

PE1595/MMM

Petitioner Letter of 22 September 2016

I am grateful to be granted an opportunity to send a submission to this new Petitions Committee. I trust that you have accessed evidence gathered by your predecessors, together with the 52 submissions sent in support of my petition, including those from all leading organisations such as RNIB, The National Federation of the Blind (NFB), Deaf Blind Scotland and many other concerned individuals. These were described by the previous Convener MSP Michael McMahon as "extremely Powerful".

While I am kept aware of developments in all parts of the country through my involvement with the NFB, much of my experiences based on the scheme which is currently under construction in Kirkintilloch. I understand that decisions concerning Town Streets and Roads, are devolved to Local Authorities, however Government guidelines, in this case 'Designing Streets', UK government 1/11 and more recently the 'Town Centre Toolkit', are intended to provide local Authorities with appropriate guidance. Local Authorities however appear to use this guidance and forget their duty under the 2010 Equality Act, which States :

As a public authority, the Council is subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty and is required to have "due regard" to equality outcomes in everything it does. In particular, the Council is required to ensure that it eliminates discrimination, advances equality of opportunity and fosters good relations between, amongst others, disabled and non-disabled people.

The Scottish Government has set a target of achieving 10% of journeys by bicycle by 2020, however this policy impacts disproportionately against all other road users, particularly the disabled. In 2014/15 it is understood that Scottish Transport allocated £19million to Sustrans, who in turn invited Councils to apply for funding. In the Communities Links Guide 2015 to 2016 and Communities Links Programme Scoring Matrix, Sustrans have set the criteria for a successful application for funding. In these documents the cyclist is promoted above all other road users, it is also clear that no account has been taken at any point to consider the impact of any scheme on the disabled, the blind, other vulnerable people or children.

It appears that Local Authorities are under severe financial pressure and will seek funding for schemes even those with conditions which will impact negatively on their community. We at East Dunbartonshire Visibly Impaired Peoples Forum (EDVIP) have over the past 2 years repeatedly voiced our concerns of exclusion, safety and the affect this scheme would have on the Town and the community, the Council ignored our concerns, stating that this scheme would be suitable for everyone regardless of age or ability. I therefore challenged the Council administration and it's officers to undertake a blindfold crossing of the Street at the junction, in the hope that they would see things from our perspective, my challenge was rejected. My 'Petition' before you has been signed by 3500 local inhabitants, however now that the scheme is under construction

and is partially completed. the overwhelming majority of the people of Kirkintilloch vehemently oppose this scheme. The main street has been narrowed to such an extent that busses cannot complete a turn from the junction without encroaching on the opposite carriageway, vehicles on the opposite side have to reverse over Courtesy Crossings to allow the bus to complete it's turn. Bollards installed at the corners have been demolished as vehicles cut the corner due to lack of turning space. There is no provision for shops to receive deliveries and parking on pavements is now commonplace, as are cyclists on pavements. The new 20MPH speed limit is being ignored by many and pedestrians are terrified to use Courtesy Crossings, resulting in many people avoiding the Town altogether, particularly the disabled and the elderly, for whom the Town is now a no-go area. This was exemplified a few days ago by an elderly lady who was standing at a Courtesy Crossing, crying in frustration as vehicles sped by. She was eventually assisted by a sympathetic motorist who stopped and helped her cross, she vowed never to return.

I recently met Michael Pringle whose 3 year old Son Clinton was tragically killed at a similar Shared Space Scheme while on holiday in Jersey. Michael told me that it is inevitable that another tragedy will take place in Kirkintilloch as the scheme is almost identical, with no proper delineation between road and pavement and with the majority of kerbs only 20mm, they are no more than a trip hazard. With no traffic controls or controlled crossings in place an 800 metre detour is necessary to cross the Street safely, this in no way could be considered to be a reasonable adjustment.

At a recent debate on Shared Space in the House of Lords, it was stated that " Shared Space was the biggest Institutionalised discrimination against Blind people ever seen in the UK". Lord Chris Holmes of Richmond, who is also blind, described Shared Space Schemes as having spread like a pernicious class 'A' drug around the country. There have however been many costly 'U' turns around the country, a much publicised scheme in Hackbridge recently had controlled crossings re-installed following public outrage when a young child was injured. If you care to look on the BVC website you will see blind reporter Ian Hamilton attempting to cross the Street in Kinross, he was completely disorientated, as he was unsure whether he was on the road or the pavement. Perthshire and Kinross Council have recently decided to re-install a controlled crossing in Kinross following local outrage.

We fully supported East Dunbartonshire Councils attempts to make the Town more attractive and encourage more traders to fill the many empty shops, however it is impossible to have a vibrant Town if over 35% of the public are excluded. There have been further shop closures since this scheme started and more are expected to follow, as people avoid the Town altogether. Drivers too oppose the scheme as some pedestrians suddenly step in front of their vehicle and many altercations have taken place. For regular drivers who have little choice like Taxi drivers, they claim that the raised tables are ruining the vehicles suspension and tyres, they do their best to find alternative routes and several 'rat runs' have been established, some putting other pedestrians and children at risk.

The Scottish Government have pledged to bring equality to the many disabled throughout the country and the following is an extract from a recent report :

Consultation Document on Equality 2016

This delivery plan shows how we will move forward to make UNCRPD a reality for disabled people in Scotland. It shows the Scottish Government's planned approach, our key outcomes and the commitments which will help us make progress towards these outcomes.

The Scottish Government is determined to make real, long term progress towards making sure disabled people enjoy the same human rights as other people.

We are committed to working with disabled people and their organisations, and with services now and in the future, so that the Government can meet disabled people's needs.

The Scottish Government will reduce the inequalities and social injustice experienced by disabled people; it will support them to be active citizens in Scotland.

On 21st September 2016 the Transport minister said :
Scotland's first accessible travel framework launched today. Humza Yousaf explains why it's needed.

I'm delighted to be at the launch of the Accessible Travel Framework. This has been years in the making. People question why in 2016 we need a framework for those with disabilities on our transport network but it is very much needed. I've been hearing testimony and stories from people today with disabilities, telling me that they've missed job interviews, that they've missed seeing their families, they've missed important life events, all because our transport system wasn't working for them. So my vision as the Transport Minister - and i know this is shared by those at Transport Scotland and wider Scottish government - is to make sure that we have a transport network that serves everybody, regardless of your physical disability or ability, regardless of any mental ability or disability, that may exist. So this framework goes a long, long way in that. And lets make sure together, we make it work for everybody in Scotland.

While these comments are welcome, the disabled have first to be able to access busses etc. To achieve this we need to be able to cross the street safely using controlled Puffin Crossings. We cannot safely cross cycle lanes to reach bus stops which are located on

islands and we cannot compete with cyclists on pavements which has become more prevalent as has pavement parking.

Disability potentially affects nearly everyone in the country, as we all live longer it is very likely that our last few years will be spent with a sight, hearing or mobility impediment. Government at all levels need to listen to disabled people explaining their needs, we need to be aware of our rights and who can help us defend them, we need champions in law and champions in Government.

Shared Space and it's many derivatives have seen our Equality and Human Rights regress many decades, as have our rights on disability. We look to our Government to stand up for ALL of the people, making the necessary changes to guidelines, in order that Local Authorities cannot override the rights of the disabled and elderly people of Scotland.

Sandy Taylor

Chairman. EDVIP