



# CTC Equal Access Advisory Group

Progress Report from the Chair, Deborah Lawson

29<sup>th</sup> August 2024

# Background

In October 2023, the Community Committee delegated responsibility to the Health & Wellbeing Working group to:

1. Set up a **Consultation Group of experts representing different disabilities** e.g. visually impaired, hearing impaired, neurodiversity, dementia, wheelchair users etc., and work with them to compile priority areas to work on for Congleton.
2. **Survey Congleton people with a disability** to learn more about the issues that they are facing in Congleton and what they believe the Town Council or other groups could do to make their lives easier.
3. Continue to **develop and offer awareness-raising sessions** for Councillors and staff to help build appreciation of the issues. The first visually- impaired awareness session has happened and more are in the planning stage.
4. Create a **Disability Guide to Congleton** – on paper and online - showing disability-friendly accessible buildings and facilities.
5. Investigate becoming a **Disability Confident Council/Employer**
6. **Apply for funding** (if possible) to progress these areas of work and consider providing a Changing Places Toilet within the town centre.
7. **Plan further action** based on input from the survey, the experience days, and the Consultation Group

# CTC Equal Access Advisory Group

## Who we are

- The Group is made up of **10 members** including the **Chair – Deborah Lawson**.
- Members of the group bring a wide range of expertise and lived experience, including **multiple wheelchair users, ambulatory scooter users**, individuals with **chronic pain conditions**, as well as **neurological and physical disabilities**. We also have members with **visual impairments**, parents of **children with cerebral palsy** and individuals who are **neurodiverse**, as well as individuals involved with **Friends for Leisure, Ruby's**, and **Dementia Friends**.
- In addition, we have an **'interest group'** of about **40 people** who have opted-in to keep up with our activities and often send ideas and suggestions, but don't attend meetings.
- We have met monthly since February 2024 and have developed an **Action Plan** based on our own insights and a **Survey of Congleton People**.

The Group selected its own name 'Equal Access Advisory Group' to focus on what we are aiming to achieve – **equal access for everyone.**

# As the committee agreed, we conducted a Survey of disabled people

As expected, we discovered that disabled people face a number of challenges in Congleton, and these have become our priority areas for future work:

## EVENTS

Only **10%** find them 'very accessible'

Many do not attend due to lack of accessibility

## TOWN CENTRE/SHOPS

**87%** of disabled people have some accessibility problems

Only **3%** said businesses are 'very well-informed' on disability

A-boards, shop access & toilets!

## TRANSPORT

Need more accessible buses  
Lack of parking spaces –and size  
Dropped kerbs, gradients  
Road conditions (potholes)  
Need accessible taxis

## PUBLIC ATTITUDES

**74%** felt the public are NOT WELL INFORMED on disability

Many are kind, but some are rude or even aggressive

## TOWN COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS

**63%** Thought they are 'very' or 'somewhat' accessible

More info needed – Disability Guide to Congleton

## PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

Scored well overall  
Some problems with uneven paths  
More accessible toilets and parking spaces needed

# Why is this important?

According to the DWP (2023)

26% of people in Northwest England have a disability. This equates to **7,410** people in Congleton

In other words, **more than a quarter of our residents** are affected by accessibility issues

Support CST where relevant	All over town - see link	Congleton sustainable Travel working on removing obstructions for disabled people	AC	CST	ongoing				
Obstruction to	<b>COUNCIL ACTIONS</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Committee</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Complete</b>	CEC		
Publish walking showing access	Equal Access Advisory Group	Group of disabled people to act as a steering group for our action plan and future work.	JM	Community		Mar-24	C?		
Bench audit of and from town	Set up an Interest Group	Ongoing - 34 members at July 2024	JM	Community		Apr-24			
	Survey	<b>PUBLICITY AND EDUCATION</b>	<b>Description</b>				<b>Lead</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	
<b>Bus Services</b>	<b>Disability Aware Council</b>	Accessibility Guide for residents and visitors	Need budget from council for production and distribution.				JM		
Bus Stop Char	Eye Society Training	Inconsiderate Parking	Create a poster				JM		
<b>EVENTS ACTIONS</b>	<b>Description</b>		<b>Lead</b>	<b>Responsible</b>					
CE	Guide for event organisers	General information on accessibility	JM	CTC					
Pla	Checklist for event organisers	List to check off based on guide above	JM	CTC					
Bu	Training/event for organise	<b>BUSINESS ACTIONS</b>	<b>What</b>						
Dr		Mobility Scooters in supermarkets	Ensure they are available						
Au	Section of CTC website								
Food and Drink	<b>TOWN CENTRE ACTIONS</b>	<b>Description</b>		<b>Lead</b>					
Blu	A boards - remove obstruction	Speaking with shops about placement		RM/JM					
Congleton Pride	Markings on Planters	Adding reflective material on corners		RB	CTC	Pedestrian area	KW	JM	CTC
Jazz and Blues	Accessibility Audit of Shops	Refer to Deborah's accessibility guide. Need a checklist for audit.		JM	CTC		KW	CTC	CTC
Congleton Make								CTC	
Christmas 2024	Accessible toilets list	List of those in Congleton/ which pubs etc?		JM				CTC	
	Changing places toilet	Fund raising exercise / find location							
	Accessible 'Things to Do' Guide	Part of accessibility guide (see Publicity)		JM					
	Audit of Town Centre for dropped kerbs etc	Documenting the good and the bad		DM					
		Share our challenges and come up with shared		...					

# Our Action Plan

# Town Council Actions

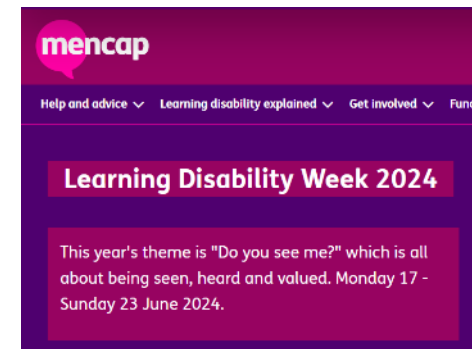
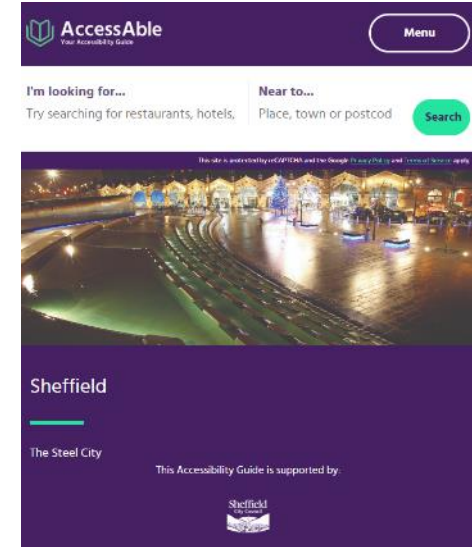
- Educate and build awareness
  - Accessible Communications Training – done
  - Visual Impairment Awareness Workshop – done
  - Planning – wheelchair awareness experience
- Improve communications
  - Changed laminated notices in the town hall – large print, matt laminate
  - Improvements to Bear Necessities – remove backgrounds, improve font and colour choices, make it available online
  - New website will adhere to latest accessibility guidelines
- Improved services
  - SEND session at Paddling Pool
  - Looking at signage in the Town Hall (e.g. to the accessible toilet)



# Publicity and Education

## Planned Actions

- **Disability Access Guide to Congleton**
  - To Include maps and places to eat, drink and visit
  - Information on safe routes and toilets
  - Provided as a booklet and online
- **Campaign for the general public**
  - Goal is to build awareness and understanding, address myths and challenge prejudice about disability
  - To cover different types of disability, reasonable adjustments and needs of disabled people
  - To include a campaign to ‘be kind’
  - Celebrate ‘action days’ such as World Autism Day, World Sight Day, Carer’s Week etc.
  - Point to other sources of information and support





# Events Actions

## Produce Events Guide and Checklist to include:

- Reduce Overcrowding
- Ensure safety – barriers and designated routes, traffic calming
- Improve Layout – clear pathways, space for chairs and scooters
- Provide adequate seating
- Ensure smooth surfaces and ramps
- Quiet space for those who need it
- Good information provided online before and with signage at the event, including for the visually-impaired
- Assistance provision, including accessibility lead and trained marshals
- More accessible toilets
- Public information on kindness and consideration

**Draft already shared with and taken on board by these event organisers**



More space between stalls  
Quiet areas provided  
Accessible toilets  
Improved signage  
Improved layout to reduce crowding



Accessibility statement in festival guide  
Icons on each venue to show accessibility features:



More space around stalls  
Accessible Toilets  
Info shared in advance



Quiet time at start of day for neurodiverse visitors provided  
Quiet area with art exhibition



Accessible area for wheelchairs and buggies  
Big screen on Mill St to watch the action – on Santa's route  
Indoor quiet areas  
Early access to grotto  
Improved layout and route management to avoid overcrowding  
Better information and signage

# Town Centre and Business Actions

- Provide info for visitors – access map and information on shops, pubs, places to visit and toilets – in a Disability Guide to Congleton
- Street furniture and other obstacles highlighted for visually impaired individuals
- Encourage A-Board placement as per CEC Policy
- Ensure mobility scooters in supermarkets are charged and available
- Look at ‘welcome’ scheme for shops and pubs
- Provide a disability access guide and checklist for shops, pubs and businesses
- Organise training for businesses

### Introduction

Chester East Council has introduced a new policy to protect and enhance the appearance of our towns. This covers the use of A-boards, banners and signs on street furniture and goods outside shop fronts. We seek to balance the needs of shoppers and visitors, wanting an attractive and obstruction-free environment, with the desire of traders who wish to benefit from advertising and displays on public land and footpaths.

It is important to have some rules to ensure there are no difficulties for pedestrians, particularly those with impaired vision or mobility problems, the elderly or those with young children.

This leaflet aims to give traders a summary of the key points of the new policy and guidelines.

For further information, and to view the full guidelines, please visit [www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/roads](http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/roads). You can also call 0300 123 5020 or speak to your local Community Warden. This document can be made available in alternative formats, if required. Please contact 0300 123 5020.

### A-boards

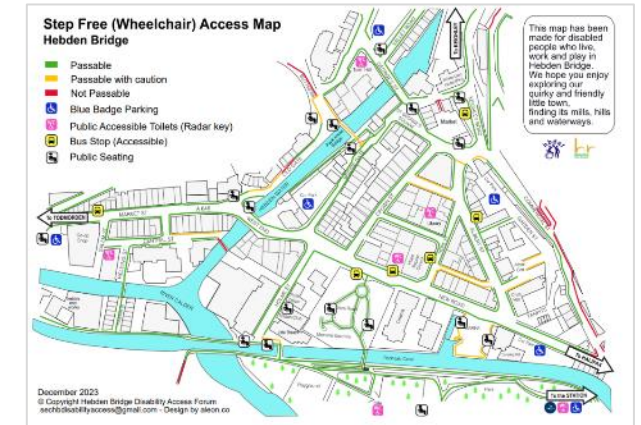
- A boards must be placed immediately outside the shops they are advertising and only one is allowed per shop.
- They should be no larger than 800mm by 800mm, and stand no higher than 1000mm above ground level.
- A boards must be removed from the street at the end of each day's trading.
- They must not be permanently fixed to any street furniture.
- A boards must not block visibility for pedestrians or drivers.
- They should never be placed on a roundabout or central reservation.
- In pedestrianised areas, there must be a clear 3.5 metre route for emergency vehicles.
- There should be at least 1.8 metres of clear footway between the A-board and the edge of the pavement, but where the business is in a busy street, it may be necessary to leave more space.
- If pedestrians are struggling to move freely around them, they must be placed somewhere more suitable, within the limits of the policy.
- They must not be within 2 metres of items of permanent street furniture such as bus stops, pedestrian crossings and litter bins.

### Other important information

- The person or business placing the A-board or display must have public liability insurance to the value of £2 million and an original policy certificate must be provided to the Council upon request.
- If the Council believes a sign or display is unlawful and an immediate danger, it will be removed and either returned to the owner, if known or practical, or retained for a period of one month before being disposed of by the Council.
- Where signs or displays breach the guidelines but are not an immediate danger, the owner will be requested to remove or reposition them in accordance with the guidelines.
- If the problem persists, the Council may serve a notice requiring the business to remove the sign or display. If the sign or display is not removed, the Council may do so and reclaim the costs from the person responsible. In some circumstances, the person responsible may also be prosecuted.

Some other activities where businesses may wish to place items on public land and footpaths are covered under different legislation, for example:

- Shops wishing to display goods at a location other than the front of their premises need to make a licence application and pay the application fee.
- Bars, cafes and restaurants wishing to have extensive seating areas outside their premises, need to apply for planning and premises licences.



# Transport Actions

Some are 'quick wins' others longer-term

## • WALKING, WHEELING AND CYCLING

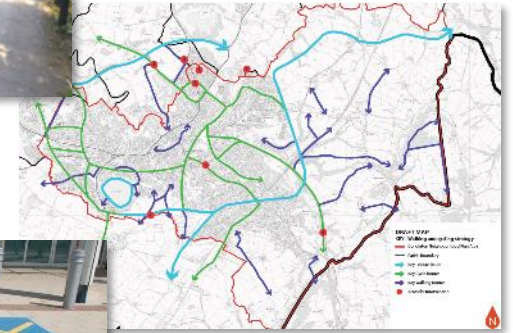
- Remove barriers – working with Congleton Sustainable Travel
- More dropped kerbs and stop obstruction of dropped kerbs
- Accessible walking and wheeling map of Congleton
- Address bins and other obstacles on pavements
- Fix uneven pavements and potholes
- More benches for walkers to rest on key routes

## • CARS

- More disabled parking spaces to come up to national standard (currently conducting a count of private and public spaces)
- Better-sized spaces to allow for large wheelchairs/scooters and wheelchair accessible vans with a tail-lift or rear ramp.
- Public education not to use spaces or block them

## • PUBLIC TRANSPORT

- Group provided input to the CEC Bus Strategy Consultation
- Need wheelchair accessible buses - that stop for visually-impaired individuals
- Improved bus information in formats suitable for all; better bus stops
- More bus services overall, especially to hospital and in the evening



### Cheshire East Bus Service Review 2024



#### Introduction:

- The bus network in Cheshire East plays a key role in providing access to jobs and services by connecting people to places.
- The local bus network is made up of 37 bus services, of which 21 services are fully supported by the Council (57%), a further 8 are partially supported by the Council (22%), such as evening journeys. 8 services (22%) operate on a fully commercial basis.
- This review looks for opportunities to encourage more bus use and get more supported services operating commercially, tweak services to improve performance and passenger uptake and get better value out of what the Council is spending.

#### Objectives:

- Maximise opportunities in areas of greatest need;
- Ensure services complement, not compete with commercial services;
- Develop stronger partnership working with commercial operators; and
- Identify opportunities to modernise flexible on-demand transport options

# What we need from you

- Continued support for our Group
- Support to implement
  - Promotional Campaign for the Public (including social media and high-quality video) £1000
  - Disability Guide to Congleton £1000
  - Business (Shop/Pub) 'Disability Welcome' Scheme (certificates & stickers) £250
- Include ongoing accessibility work in Council's Business Plan
- Support expenditure as outlined for the above