



Report on existing pedestrian environment in the streets that cover the proposed area for Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3

July 2015

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About us

Imtac is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including key transport professionals. Our role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of older people and disabled people.

Our aim 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 Regional Development.

About this report

This report was compiled by Imtac to inform the design process around proposed public realm works in Belfast City Centre as part of Phase 3 of the DSD Streets Ahead project. The purpose of the report is to audit the existing public realm in the area and identify barriers for disabled people, older people and other pedestrians. The report broadly replicates the approach to similar reports undertaken by Imtac into pedestrian provision in a number of towns and cities across Northern Ireland. The report looks at provision in each street highlighting examples of good and poor practice as well as other issues. The report has been produced in two versions, one plain text, the other with photographs. Images have been used to illustrate issues identified. The report was compiled following a site visit to the streets covered by the project by Imtac members and other organisations on the 24th February 2015.

The streets covered by the report

The report covers streets where public realm improvements are planned as part of Streets Ahead Phase 3. These streets are Royal Avenue, York Street, Frederick Street, Academy Street, Talbot Street and the three streets associated with the proposed Library Square development (Library Street, Little Donegall Street and Union Street).

Overview of findings

Much of the public realm is dated in each of the streets covered by the report and would benefit from public realm improvements. There were a number of general access issues identified by the report. These issues include:

- poor surfacing in all the streets surveyed
- poor provision of crossings
- the absence of safe and accessible crossing opportunities

- Clutter on the pavements causing obstructions
- A failure to use contrasting materials where appropriate

Other issues varied from location to location.

The two main streets, Royal Avenue and York Street, have broad pavements with clutter generally located in a furniture line. Crossings on these streets, whilst not perfect, were reasonable. The proposed public realm has the potential to significantly enhance these streets and address some of the general barriers outlined above.

The smaller side streets have much narrower footpaths, often interrupted by vehicle entrances to buildings. The provision and quality of crossings are very poor on these streets. Given the importance of the area the provision for pedestrians in the Cathedral Quarter is particularly disappointing. The proposed public realm improvements should look to address some of these issues in the streets covered by the project. However a broader examination is needed to look at how the pedestrian environment is the area as a whole can be made more accessible and inclusive.

Frederick Street carries high volumes of traffic across many lanes making it an area not particularly welcoming to pedestrians. Despite the provision of controlled crossings on Frederick Street, the design and nature of the crossings mean the area is challenging for many disabled and older people. Reducing the impact of traffic and enhancing the attractiveness of the area for all pedestrians will be a major challenge for the Streets Ahead project.

Cathedral Gardens is the only public space covered by the report. As with other areas the Gardens are tired and dated and in need of renewal. The problems with the area are perhaps best summarised by the people who undertook the site visit, none of whom would want to spend anytime in the Gardens. Cathedral Gardens does represent by and large a blank canvas for the Streets Ahead project, an opportunity to create a much needed welcoming and inclusive public space where people do want to spend time. The same opportunity exists on a lesser scale with the proposed Library Square development.

Royal Avenue

Royal Avenue is divided into two distinct areas. The first is linked to the retail core of the city centre and includes Castle Court shopping centre. The second area, after the junction with North Street, is linked to the cultural district of Belfast and includes the Central Library.

- 1 The public realm in the retail area of Royal Avenue is dated. In some areas the surfaces are uneven, an inevitable consequence of repairs over the years.



- 2 The pavements in the area are, however, wide and generally clutter free. Furniture, including bus stops, have been largely grouped in a line, minimizing impact on pedestrians and providing a buffer against traffic.



- 3 A major issue in the area is limited availability of opportunities to cross Royal Avenue. The number and location of bus stops in the areas makes provision of additional crossing opportunities difficult. None of the existing crossings have tactile paving.



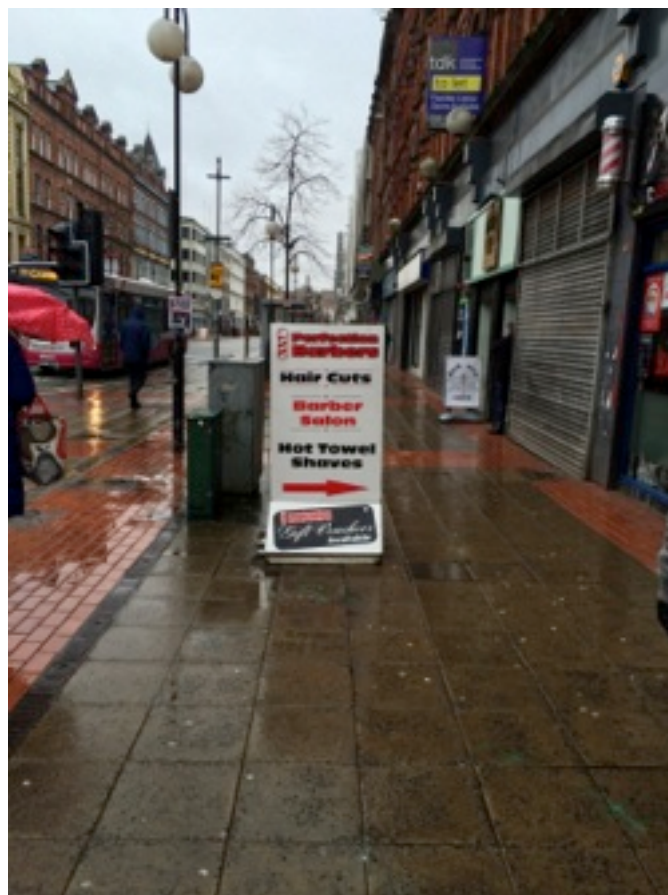
- 4 There is a crossing opportunity at the entrance to Castle Court. However poorly positioned street furniture and general clutter create unnecessary hazards in the area. There is no tactile paving at the crossing.



- 5 There is a good example of a controlled crossing across Royal Avenue close to the junction with North Street, although the tactile tail should extend to the building line.



- 6 A-boards create obstructions on the pavement in this area of Royal Avenue.



- 7 At the busy junction with North Street there are a series of controlled crossings. On the eastern side of Royal Avenue there is an open area of pavement. This coupled with the lack of contrast between general paving and the tactile surface makes locating the crossing across North Street a challenge for people with a visual impairment.



- 8 Contrast is also an issue on the far side of the crossing, heading towards Cathedral Gardens.



- 9 The controlled crossing across North Street on the western side of Royal Avenue is reasonable. However issues with contrasting and tactile paving persist and there is a problem with water pooling at the crossing.



- 10 There is a controlled crossing across Royal Avenue at this point which is reasonable. However issues persist with contrasting of tactile paving and the surrounding pavement.



- 11 On the eastern side of Royal Avenue between North Street and Donegall Street a pavement cafe and associated a-board reduces pavement width considerably.



- 12 The pavement in this area is generally wide, however the surfaces in places are uneven and dish drainage channels are used.



- 13 There is a good example of an inline uncontrolled crossing at the junction of William Street. Given William Street is a small side street enhancing pedestrian priority could be an option.



- 14 Close to the junction with Donegall Street on the eastern side hoardings around a building and telephone box create a very narrow pavement.



- 15 The pavement on the western side of Royal Avenue between North Street and Donegall Street is generally wide and, apart from a-boards, clutter free.



- 16 There is an uncontrolled crossing at the junction with Kent Street. Tactile paving has been laid incorrectly at this junction. The location of tourist signage in close proximity to the tactile paving creates a potential hazard.



- 17 An a-board at the entrance to the Central Library creates an unnecessary hazard.



- 18 The inline uncontrolled crossing at the junction of Library Street has incorrectly laid tactile paving.



- 19 There is a very busy junction with Donegall Street and York Street which includes a reasonable controlled crossing across Royal Avenue.



- 20 At the junction with Donegall Street on the eastern side of Royal Avenue there is an inline uncontrolled crossing that allows access to the controlled crossings across Royal Avenue and Donegall Street. With the volume of traffic at the junction the people with a visual impairment in particular will find using this uncontrolled section of the crossing challenging.



Library Street, Little Donegall Street and Union Street

The area is currently dominated by on-street parking and servicing access to the Central Library and the Belfast Telegraph offices.

- 21 The footpaths in Library Street, Union Street and Little Donegall Street are narrow, with the area primarily used for pay and display on-street car parking.



- 22 On both Library Street and Little Donegall Street servicing entrances take priority over pedestrians. The absence of dropped kerbs makes using the pavements difficult or impossible for some pedestrians.



- 23 There are no appropriately designed crossing opportunities at the junctions between Union Street, Library Street and Little Donegall Street.



York Street

York Street is dominated by the University of Ulster campus. There are currently significant works in the area associated with the expansion of the University.

- 24 There is a reasonable controlled crossing across York Street at the junction with Donegal Street/Royal Avenue.



- 25 As with the issue previously raised in paragraph 20 an inline uncontrolled crossing on the western side of York Street at the junction of Donegall Street presents major challenges for people with a visual impairment and other disabled people at a very busy junction.



- 26 The pavement on the eastern side of York Street adjacent to Cathedral Gardens is of sufficient width and relatively clutter free.



- 27 However the pavement narrows considerably at the University of Ulster Building. The steps into the building present a potential hazard to pedestrians due to poor contrasting and an absence of tactile hazard paving. The position of cycle parking also creates potential hazards.



- 28 Continuing on the Eastern side of York Street construction works associated with the new university campus narrows the pavement considerably after this point. There is a controlled crossing at this point across York Street with no rotating cone.



- 29 The pavement on the western side of York Street is broad but in poor condition in some locations.



- 30 Bicycle parking infrastructure on York Street has been poorly installed, presenting a potential hazard. Colour contrasting would help reduce this hazard.



Cathedral Gardens

Cathedral Gardens is one of the few examples of public space in the area.

- 31 Cathedral Gardens is generally tired and dated. Poles and posts obstruct walking routes through the area.



- 32 A low wall around the gardens and bollards at entrances do not provide a suitable contrast with the surrounding area, making access difficult for people with a visual impairment.



- 33 From a positive perspective seating is located to leave good access in and around the gardens.



Academy Street

Academy Street links Cathedral Gardens to the St Anne's Square development.

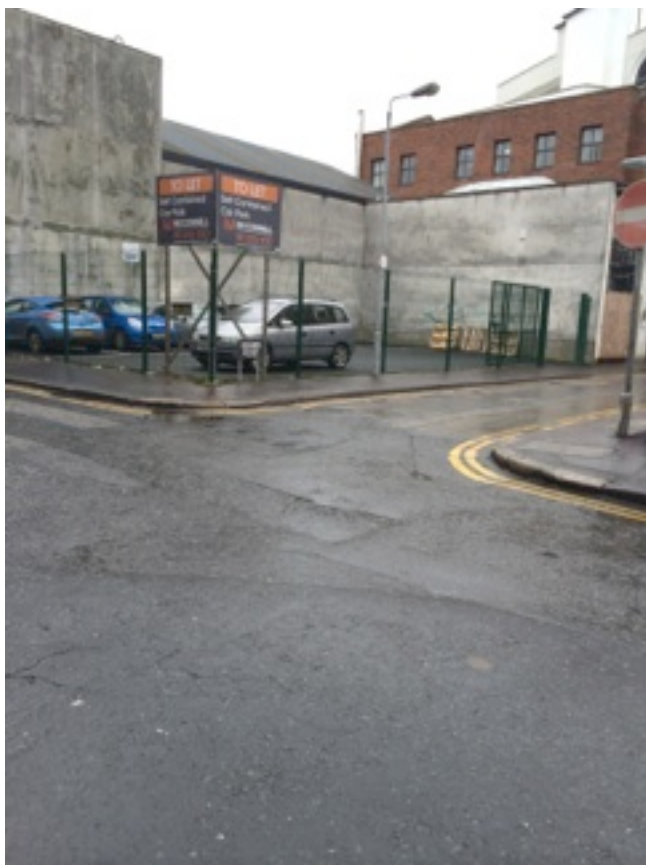
- 34 Academy Street has narrow pavements and is dominated by on-street parking.



- 35 Crossing Academy Street presents real difficulties for some disabled people due to the absence of appropriately designed crossing opportunities.



- 36 These problems increase at the northern end of Academy Street with no dropped kerb provision.



- 37 Vehicle entrances to buildings without dropped kerb provision in this area makes pedestrian access difficult or impossible.



Talbot Street

Talbot Street is an important street within the Cathedral Quarter with links to the vibrant Hill Street and the St Anne's Square development.

- 38 As with Academy Street pavements on Talbot Street are narrow.



- 39 There are limited opportunities to cross Talbot Street. Provision for pedestrians at the junction with Hill Street and Exchange Street West is very poor. Much more needs to be done to enhance pedestrian accessibility and priority at this junction.



- 40 Also at this junction the positioning of a cycle stand on Hill Street obstructs the pavement and presents an obvious hazard to people with a visual impairment.



41 The pavements broaden towards the northern end of Talbot Street.



42 Appropriately designed inline uncontrolled crossings have been provide across Talbot Street at the junction with Dunbar Link.



Exchange Street West

Exchange Street West links Talbot Street and Academy Street and includes the main entrance to the St Anne's Square development.

- 43 The pavements in the street are narrow with limited or no opportunities to cross the street. The uneven cobbled road surface enhances the perception of an area where pedestrian accessibility is not a priority.



Frederick Street

Frederick Street is an exceptionally busy street with numerous lanes of traffic which in itself makes it a difficult area for pedestrians.

- 44 At the junction between York Street and Frederick Street there are a series of pedestrian crossings. Most of the crossings are controlled but there is an uncontrolled crossing which, in such a busy area presents a significant challenge to some pedestrians.



- 45 Due to the heavy 2-way traffic flow in the area access across Fredrick Street necessitates using two controlled crossings split by a traffic island. Whilst the design is generally reasonable the heavy traffic and the location of lighting columns make this a challenging area for pedestrians.



- 46 The pavement on the northern side of Frederick Street is broad but pedestrians are in close proximity to heavy traffic.



- 47 There are no dropped kerbs at the entrance to an off-street car park on the northern side of Frederick street.



- 48 Access across Frederick Street at North Queen Street is via a split controlled and uncontrolled crossings. As with paragraphs 20 and 25 this will be challenging for people with a visual impairment. While the controlled crossings are generally satisfactory the tactile paving on the island has been incorrectly laid and the control boxes located in the wrong position.



- 49 The uncontrolled crossing at Frederick Street at this location has no tactile paving on one side of the crossing.



- 50 There is a controlled crossing across North Queen Street at this junction which is reasonable. However as with paragraph 48 the inclusion of an uncontrolled crossing creates a challenge. The non provision of tactile paving is not satisfactory.



- 51 Access to southern side of Frederick Street is via a pavement separated from the traffic by a landscaped area. A bollard in the middle of the pavement creates an obstacle.



- 52 The pedestrian route splits with a pavement leading to the controlled crossing to North Queen Street. Again a bollard creates an obstruction close to the crossing.



- 53 The remaining section of path continues down the south side of Frederick Street to York Lane at the start of the new University Campus. Here the crossing is blocked by two bollards and a parked car.



- 54 The kerb has been dropped at York Lane but no tactile paving provided.



- 55 The pavement on the southern side of Frederick Street has been narrowed considerably as part of the building works associated with the new university campus. Poles associated with traffic signage create additional obstacles.

