.

Another specific location of concern to Imtac is the junction between Dromore Street, Church Street and Church Square. The use of a triangular traffic island at what is an extremely heavily trafficked junction, makes using this crossing difficult or impossible for some disabled people. Imtac has previously highlighted the issues created by the use of this type of infrastructure during street audits undertaken in Belfast. The Committee would like to repeat its previous recommendation that DfI Roads examine more inclusive design solutions to this type of junction, that prioritising pedestrian access over vehicle movement.

The location in the town that causes greatest concern is the area around the historic bridge. Currently traffic levels, the lack of pedestrian priority and the raised shared surface make this a hostile environment for many older people and disabled people. The public realm scheme must make improving this area a priority including:

- Reinstating kerb delineation between the carriageway and footway
- Removing on street parking to improve sight lines and increase footway widths
- Consider the provision of dedicated crossings to enhance pedestrian priority over vehicle movements in the area.

On a broader issue, public realm improvements will only have minimal impact on the accessibility and amenity of the town centre unless action is taken to reduce the current impact of traffic. Concerted effort is needed by all the agencies involved to introduce measures to achieve this. Measures should include:

- Reducing on-street car parking provision, increasing footway widths (whilst retaining and expanding on-street accessible parking provision).
- Introducing charging for on-street car parking.
- Enhancing off-street car parking.
- Exploring options with Translink to improve existing public transport infrastructure and the feasibility of providing new bus stops on central streets.
- Providing safe, segregated cycling routes into and around the town centre and associated cycle infrastructure such as parking as part of the public realm scheme.

- A redesign of the roundabout at the end of Newry Street with enhanced pedestrian and cycling priority.

Whilst a strategy for managing parking, encouraging off street parking over on street, is key to reducing the impact of traffic, there does need to be recognition that for some disabled people the car is the only viable form of mobility. It is essential therefore that any changes to parking prioritise:

- Increasing the numbers of accessible on-street parking bays on the main streets.
- Ensuring all accessible parking, off street and on street, is designed to inclusive standards (including making provision for people who use larger accessible vehicles).