

Report to Scrutiny Commission

Economic Development, Transport and Tourism
Date of Commission meeting: 22nd August 2019

City Centre Accessibility

Report of the Director of Planning Transport and
Development



Useful Information:

- Ward(s) affected: All
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1. Summary

This report outlines the approach taken to accessibility design relating to proposed highway and transport schemes in and around the city centre.

2. Recommendation(s) to scrutiny

Scrutiny is asked to note the contents of this report.

3. Supporting Information

Over the past 15 years a significant pedestrian zone has been created in Leicester's City Centre. Initially this was in relation to the development of the Highcross Centre and sought to ensure that the environment around the main retail areas within the city centre (such as Gallowtree Gate, High Street and Market Street) was of a high quality to complement the new development which opened in 2008.

The City Mayor, following his election in 2011, initiated a programme of works, Connecting Leicester, which seeks to create a high quality environment across the city centre, in both streets and open spaces. As well as creating spaces which people wanted to be in, it also improved links between places which had previously been isolated, or poorly connected. This programme has included the development of new or improved open spaces of Jubilee Square, Cathedral Gardens and New Market Square, other streets within the main retail area, and streets in the Old Town area. This has now begun to expand outside the city centre to provide links to nearby residential areas and destinations e.g. along Welford Road, Belgrave Gate and London Road and to De Montfort and Leicester Universities.

In all these schemes a key design feature has been to make the streets and spaces accessible to all sectors of the population whatever their age, disability, gender, etc, and to both pedestrian and cyclists.

The creation of what is thought to be one of the largest contiguous pedestrian zones in the country, covering the main retail area of the city centre, has significantly reduced conflict between pedestrians and vehicles which are only generally allowed access between 5am and 11am (9am on Saturdays) for loading. Occasional essential access by vehicles is permitted outside these hours. This has allowed the streets within the zone to be rebuilt without kerbs and without formal carriageways

allowing everyone including disabled people, those with any mobility issue, children and pushchair users to move around safely and without impediment.

Cycling is also permitted within the pedestrian zone; segregated cycle facilities have not been provided as it was considered that this would create more problems than permitting managed shared use.

Within the city centre, but outside the pedestrian zone streets have generally been reconstructed with segregated carriageways and footways, with a minimum kerb height of 60mm (for blind cane users) and dropped kerbs at locations where people wish to cross. As Connecting Leicester schemes expand to areas outside the city centre the emphasis is on creating high quality, attractive, segregated routes for pedestrian and cyclists to encourage people to use of these forms of transport for shorter journeys instead of using cars.

All designs have followed Department for Transport guidelines and requirements which applied at the time they were designed, and continue to do so. In addition, we have recently adopted the Healthy Streets Assessment process and new schemes, such as London Road, are subject to a Healthy Street Audit, which considers how they improve conditions for all street users including disabled people. The City Council is also developing a "Street Design Guide" which identifies a hierarchy of 9 street types and provides guidelines on how they should be designed or amended to ensure that they are easily and safely used by everyone. A recent workshop involving disability groups has contributed to development of the guide.

Schemes are also subject to Safety Audits and Equality Impact Assessments to help to ensure that schemes as far as is possible meet the needs of all potential users and ensure that they can be safely and easily used by everyone.

Consultation is carried out with all transport and access groups when developing street improvement schemes and schemes are adjusted accordingly. In the initial design stages this will help determine the form of the scheme e.g. on or off carriageway provision of cycle facilities and the level of segregation, and in the later stages it will address details of the design e.g. use and position of street furniture, tactile paving and surface materials.

Going forward it is intended to continue the Connecting Leicester programme through the Transforming Cities Fund. This will be a major programme of works including, amongst other things, proposals for improvements to transport hubs including the rail station, routes in the north and west of the city to provide bus priorities and improved facilities for walking and cycling, and park and ride services. These will be subject to the same assessments and audits as set out above for current and previous schemes, and specifically will seek to ensure that they are easily usable by disabled people.

Signage

The council has delivered a first phase of its Legible Leicester programme to provide directional signage and simple map based information in the city centre. This has been designed to improve accessibility for all to navigate their way around the city centre.

Bus provisions

The council completed a programme to convert bus stops to level access across the city some 4 years ago. All buses are able to adjust the platform height by lowering the front of the vehicle and can deploy a ramp to assist wheelchair users if required. All bus stops within the city centre, both on-street and within the bus stations have raised kerbs to allow level access onto buses. Many on-street bus stops have been constructed with a shallow sawtooth layout to ensure that buses can stop parallel and close to the kerb to ensure that the raised kerbs can be properly used. Both the bus stations are of the “drive in, reverse out” design so that passengers can wait in a pleasant, weatherproof environment and are segregated from the buses.

Parking for people with disabilities

Provision is made for parking for people with disabilities in the city centre and this is reviewed when delivering city centre street improvement schemes. A recent audit was carried out which indicated that the existing provision was meeting existing demand in both numbers and location. However, as the city centre is constantly changing we will continue to review provision and make changes where necessary and possible.

Observations arising from a city centre visit

A city centre walk-about and bus boarding opportunity was held on 8 August 2019. Observations arising from this are attached at Appendix B1.

4. Financial, legal and other implications

4.1 Financial implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

4.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

4.3. Climate Change implications

There are no climate change implications arising directly from this report.

4.4 Equality Implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 also requires that reasonable adjustments be made so that disabled people are not excluded from places that serve the public, including publicly accessible open spaces. This duty is on-going and anticipatory and, therefore, reasonable and proportionate steps to overcome barriers which may impede people with different kinds of disabilities.

There are no direct equalities implications arising from the report recommendations as the report is for noting, rather than decision. However, the future and on-going approach to city centre accessibility will have equalities implications. The report outlines intentions to improve – it is important as part of this to consider the needs of people with a range of different disabilities and impairment needs (for example, those with dementia, visual impairments, mental health conditions, neuro diverse conditions such as autism, learning disabilities and so on) in addition to older people and those with the protected characteristic of pregnancy and maternity. It is vitally important that less visible disabilities are taken into account, as they can pose just as much of a barrier as a physical disability.

Generally, 'shared space' schemes in roads and highways have been criticised by disability activists and organisations – particularly those campaigning on issues relating to visual impairment and neurodiversity. As there is not a definitive definition of what constitutes a shared space, the more problematic characteristics have been identified as the removal of traditional delineators between pedestrians and vehicles (such as kerbs and controlled crossing points) and the mixing of pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles in the same street space. In July 2018, The Department for Transport (DfT) made a major announcement on 'shared space', calling on local authorities to pause any new development of schemes which incorporate a level surface, as part of their [Inclusive Mobility Strategy](#). The department plans to release further guidance in due course.

Accessible and inclusive design relating to highway and transport schemes in an around the City Centre will support the general aims of the PSED and will be beneficial particularly in removing barriers to participation in public life. Ongoing engagement and consultation with key service user groups, disability groups and organisations is a vital aspect of ensuring that an inclusive approach which is consistent with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 is taken. The drafting of a Street Design Guide and the workshop involving disability groups to help to develop this should make a positive contribution in achieving positive equalities outcomes. It may be the case that an Equality Impact Assessment is required to develop the

proposals in terms of what should be included in the guide and how it should be presented, in order to ensure that the possible impacts across all protected characteristics are taken into account.

In addition, as the report outlines, an equality impact assessment will be required for future schemes to ensure that any potential disproportionate negative impacts on any particular protected characteristic/s are identified and mitigated and to ensure that the schemes are inclusive of individuals and groups with different protected characteristics.

Hannah Watkins, Equalities Manager ext. 37 5811

4.5 Other Implications

None

5. Background information and other papers:

N/A

6. Summary of appendices:

N/A

7. Is this a private report?

N/A