

PE1595/EE

Charlotte Nickson Letter of 19 January 2016

Dear Public Petitions Committee I am writing to explain my views on the PE1595 on "Moratorium on shared spaces."

My name is Charlotte Nickson I am a 20 year old Coventry University student that lives in the city centre. I am also visually impaired (VI) and a Guide Dog owner (GDO) and on a daily basis I struggle with the problem of shared spaces. The city is riddled with them and I am very limited to where I can go independently without having to ask for sighted assistance.

The main problems these areas cause for blind, VI and deaf blind people like me are:

- Not being able to tell where the road is.
- Drivers speeding.
- Drivers not looking where they are going and driving in to pedestrians, lamp posts or buildings.
- Fear of going out.
- Not knowing if it is safe to cross the roads unless told so by another sighted person.
- Tactile misused so long cane users (LCU's) can get lost or not able to find the tactile in the first place.
- Guide Dogs not able to find curbs as trained for drop curbs and raised curbs not tactile.
- Obstacles that would not on a normal foot path can be put out the way like benches being walked in to.
- Getting lost
- No right of way means cars and other pedestrians don't stop to allow people to cross or walk around.
- No strait lines, removes the ability of all blind and VI people to get around safely without getting lost.
- Increased use of electric vehicles with no sound generation and with newer vehicles being quieter makes it very difficult for people who rely on using their hearing to cross the road.

These problems cause blind, VI and deaf blind people to not get out independently, they require more expensive training that is supposed to be provided by the government by law however these services are being cut, resulting in the most vulnerable in society to get lost, injured or simply not enter these areas on their own. Most councils in England argue that the colour contrast is enough of a warning for blind people to used shared space, however, blind people cannot see the colour contrast and in the dark many VI who could potentially see the it cannot in the dark. I for instance cannot see my own feet if I look down and stand up straight, as I am taller than my depth of filed. Also the tactile used by some councils is not wide enough, which makes it easy to miss as many peoples walking stride just goes over

it and if it is not put in the correct position white cane users cannot pick it up. This again prevents blind people from accessing these areas as they are unable to safely and independently navigate there way around shared spaces.

The other main issue is drivers. Drivers don't always go the speed limit and in narrow roads this is more dangerous, and considering they are always in the centres of towns and cities meaning close to pubs and bars. The pedestrian may not even be aware of the fact they are in the road due to the lack of proper curbs and crossings. This assumes all drivers follow the high way code to the letter, which they do not. It is just not worth the risk surely keeping people on foot away from the one tone metal boxes going 20 miles an hour or faster is safer for every one? Less chance of A&E being overrun and fewer deaths. Also how will things like ambulances get to emergencies in the city or town centre if there are people and cars in the way they are so wide that when they drive on shared space they cause havoc and almost always get close to injuring someone? It is only a matter of time before they do.

Another problem faced by blind and VI people in these areas is that not enough people know the safe and correct way to offer us assistance, which can put us in a lot of danger as people who genuinely want to help us do so with no warning. We get dragged across roads, which leads to us tripping or falling and can lead to us being lost, confused and these people often leave without telling us where we are standing, so we try to talk to them and they are already gone. This can be traumatising and harmful and unfortunately is due to a lack of education. Due to this problem removing the ability for people like me to cross independently can lead to confusion at best or at worse injury.

I cannot cross the shared space crossing in Coventry as seen in the two pictures below, as the junction shown has 3 way traffic and I have to wait for sighted assistance to be able to cross the road. All the independence is taken away from me at this point and at times have had to wait 10 – 15 minutes to get sighted assistance and on occasions I have had to turn back and go home when I cannot find somebody to help me. Many blind people do not like asking for sighted assistance as you have no clue who you are asking and would simply avoid using the junction. Also at the time when the photograph was taken a hybrid electric mini bus passed through the junction, which I did not hear. This is another problem which makes shared space even more dangerous as more of these vehicles are being used on our roads and if you rely on hearing to help you cross it then electric cars with no sound generator or quieter vehicles makes it very dangerous. I sometimes ask friends to give me sighted assistance if I need to go to the bank to ensure I get there however this is not allowing me the independence I should have in the city centre. Even when I do get the opposite side, there are also obstacles lower than knee height that I and others can trip over placed in the pedestrian walk way area making my and others journey even more stressful.



Photo 1: Shared space junction in Coventry where sighted assistance is needed to cross the road and illustrates the problems that electric cars can pose as people cannot hear them.



Photo 2: Shared space junction in Coventry illustrating potential trip hazards in the pavement area.

Many part of Coventry are no go areas for me without sighted assistance and limits my ability to navigate the city freely and independently as a blind person. The best solution is for all established crossing points for pedestrians to be controlled crossings with lights, tactile that goes from the building line to the drop curb, beeps if possible and with spinning cones. Kerbs, are also being lowered in parts of the city and these need to be reinstated to allow blind people to be navigate independently.

Shared space also limits the ability of my blind friends who want to visit me in Coventry independently to do so and are not able to do so without sighted assistance. I am also limited to places I can go and visit with my friend who is also blind in Bournemouth due to the shared space concept being used there. I recently spoke with a member of the National Federation of the Blind who said that he would not come into Coventry anymore due to the shared space and he only lives in Warwick. What this does is make our ability to meet and socialise with blind, VI and deaf blind people very difficult and leads to a greater isolation of blind people.

The theory of shared spaces look good on paper but in practice they are very unsafe for vulnerable they often break the Equality Act 2010 due to forcing blind, VI and deaf blind people not use them. It equates to creating apartheid in our towns and city centres where blind, VI and deaf blind people are effectively excluded from independently navigating the streets where they live, socialise and work.

The problem of shared space has been highlighted as an emerging issue in Scotland through the Scottish Governments accessibility summit¹ held in 2015. Shared space has been reported to the United Nations by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in December 2014² and Scotland has the unique opportunity to act upon these concerns by acting upon PE1595 on “Moratorium on shared spaces” and to ensure Scotland meets its duty to protect people under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities³.

¹Page 12 <http://www.transportscotland.gov.uk/system/files/documents/reports/TSA.pdf>

²Pages 12/13

http://www.equalityni.org/ECNI/media/ECNI/Publications/Delivering%20Equality/UNCRPD%20investigations/UNCRPD-UKIM_List_of_Issues-Interim_Report.PDF

³<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>