

PE1595/K

To the Public Petitions Committee

Deafblind Scotland would like to support the petition PE1595 on “Moratorium on shared spaces” lodged by Mr Alexander Taylor, Chairman of EDVIP with the following written submission.

We as an organisation work with deafblind people who live with a severe dual sensory loss. They have varying degrees of hearing and visual loss, some of whom are fully deafblind meaning they can hear and see nothing and can only communicate via spelling out words by deafblind manual alphabet on their hands. Deafblind Scotland feel that shared space schemes would pose grave danger for deafblind people as they can neither see nor hear traffic or cyclists approaching. It is with anxiety and trepidation they negotiate even familiar areas. They rely on controlled crossings mainly with rotating cones and tactile markings to alert them to cross the road safely. They are unable to have “eye contact” with drivers which forms a vital part of the shared space scheme. This is also relevant to blind, visually impaired and partially sighted people as none of them can have that all important eye contact either.

The shared space scheme proposes to remove traffic lights, crossings and safety barriers from the high street. Whilst this would be more aesthetically appealing surely safety has to be paramount?

The shared space scheme will also eliminate many of the kerbs which are extremely important to deafblind and blind people if they use a long cane for navigation. They give orientation and markers so without them it would be extremely difficult to work out where the actual pathway for cars begins and ends. Guide dogs are also trained to navigate by kerbs and respond to the “beeps” at controlled crossings. The success of this scheme depends largely on drivers to drive with due care and attention at a slower speed and give way to pedestrians. This all sounds plausible on paper but in practical terms is unlikely to happen. It is a very frightening prospect to have to put your trust in the hands of a driver rather than the safer option of designated controlled crossings.

Courtesy crossings which are marked out on roads are unable to be seen by deafblind or blind people so they would be very reluctant to attempt to use them. Tactile markings on approach to these courtesy crossings will be in place, however there is still the uncertainty with no method of control to guide them.

The proposal is to have two puffin crossings off the main thoroughfare but to access them it could be a considerable walk for less able bodied people yet it is the only place they would feel safe to cross. Deafblind and blind people could be easily disorientated having to leave the high street in order to cross the road and with many of their markers being removed.

This is direct discrimination towards a large number of members of the public and places them in a very vulnerable position and at considerable risk. Local authorities should have due regard to equality outcomes and not marginalise the most vulnerable in our society. The proposed plans should be accessible and inclusive for all.

Deafblind people will inevitably become more isolated as they will be in fear of navigating their once familiar high street, if it changes into a shared space scheme, as their safety would be compromised. It would take away their independence, leaving them feeling unsafe and lacking confidence, also excluding them from their town centre. It would be exceptionally difficult to try to retrain both people and guide dogs in methods they have used for many years.

The shared space scheme will have a negative impact on not only deafblind people but on many other groups in society including:

- Blind and partially sighted
- Physically disabled including wheelchair users
- Elderly including those with dementia
- Children
- Adults or children with learning difficulties

Lives will be put at risk and safety severely compromised if this controversial shared space scheme is allowed to go ahead.

I give consent to this submission being posted on the Parliament website.

Helen Campbell
Welfare Rights Officer
Deafblind Scotland