

I'm speaking on behalf of York Disability Rights Forum regarding Agenda Item 5, the City of York Council Recovery and Renewal Strategy. Buried within this agenda item is the ongoing issue of the footstreet extensions and how they continue to exclude disabled people.

The footstreets measures were introduced last July as a pandemic response to allow 2 metre social distancing. National government is now at Stage 4 with the 2 metre rule no longer in effect.

Whilst the main concern of the council seems to be to get York moving again and boost the local economy, at the same time they are still denying disabled citizens access. Disabled residents who have the same right to access the city centre and its facilities as non disabled residents. This lack of joined up thinking is posing Blue Badge users as a problem to York rather than a part of the community who should be included in any recovery plan.

The main access issues include: the distance of Blue Badge parking from the city centre; sharing Blue Badge parking spaces with loading and delivery vehicles; the need for easy access to a safe personal space; and street furniture and pavement cafes obstructing access for those with mobility or sight impairments. Without adequate enforcement and consequences, the street cafes remain a hazard to disabled users.

To address the removal of Blue Badge access specifically, we have already put an immense amount of our time, health, energy and free labour into engaging with the council to help you understand why the footstreet extensions are discriminating against us and excluding us. To hear that you are planning further consultation is deflating.

This is no longer a new issue. There has been consultation with disabled residents for over a year now. Your own survey found that over three quarters of Blue Badge holders disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "There is parking close enough to allow me access to the city centre". What is needed is for the council to treat this issue seriously, to listen to the community and act on what we are saying

Shop Mobility and Dial-a -Ride have already been discussed in the consultation (specifically in council zoom sessions on 14th and 16th June respectively) and options for service improvement and expansion have been suggested. Whilst funding for these services is to be applauded, it needs to come alongside a commitment to allow disabled residents access to the whole of the city centre. Investing in these services will not remove the need for blue badge parking in the centre and will still require investment other measures eg. dropped kerbs, improved signage, etc.

It needs to be acknowledged that these two services cannot provide for all Blue Badge holders. The necessity of advanced booking; limited hours; cost; are all prohibitive. The crucial point is that some people require their own specialised wheelchair and adapted vehicle; and the simplest way to allow for this is readily available and central Blue Badge parking.

Spending thousands of pounds to make us more aware of these services will not make them into appropriate alternatives for adequate vehicle access.

Instead, the council can make a meaningful change now, and at no expense, by returning Blue Badge access to the city centre. The city centre we have been absent from for over a year and a half now. Delaying the decision until November will not change the facts, just the extent to which we are excluded.