

PE1595/KKK

PETITION PE 1595

Comments by Petitioner Alexander Taylor on Responses by:-

Scottish Borders Council.
Perth and Kinross Council.
East Dunbartonshire Council.
Glasgow City Council.
The Scottish Government.
Sustrans.
The MACS Committee.

Following my appearance before your Committee to present my Petition on 26th January, I would be grateful once again for your patience and understanding of my inexperience of political protocol, I do however feel passionately about my campaign and I hope to demonstrate how Shared Space Schemes are dangerous, exclude many vulnerable people and are therefore fundamentally flawed.

The Scottish Government commissioned Consultants who followed their English counterparts and they produced a Policy Document entitled Designing Streets. The responsibility of rolling-out this policy throughout Scotland was handed to Sustrans, a charity who in reality primarily champion the cyclist, however they also claim to support the pedestrian and promote public transport. Sustrans encouraged Councils to apply for funding to regenerate Town Centres etc. however they hold the purse-strings and stipulate that Councils must follow the Designing Streets policy to qualify for funding, this means introducing Shared Space.

Cash strapped Councils clamoured to get their hands on this funding and are prepared to go to extreme lengths to secure it, the tick-box exercise had begun.

The following comments are directed at the responses of the majority of the respondents, however as I have been directly involved with East Dunbartonshire Council in Kirkintilloch, my comments relate to my recent experiences there, although similar situations have happened elsewhere.

On 30th April 2015 East Dunbartonshire Council voted to adopt a Shared Space Scheme in the Town Centre, the main Street which runs through the Town is Cowgate and this became known as the Cowgate Regeneration Scheme.

The Council produced an Equality Impact Assessment Report which to anyone not directly involved would appear to be a most professional document as it appeared that all the afore mentioned boxes had been ticked. In reality it is a masterpiece of fantasy fiction worthy of the author Sir Terry Pratchett himself. It is a complete fabrication of events, with inaccurate information, Exaggerations and blatant deception. The most

galling aspect of all however is the claims of consultation, which never took place, we were invited to meetings for the sole purpose of ticking another box, however no meaningful consultation ever took place as the Council unceremoniously bulldozed their policy through.

This lack of consultation is in clear contravention of the policy laid down in Designing Streets and numerous other guidance documents which all state the importance of engaging and consulting with stakeholders, the public and in particular disabled people.

The most glaring example of lack of consultation happened 4 days prior to the start of construction on February 8th, when the local Parish Church Minister was advised for the first time, BY WORKMEN, that on commencement of works on the Monday morning he would have no vehicular access to his church over the next 3 months. There had been no prior notice that he could not get Wedding cars or funeral hearses to the door of his church. Understandably he was upset and angry and featured on the front page of the local Kirkintilloch Herald. The Council's response was to call his integrity into question.

In another box-ticking exercise, following the Council vote to implement the scheme, as Chairman of East Dunbartonshire Visibly Impaired Peoples Forum, (EDVIP) I was invited by the Council Project Team to join the inappropriately named Equality Design Forum (EDF), as was my Vice Chair Margaret Hutchison and the President of The National Federation of the Blind, Douglas Gilroy, all 3 of us are blind or partially sighted. While some attempt was made to provide samples of materials and a model of sorts was attempted, unfortunately it did not help us, as obviously we were unable to see the plans. We had no alternative but to rely on the integrity of those with whom we were engaged in discussion to give us an accurate portrayal of the proposed plans. We were told that the roadway would be narrowed and the pavements widened. To satisfy the minimum requirements of Guide Dogs we were advised that the kerb height would be 60mm, although we objected to this as being inadequate we were as usual, ignored. We were also invited to comment on samples of the proposed paving material. As the same stone had already been installed in another recent development in the Town we had the experience to advise that when wet this type of stone paving became extremely slippery, our comments were again ignored. We later discovered that much of this paving material had already been purchased and had been stockpiled in a former school playground. Shared Surface schemes without kerbs in other locations were discussed, however we were assured that the proposed scheme for Kirkintilloch had 60mm kerbs with wide pavements. It was generally understood that the informal Courtesy Crossings would be mounted on raised tables which would be around 6 Metres long, however longer tables were never discussed. Despite all the assurances, I recently discovered that over 60% of the Street will be on raised tables. This effectively means that the majority of Cowgate will have no detectable delineator between the road and the pavement. With a kerb of only 20mm there is nothing to stop vehicles mounting the walkway, in the absence of signs and no double yellow lines or other road markings, there is nothing to prevent vehicles parking on pavements, as has been the experience of the people of Dumfries and Kinross who have had similar schemes imposed upon them.

In 2009 Guide Dogs commissioned research from University College London into minimum kerb heights. This concluded that the minimum height necessary to ensure that a kerb was always detectable was 60mm. A 20mm kerb was not detected at all 30% of the time, i.e. people walked across the kerb without realising that they had effectively entered the road until researchers told them. A further 30% of the time participants only realised that they had crossed a kerb, was once they had stepped on to the roadway. Obviously if you step in front of a bus this could have catastrophic consequences, even if you realised immediately what you had done. Even if no traffic was present it would be hugely disorientating and distressing to find yourself in the road.

Guide Dogs are taught to stop at kerbs, but they are unlikely to recognise a kerb below 60mm as a kerb. This aspect of the scheme is highly dangerous and you may be aware that RNIB are currently supporting a Judicial Review taken by a blind woman in Lisburn Northern Ireland, regarding kerbs that are 30mm and where the failure rate is substantially less, albeit unacceptable, given the catastrophic consequences of missing a kerb. This lady has on occasion missed a kerb and walked onto the road.

The Council have suggested that the blind and partially sighted can be trained to use informal courtesy crossings along Cowgate, by Sensory Impairment and rehab workers, this is impossible, because it relies on being able to see oncoming traffic and judge when it is safe to cross. The only way to know when it is safe to cross is when a red light obliges traffic to stop.

Over the past 18 months we have tried to engage with the Council on these safety and Equality issues, however their approach suggests that it is the disabled person that is the problem, rather than providing an inclusive environment.

To be able to cross the Street safely by the use of a push button controlled crossing in Kirkintilloch, involves a detour of over 800 metres by everyone, including the elderly and disabled, this must be seen to anyone as being unreasonable and places blind and disabled people at a substantial disadvantage.

These schemes are being implemented in such a way as to make it hazardous to blind and partially sighted people, thereby excluding them from the High Street. In a recent survey by Lord Chris Holmes entitled ' Accidents By Design ', it was found that over one third of people actively avoided using Shared Space. The Council claims that this scheme will ' Regenerate ' the Town Centre, however if previously accessible streets are being turned into no-go areas for large sections of the community, how can they possibly achieve their stated objective, which is to deliver an Attractive and Inclusive Town Centre ', with ' Reduced Vacancy Rates and Higher Footfall'. The Holmes Report found that over two thirds of respondents reported a negative experience of Shared Space and although perhaps the problems are most obvious for vulnerable pedestrians, the schemes were equally unpopular with drivers

Of all of those who responded to my Petition, only The City of Glasgow Council have

interpreted Shared Space as it was intended.

I wish to respectfully remind the Committee of the many impressive and powerful submissions which were earlier received in support of my Petition. These included all the major organisations including RNIB, The National Federation of the Blind, Guide Dogs UK, The Access Panel, Visibility Scotland, Inclusion Scotland, Deaf Blind Scotland and many more passionate individuals who feel that we are being ignored and that our Equality and Human Rights are being violated.

Last month the findings were announced of a coroner's inquiry into an accident in Leek town centre in April 2015 when an 80 year old pedestrian was killed after being hit by a truck. The man who died had attempted to cross the road in a place where safety barriers had been in place before the shared space scheme was introduced. The coroner identified the changes in this scheme as having caused a problem and stated that—

“Without anything to force people to walk to the crossing point it must be a temptation to cross the road at this particular point. I am going to refer this matter back to the local authority to ask them to put up some railings to force people a little further down to the crossing, and thereby – hopefully – incidents such as this will be avoided.”

The coroner concluded that the man who died believed that the truck driver knew where he was but that the truck driver did not see him.

This accident location in Leek mirrors the proposed changes at the Catherine Street junction in Kirkintilloch and the Coroners conclusions should be carefully considered, otherwise this tragic incident will be repeated here.

I also bring to your attention the recent decision taken by the Orkney Islands Council to reject Sustrans inducements to install Shared Space in Kirkwall's Broad Street and act democratically by acting on the wishes of the vast majority of the people of the town with one councillor stating that “To my knowledge about 95 per cent of people are against what we are proposing for Broad Street.”

On behalf of the vast majority of the people of Scotland, I implore the Committee to progress my Petition to ensure that a moratorium can be placed on all current and proposed schemes until safety and Equality issues can be addressed.

Yours sincerely

Alexander (Sandy) Taylor