

PE1595/NNN

Margaret Hutchison Letter of 21 September 2016

UNTIL A "SHARED SPACE / Balanced Street SCHEME" commenced construction in my Town Centre, earlier this year , at a very busy 4 way Junction. I walked daily INDEPENDENTLY, IN TOTAL Safety, with my guide dog. giving me a low "carbon footprint" .

All my guide dog training has now been "negated" with the removal of all the previous, safe & proven, training "Landmarks" (e.g. vital Controlled Crossings, recognisable kerbs & railings) resulting in my daily life becoming even more challenging. My self-confidence has decreased & I now am forced into being more reliant on the help & kindness of strangers to navigate through my own Town Centre. My independence has been stripped away& I now have to rely on taxis or public transport to do what previously was, a straightforward journey on foot, with the resulting increased "carbon footprint"

Now all ,along the" pavement" area, it is a series of obstacles to negotiate along the route (e.g. outdoor tables & chairs, numerous A Boards , cyclists riding along (mainly without using bells to announce their presence) plus cars & vans parked, as there are no double yellow lines.

There have been numerous "incidents" in the last couple of months, (which were reported in writing to the Council Project Leader, to which there has been no response to date) "Incidents" reported to the local police are not being recorded, unless it's a "criminal offence".

Vehicles & buses are NOT stopping when someone uses a "Courtesy" crossing as their proponents said would happen & many times the pedestrian has to jump back onto the "pavement" area to avoid being knocked down.

Public buses are having to "encroach" onto the opposite side of the carriageway as the "turning corner" is too tight, making it very frightening & intimidating for anyone waiting at the crossing. Because the "Carriageway" has been narrowed so much. The bollards at these corners have already been knocked down several times due to this, which is highly dangerous & alarming to pedestrians who no longer feel safe. The police themselves have requested the Junction be "made safe"

. In many cases cars have had to reverse back over a "Courtesy" crossing to allow the bus to continue its journey, sometimes because parked cars are blocking the way forward. Again the implications of this action on any person already on the crossing are horrendous.

This is occurring when only 3 arms of the Junction are functional as yet.

It will be worse on full completion.

The installation of "Courtesy" Crossings, i.e. unpredictable "jay walking areas" has led to "mixed signals", uncertainty & confusion amongst ALL users; private car & public vehicle drivers, pedestrians & cyclists as well as, my guide dog who has, sensibly, been trained to stop when there is oncoming traffic . If I were to use a "Courtesy" crossing I could be stranded amidst traffic moving around us from several directions. Leaving us, on an "island" A scary experience indeed.

Even scarier, for those who are TOTALLY BLACK BLIND? With absolutely no awareness of anything or anyone in their surroundings, every moment of every day. They rely on Touch for navigation & that has now been denied them.

Due to the bad design, the location of the 2 new "Puffin" Crossings, which have had their "bleeper" turned off, are also causing serious problems with a "backup" of traffic & on one occasion I couldn't get across as there was a large 4 by 4 car parked fully over the crossing as it couldn't move forward.

I had to wait several minutes before the traffic "cleared".

This again, doesn't help with emissions or making our Town centres more "Green".

Many car drivers are avoiding the area as they do not like the uncertainty & unpredictability of both other drivers & pedestrians actions. There is confusion over "right of way" & difficulties in watching 3 different directions. These will not, "regenerate" our Town Centre, which was one of the main aims of the scheme, in fact, quite the opposite effect.

These "Streetscapes" which promote "blurring" the lines between "carriageway" & "pavement" , integrating pedestrians with all vehicle users, sharing & traversing the same "space" are highly dangerous & have a devastating impact on those of us in a "vulnerable" category. The main focus appears to be concentrating on the needs of cyclists above & to the detriment of the disabled (e.g. Two way directional cycle lanes which have to be crossed over in order to reach the bus stops which are now located on "islands" mid-way . Again, "foolhardy" at best & dangerous at worst. This discourages, rather than encouraging the use of "public transport".

East Dunbartonshire has the highest ratio of elderly people in the whole of Scotland so there are many who have mobility problems & find such areas impossible to cope with.

Such schemes are based on ideological theory as to their positive "benefits" & not on reality. They are fundamentally flawed & lead to a "Third World Free for all". They concentrate on aesthetics, above all -- in looking "pretty" rather on safety.

"Courtesy" crossings are NOT CLASSIFIED , aren't covered by the Highway Code & as such no national "register" is required to record accidents / incidents so their "architects" of such designs make unverifiable claims as to the reduction in traffic "incidents".

Both the "architects / "proponents" & Local Authorities are motivated by the financial "incentives" of such schemes.

Our Council's C.E.O., when questioned, over safety concerns, Stated they were only "carrying out the decisions made by the elected Administration", absolving himself of any responsibility. He also advised the current design "was not a purist Shared Space" , implying that due to this , the Guidelines in Designing Streets etc. need not be followed fully. (Again, down to "interpretation"!)

Our Council Administration claim that the new "streetscape" is "accessible to everyone of any age or ability", however, they failed to substantiate this claim, by refusing to undertake a blindfold walk & wheelchair "navigation" along the area!

Would this "accessibility" claim include some of my friends below?!

1 A lady who has "an acquired brain injury " disability who is now afraid to cross the road as she's confused by the removal of recognisable Traffic Lights.

2 An elderly lady in a mobility Scooter who can no longer access the local shops due to the limitations of her scooter, the many pavement "obstacles" & the removal of Controlled Crossings where she previously knew that traffic was legally bound to stop to give her mobility scooter time to cross safely without "intimidation".

3A young woman in her 20's, previously able bodied & fully sighted, who has now lost 80% of her vision after a stroke. She now needs assistance with her mobility due to her new sight loss & anew unrecognisable "streetscape"

4 A man in his 30's, with learning difficulties, who is terrified on the "Courtesy" crossings & has almost been knocked down several times.

I could site numerous other such "vulnerable" folks who have not been considered at all in the introduction of such schemes which effectively "ban" vulnerable people from their own community. This is definitely NOT "Inclusive Design at the heart", as stipulated in

"Designing Streets" & are a retrograde step in the wrong direction. The rights of the Disabled have been put back a century with this Design "pattern".

The "Town Centre Toolkit", which came into being in 2015 is noticeable by the absence of any consultation with , or input by, any Disabled organisations, despite numerous other organisations being consulted.

Council Administrations are avidly following these Guidelines (which we are reminded they are not statutory or the law) which give absolutely no consideration to the needs or rights of the disabled or those in "vulnerable" Groups. The Disabled have, in effect, been "deleted out of existence"!

There is no accountability & is purely open to "interpretation" by individual Local Authorities.

Every single person should have the same access rights & not be denied this, or be culpably prevented from doing so by a new discriminatory "streetscape" which does not, in my opinion, comply with Equality legislation. It would appear; however, that current Equality legislation is ineffective & powerless.

With the "expansion" of such areas planned, & under construction, throughout Scotland & the rest of the U.K., our exclusion will become almost total. This isn't fair or equitable. The Current Design "Mantra" towards Disabled people seems to be "We Don't Mind Because They Don't Matter"!

The current "Guidelines" are ineffective & in fact are biased against those in "vulnerable" categories who, definitely are NOT being "protected".

We urgently need mandatory, statutory Legislation so there can be no "get out clauses". Local authorities need to be made accountable for their actions.

The Highway Code also needs to urgently be revised to include "Shared Space" areas & CLASSIFY "Courtesy " crossings. This would then educate drivers as to their legal responsibilities. There would then be an official record of & monitoring of any "incidents" or accidents in such areas, which does not happen at the moment.

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