

# **Disability Consultation and Advisory Service**

**Consultation Report, Bournemouth Borough Council  
Town Centre Detailed Options Proposal Document  
12<sup>th</sup> February 2010**

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## 1.0 Executive Summary

Bournemouth Borough Council is undertaking a large scale project to redevelop the town centre. The vision for 2026 is that Bournemouth Town Centre will be as follows:

**“A vibrant, diverse and sustainable coastal centre offering a unique retail, leisure, living and learning experience.”**

**“An accessible place, where people feel safe and are proud to live, work, visit and invest.”**

**“An inspiring fusion of historic and high quality modern buildings complemented by an unrivalled sea front and network of streets and spaces.”**

The Town Centre Area Action Plan: ‘Moving Forward - The Detailed Options’ Document contains a number of options for the redevelopment of the town centre and is currently under consultation.

The built environment has a significant impact on disabled people and can either help maximise inclusion or compound the exclusion that disabled people experience.

In recognition of this, the Planning and Transport Department decided to consult with disabled people on some of the proposals in the Detailed Options Document that they feel are particularly relevant to disabled people and the issues they face. These included:

- Sustainable Transport Priority Zone & physical changes to the street.
- Disabled (Blue Badge) Parking.
- Improvements to the accessibility of the train station and its links to the heart of the town centre.
- Street furniture.

### **Key Messages/Recommendations from the Consultation include:**

1. The consultation focused on some, but not all, of the issues covered by the Detailed Options Document. Participants commented that all the issues in the Document were interrelated and could impact negatively on disabled people. This needs to be taken into consideration to prevent the creation of further barriers.
2. The plans to improve the accessibility of the public realm town centre are welcomed. The town centre is currently inaccessible to many disabled people, due to topography, inadequate Blue Badge parking and only partially accessible public transport (Shamrock buses are considered to be inaccessible): **“So many areas are inaccessible”**.
3. The accessibility of ‘community services’ must also be addressed in order to achieve an accessible environment: **“You cannot get into the post office”**.
4. Not all the barriers that disabled people face are obvious to non-disabled people without training and consultation. Those making decisions about the development of the town centre need to have a broad and accurate understanding of the barriers that disabled people from a wide range of impairment groups face when negotiating transport and movement within areas: **“Think beyond the wheelchair”**.
5. The lack of a Shop Mobility Scheme in the town centre is a major barrier and disincentive for many disabled people. It is an essential part of an accessible town centre and its absence has a negative impact on the economy: **“You lose a lot of money ...[the lack of a Shop Mobility scheme] links to the economy”**.

6. The development of a Reference Group to produce a parking strategy for disabled people was **very welcome**. However, it was felt that its remit needed to be extended to include all of the proposals that will be taken forward. Blue Badge parking in isolation will not achieve an accessible town centre.
7. Any Reference Group will need to include disabled people from a wide range of impairment groups, age ranges and cultural backgrounds, in order to reflect the different use of the town centre by different groups. For example, young disabled people are more likely to want to access the night time economy, to which there might be specific barriers.

## **2.0 Introduction**

DOTS Disability was engaged by Bournemouth Borough Council to consult with local disabled people on the Bournemouth Town Centre Area Action Plan: 'Moving Forward - The Detailed Options' Document 2010.

The purpose of this consultation was to provide the Planning Department with feedback on areas identified by the Department that could significantly impact on disabled people.

DOTS Disability and disabled people value participation in this particular consultation because the impact of the built environment on disabled people is considerable. An inaccessible public realm/town centre creates barriers to the social and economic wellbeing of disabled and non-disabled people alike. In addition to perpetuating the physical and informational barriers that disabled people face on a daily basis, it also perpetuates negative stereotypes of disabled people.

## **2.1 Local Demography**

The 2001 Census found that 20% (33,000) of Bournemouth's population were disabled people. In 2007, Bournemouth and Poole PCT's Strategic Review reported that 28% of the population had a "long-term illness or disability". Given the ageing demographic within the conurbation, these numbers are likely to increase in the future.

## **2.2 The Consultation Group**

Six disabled people attended the focus group, as follows:

- 2 male and 4 female;
- 3 wheelchair users;
- All aged between 40 and 60.

A facilitator from DOTS Disability led the session.

Bournemouth Borough Council was represented by Sophie Edwards and Caroline Peach. We would like to thank them for their invaluable input, which helped to clarify a range of complex issues.

## 3.0 Consultation Summary

The consultation was held on 12 February 2010 at The Village Hotel, Bournemouth.

Prior to the consultation, local disabled people from a range of impairment groups received The Detailed Options Document<sup>1</sup> and the Topic/Question list from the Planning Department (see Appendix A, page 12), which they were asked to consider prior to the event.

The following sections of this report address each of the topics/questions, and provides a summary of the themes, comments and recommendations.

### 3.1 Topic 1: Sustainable Transport Priority Zone & physical changes to the street

#### Questions:

1. Do you understand the principle of the 'Zone' and what we mean by 'physical changes to the street'? Do you need clarification about the different proposed options?
2. Which of the 3 options do you think would be best for disabled people?
3. Do you think that there could be any negative impact(s) as a result of any of these 3 options? If so, how do you think these problems could be overcome?

The group understood the principals of the Sustainable Travel Priority Zone (the 'Zone') and what is meant by 'physical changes'.

They noted that features such as wider pavements could significantly benefit disabled people, but also commented that, if badly designed, these could also have negative impact. Other comments and observations were:

- Concern that there were shared surfaces, which “**endorse crossover [between cars, cyclists and people].**” One participant, a wheelchair user, commented that she had been hit by a cyclist.
- Concern that the inclusion of physical features such as tall planters could reduce the visibility of disabled people and result in collisions.
- That the physical changes to the streets which will aim to discourage car use within the Zone could make it difficult to reach Blue Badge parking located within the Zone.

The interface between the Zone and the capacity of public transport providers - who would transport people from outlying areas to the Zone and deliver a service to growing numbers of disabled people - was discussed at some length, with the following arising:

- In principal, the group did not object to the idea of using public transport.
- The group were wary of the ability of public transport to meet their needs currently, and the needs of growing numbers of disabled people in the future (please note, the group did not generally use the buses).
- The group felt that public transport could work for some disabled people but not all (possibly due to the complexity of access needs/health issues).

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<sup>1</sup> See

[www.bournemouth.gov.uk/Residents/Planning\\_Development/Planning\\_Policy/Local\\_PLanning/LDF/AreaActionPlan\\_DetailedOpt.asp#Documents](http://www.bournemouth.gov.uk/Residents/Planning_Development/Planning_Policy/Local_PLanning/LDF/AreaActionPlan_DetailedOpt.asp#Documents)

- It was noted that Shamrock buses are not accessible.
- Late buses were seen as a problem, particularly in the winter, because people with mobility issues cannot necessarily move around to keep warm when a bus is late, and the implications of getting cold have a significantly greater negative impact for some disabled people.
- If it is raining, lack of or inadequate bus shelters were an issue for wheelchair users as their seated position means their legs will become significantly wetter than those of a person who is standing.

One group member commented that it is important for planners to have a good understanding of the barriers that disabled people face in accessing public transport.

The group further felt that it would be a good idea to start with a small Sustainable Travel Priority Zone so that the physical features that will affect disabled people could be trialled and lessons learnt before extending the Zone.

The group felt that Option A was preferable, because it could constitute a pilot where the impact of the changes to the area could be tested out with disabled people. The larger zoned area could then be phased in.

### Recommendations

1. That disabled people are involved in the design, development and management of the accessibility of the public realm within the Zone.
2. That the proposal to start with a small Zone (Option A) is implemented initially, in order to allow an opportunity to “test” the approach to creating an accessible environment.
3. That partnership work with transport providers and disabled people is undertaken to identify ways to maximise the accessibility of public transport, from outlying areas, to and from the zone for disabled people.
4. That the actions taken to “discourage cars” by making physical changes to the public realm within the Zone should not negatively impact on routes to Blue Badge parking bays.
5. That Blue Badge parking is retained within the Zone in order to ensure access for people for whom public transport is inaccessible.

### 3.2 Topic 2: Disabled (Blue Badge) Parking

#### Questions:

1. Do you understand the 2 proposed options?
2. Which of the 2 options do you think would be best for disabled people?
3. Do you think that there could be any negative impact(s) as a result of any of these 2 options? If so, how do you think these problems could be overcome?

The group feel very strongly that the current parking provision for disabled drivers who are Blue Badge holders is inadequate. They referred to a number of negative experiences relating to the current provision. Therefore, they feel that Option A is not an appropriate response to meeting the needs of disabled drivers because it constitutes the continuation of an approach that disabled people say is not working.

Specific issues with the current approach were:

- The lack of Blue Badge parking bays located on level surfaces.
- The lack of Blue Badge bays adequate for drivers with more complex needs, for example, those who employ side hoists, and rear entry vehicles.
- That not all Blue Badge parking spaces are of the same dimensions. There is nothing to stop any Blue Badge holder parking on one of the larger spaces even if the individual does not need to do so for access purposes. This further limits access to the town centre for those with more complex needs. However, there was also concern that variation in the type of parking bay could prove confusing and would need careful consideration, consultation and planning.

The group preferred Option B, which proposes the formation of a Disability Reference Group. In addition to providing input into the development of a parking strategy, the Reference Group could consider the location and type of parking required and associated issues, such as the development of a Town Centre Shop Mobility scheme.

There was considerable discussion about how and where Blue Badge parking should be located and grouped. Different group members currently favoured different car parks. The 3 car parks mentioned as offering the best accessibility were:

- Exeter Road;
- Pavilion;
- IMAX.

There was concern that if a block area or car park was purely designated for Blue Badge holders there would be a greater risk of Blue Badge theft and also of mugging or physical attacks on disabled people<sup>2</sup>.

The group were concerned by the lack of a firm commitment in Option B for the inclusion of a Shop Mobility scheme in the proposal. The group felt that the lack of a Shop Mobility scheme in the town centre was one of the central issues that make the town centre inaccessible to many disabled people. Disabled people are currently drawn to Castle Point because it has this facility.

The provision of a Shop Mobility scheme for the town centre has been on the agenda for a number of years and some group members have been involved in lobbying for this. The tone of the discussion indicated very strongly that disabled people who are involved in this lobbying feel a significant sense of frustration: **“This is the only town in the South West which does not have this facility [in the town centre].”**

Group members felt that the importance of Shop Mobility needs to be recognised and that it needs to be acknowledged that this is an **“essential”**, not just something for consideration in any proposals going forward.

**“You do not understand the difference....the immense difference....[a Shop Mobility scheme] this would make to peoples lives.”**

**“The problems would be sorted by a proper Shop Mobility centre – it would halve the parking issues for disabled people in Bournemouth.”**

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<sup>2</sup> Research indicates that disabled people are twice as likely to be the victims of verbal abuse and 4 times more likely to be the victims of violent crime.

One group member focused on the freedom that a Shop Mobility scheme could provide by removing the dependence of disabled people on carers/support workers when shopping in the town centre:

**“[A Shop Mobility scheme] would offer [disabled people] a sense of freedom and a sense of accessibility.”**

**“People could access leisure, shop and visit the key services.”**

The importance of the location of any Shop Mobility scheme was also considered key.

It was felt that the Shop Mobility scheme would need to link with the BAT bus enabling disabled people to visit a range of locations to access leisure, shopping and services: **“It could give independence”**.

### Recommendations

1. That Option B is progressed and a Reference Group made up of disabled people from all the impairment groups is developed.
2. That the wording in Option B is amended so that a Shop Mobility scheme is included as an essential and priority feature of the town centre development.
3. That the remit of the Reference Group is extended to cover all aspects of town centre development.

### 3.3 Topic 3: Improvements to the accessibility of the train station and its links to the heart of the town centre

#### Questions:

1. What works and what does not work for disabled people in this area?
2. How could this area be improved for disabled people?
3. What do you think should be done first in this area?

The group felt that the current physical environment of the train station and its surroundings are inaccessible and unwelcoming for everyone, including disabled people: **“It is not a welcoming place – Holdenhurst Road is not [welcoming]”**.

Group members felt that current parking arrangements at the station are confusing. People were unsure as to whether they have to pay or not.

The group also felt that there needs to be more Blue Badge parking provision on both sides of the station.

The group commented that the poor quality of the surfaces and dropped kerbs has a negative impact. One member stated that **“the dropped kerbs are random”**.

Another commented on the difficulties encountered travelling from the train station to the bus station: **“The traffic coming across your path....moving to the bus station – you are taking your own life in your own hands”**.

The group really welcomed the idea of “**pulling it (i.e. ASDA and ASDA car park) down**” and creating a more welcoming environment, with good access features for disabled people. In the interim, the group welcomed the idea of small scale changes to the area that would improve access features.

## Recommendations

1. That the proposal to reconfigure ASDA and the multi-storey car park to create a public space is adopted (Option A).
2. That the key physical barriers that currently make the area inaccessible for disabled people are addressed.
3. That disabled people are involved in the identification of barriers and potential short term solutions.
4. That signage at the station is amended so that disabled drivers have clarity on whether or not they have to pay to park.
5. That disabled people are kept informed about works to the station and surroundings, which may impact on the station’s accessibility.

## 3.4 Topic 4: Street furniture

### Questions:

1. Do you understand the proposal?
2. How could the proposal improve the experience for disabled people?
3. How should we take into account the needs of disabled people?

There was an expectation that this might be one of the less difficult areas to address; however, it proved problematic because the disabled people in the group felt so disassociated from the town centre.

The Planning Department had hoped to be able to extrapolate geographical areas or ‘hot spots’. As we were unable to do this, we instead focused on identifying general responses to, and experience of, street furniture.

Key issues were that:

- Although greenery is welcome, people were concerned about street furniture that obscures sight and guidelines<sup>3</sup>, for example, tall hanging planters.
- Poorly placed street furniture interferes with features that disabled people need to navigate an area safely.
- Temporary furniture - specifically furniture associated with Christmas and Summer Festivals, for example, temporary stages and platforms - can constitute a hazard if the needs of disabled people are not considered. The group noted that, in the past, these features/attractions have been inaccessible to disabled people: “[**Celebrations/festival structures**] need to be accessible to disabled people as well”.

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that, in general, visually impaired and blind white cane users will tend to guide to shop front and therefore street furniture, particularly furniture which is not permanent such as A boards, can prove disruptive and dangerous.

At this point, the group facilitator suggested that although personal opinion of what was or was not accessible was welcome, that this remained a personal experience, and in order to identify 'hot spots', an objective exercise was required. The group welcomed this suggestion.

The group was then asked to identify street furniture that they find problematic, which led to the following list:

- Poorly planned parking (adjacent to barriers or obstructions that limit accessibility and can render the bay inaccessible).
- Bollards (randomly placed can cause a collision hazard, especially to people with a visual impairment).
- Bins (can narrow the width of the pavement/cause a collision hazard/obscure sightlines).
- A-Boards (can be a collision hazard and disorientate visually impaired people because their placement is not consistent).
- Gullies (can cause significant difficulties for wheelchair users, for example, unbalancing people or trapping wheels): **“Why are they like this?”**.
- Poorly maintained dropped kerbs that are not flush (create a barrier for wheelchair users and trip hazards).
- Changing levels and uneven surfaces, for example, Commercial Road (the changing level creates a barrier).
- People parking and blocking dropped kerbs (again, rendering Blue Badge parking bays inaccessible and forcing wheelchair users to progress along the highway: **“People do not realise what they are doing when they park [next to one]”**).
- Narrow shared surfaces and narrow streets: **“I get hit by cyclists”**.

## Recommendations

1. That an objective consultation exercise is carried out for key features/street furniture that could potentially have a negative impact on disabled people to identify and rectify current 'hot spots'.
2. Those standards for the development and management of street furniture are implemented to ensure that barriers are not included in the town centre design. One example of a potential standard could be that street furniture should **“[maintain or] increase the visibility of disabled people”**.

## 4.0 Summary of Recommendations

1. That disabled people are involved in the design, development and management of the accessibility of the public realm within the Zone.
2. That the proposal to start with a small Zone (Topic 1: Option A) is implemented initially, in order to allow an opportunity to “**test**” the approach to creating an accessible environment.
3. That partnership work with transport providers and disabled people is undertaken to identify ways to maximise the accessibility of public transport for disabled people, from outlying areas to and from the Zone.
4. That the actions taken to “**discourage cars**” by making physical changes to the public realm within the Zone should not negatively impact routes to Blue Badge parking bays.
5. That Blue Badge parking is retained within the Zone in order to ensure access for people for whom public transport is inaccessible.
6. That Topic 2: Option B is progressed and a Reference Group made up of disabled people from all the impairment groups is developed.
7. That the wording in Topic 2: Option B is amended so that a Shop Mobility scheme is included as an essential and priority feature of the town centre development.
8. That the remit of the Reference Group is extended to cover all aspects of town centre development.
9. That the proposal to reconfigure ASDA and the multi-storey car park to create a public space is adopted (Topic 3: Option A).
10. In the short term, that the key physical barriers that currently make the train station and the surround inaccessible for disabled people are addressed (to an extent, the recommendation for Topic 3 is therefore Option B in the short term and Option A in the longer term).
11. That signage at the station is amended so that disabled drivers have clarity on whether or not they have to pay to park.
12. That disabled people are kept informed about works to the station and surround that may impact on the station’s accessibility.
13. That an objective consultation exercise is carried out for key features/street furniture that could potentially have a negative impact on disabled people, and to identify and rectify current ‘hot spots’.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Consultation Topic Summary Document

#### **Bournemouth Town Centre Area Action Plan: 'Moving Forward – The Detailed Options'**

##### Topic 1: Sustainable Transport Priority Zone & physical changes to the street

In order to balance the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and private car movement in the town centre, one of the possibilities is to create a 'sustainable travel priority zone'. The creation of a 'Zone' would include changes to the design of roads and junctions in order to reduce vehicle speeds and give greater priority to pedestrians, cyclists and public transport movement over the private car. For example, the width of roads could be reduced, allowing wider pavements and changing surfaces could be introduced to slow vehicles down and make roads easier to cross.

As shown on these maps, the different options relate to the size of the 'zone' that could benefit from such changes.

##### Questions:

1. Do you understand the principle of the 'Zone' and what we mean by 'physical changes to the street'? ; do you need clarification about the different proposed options?
2. Which of the 3 options do you think would be best for disabled people?
3. Do you think that there could be any negative impact(s) as a result of any of these 3 options? If so, how do you think these problems could be overcome?

##### Topic 2: Disabled Parking

There are currently a number of parking spaces for disabled people across the town centre, either in public car parks or within dedicated on street parking bays. There are also some areas where people with disabled badges can park on double yellow lines for a limited period of time.

In the document we propose to either continue with the existing arrangements and make small scale changes as and when they are needed, or to work with disabled people to prepare a parking strategy. For example this could include finding the best location for a Shop Mobility facility and understanding where the best places are for disabled people to park.

##### Questions:

1. Do you understand the 2 proposed options?
2. Which of the 2 options do you think would be best for disabled people?
3. Do you think that there could be any negative impact(s) as a result of any of these 2 options? If so, how do you think these problems could be overcome?

### Topic 3: Improvements to the accessibility of the train station and its links to the heart of the town centre

As part of previous consultation events, members of the public told us that the links between the heart of the town centre and the train station should be improved. We would like you to think about your experience of the train station as a space.

#### Questions:

1. What works and what does not work for disabled people in this area?
2. How could this area be improved for disabled people?
3. What do you think should be done first in this area?

### Topic 4: Street furniture

In order to make the town centre look nicer, we are proposing to prepare a strategy to improve existing public spaces and streets, but also create new public spaces. This strategy could also include things like additional trees and planting in between public spaces on key routes, quality street furniture (for example seating, lighting). We might also look at removing unneeded items that have been left in the street and are in the way (for example bins, poles, signs, railings).

There are lots of different ways to do this, and we would like to hear your views on how we could or should do this.

#### Questions:

1. Do you understand the proposal?
2. How could the proposal improve the experience for disabled people?
3. How should we take into account the needs of disabled people?