

PE1595/I

Leicester Disabled People's Access Group Email of 3 January 2016

Comment on Petition **PE01595** - which calls for a moratorium on shared spaces.

I wish to support this petitioner and ask you to urge the Scottish Government to impose a moratorium on 'shared spaces' and 'shared surfaces' at least until there has been more research into the issues - and solutions found for disabled people.

Highway changes that enable independence for disabled people have been developed over many years. Research, and consistency across the country, has been an important part of this to give clarity to disabled people wherever they go. Shared space however has developed like a virus in recent years without consistency or good research base. As it becomes more widespread it is increasingly affecting disabled people's ability to get about independently and safely as they can no longer avoid it.

Getting around independently is fundamental to people's ability to join equally in society. This affects not only the person themselves - risking social exclusion and the further health needs that come from isolation - but also creates further care needs if people cannot get to work, shop for themselves or need transport to attend health appointments. This creates a cost to the public purse.

The needs of visually-impaired people in particular are poorly understood by those designing and approving the new shared spaces and are being ignored. 'Level surfaces' are still being developed in spite of research commissioned by Guide-Dogs and others failing to find an alternative to kerbs that is reliable both for navigation and as delineator between carriageway and footway. Removing the 'inner and outer shores' of building line and kerb across wide spaces means that people without sight cannot find their way.

Crossings that rely on negotiation and eye-contact are not usable by people without sight - or with other disabilities such as autism or dementia.

People with limited sight (and others) have fewer mobility choices - they cannot drive, cycle or use mobility scooters for example, making good walking routes even more important.

Measuring only traffic accidents as outcomes misses much of the disadvantage that is caused for people.

We have an aging population and some will have sensory loss, mobility problems or dementia - often in combination. It does not make economic sense to create more dependency.

It is easy to dismiss a minority need. That is why there is equality legislation to protect. The Scottish Government commits to the principle of equality. Such stated commitment is meaningless if not reflected in actions and outcomes.

New street layouts should be **improving inclusion**, not **excluding** some. The Scottish Government has a duty not just to prevent discrimination but to promote equality of opportunity.

In the 21st century we would not expect new public buildings to have toilets only for men. That would effectively exclude women from using them fully and make them feel unwelcome. Why then is it acceptable that new street provision should make access more difficult or impossible for some disabled people? There may not be 'no disabled' signs - but the effect is the same.

Finally I would like to share the comments of one of our older members (of Scottish origin) who has had poor sight since childhood.

When young they had to ask someone to help them to cross road, or just wouldn't try. *"When light- controlled crossings came in, it revolutionised my life - opening up so many more opportunities to do things independently. Now they want to take that away again"*

Only a few bodies can prevent the escalation of the problems of shared space - the Scottish Government is one, and it is not sufficient to 'pass the buck' of responsibility to lower authorities.

Will the Scottish Parliament have the courage to take a stand, press the 'pause button', and prevent the exclusion shared spaces cause spreading even further?

Sally Williams
Secretary
Leicester Disabled People's Access Group (LDPAG)