

Weekly Poll - 20-minute Neighbourhoods

Each week Disability Equality Scotland send out a poll question to our members on a topical issue. For the week beginning 9 November 2020, we asked a question about 20-minute neighbourhoods, a topic suggested by Transport Scotland. A 20-minute neighbourhood means having all your basic needs – shops, health centres, work opportunities, and recreation - within a mile of where you live and close enough to walk or wheel.

Results

Can you access key services in your local community within a 20-minute walk or wheel from where you live?

- YES – 6% (25 respondents)
- NO – 94% (422 respondents)

Comments

The majority of respondents (94%) reported that they are unable to access key services in their local community, within a 20-minute walk or wheel from where they live. We provide verbatim comments where appropriate to illustrate strength of feeling or personal experience.

Pavement Infrastructure

Whilst respondents recognised the benefits that can be gained from having key services within a walking and wheeling distance, on a practical level, this is challenging due to the inaccessible nature of the built and natural environment. Disabled people raised concerns about poor pavement infrastructure, lack of dropped kerbs and safe crossing places.

“In theory I could access services as the distance to these from my house is quite short however, current infrastructure makes this impossible. Pavements are not suitable for wheeling due to poor surface, lack of dropped kerbs, people parking their cars on the pavement, no safe way of crossing the road as no traffic control and speed limits are not respected.”

“There is a real lack of dropped kerbs where I live which means in distance I’m close to everything I need but I can’t get to it at all and am trapped going round my block only. I’m a power chair user and this greatly restricts my independence and ability to do things that I want.”

“I can’t get from my house to the bus stop less than 5 minutes away. This is because there are no dropped kerbs to let me get from one section of the pavement to the other. The only option would be to wheel on the road and it’s full of parked cars and passing cars that drive too fast.”

“Smooth pavements which have level lowered kerbs would make wheelchair travel possible, safer and more comfortable.”

Pavement Obstructions

Disabled people face ongoing challenges accessing key services due to obstructions on pavements created by street clutter, such as café furniture, street signs, A-boards, bollards and wheelie bins. Pavement obstructions can force wheelchair and scooter users, visually impaired people, and people with pushchairs onto the road and into the path of oncoming traffic.

“Absolutely fed up with road signs being placed on our pavements making them impassable and adding risks and obstacles for visually impaired people.”

“Streets and pavements are too narrow and there are always signs and bins on them. Road work signs and plastic barriers seem to be left lying about long after the road works are finished. I use a mobility scooter and I can’t get past.”

Pavement Parking

In addition, obstructions can be created by vehicles parked on pavements. Scotland recently became the first UK country to introduce a pavement parking ban. The new law is due to be enforced in 2021 as part of the Transport (Scotland) Bill.

“If you want to make neighbourhoods more accessible deal with pavement parking. This is a major issue for disabled people, people affected by sight loss and people with prams and buggies.”

“Parking on pavements is one of the biggest barriers for access to the outside world for many disabled/ elderly people and in particular wheelchair users. The pavement parking ban due to be enforced in 2021 will help eliminate the inconsiderate drivers who park over dropped Kerbs.”

“We need effective pavement parking enforcement. There is no clear start date for the ban. Surely the case for clear pavements to allow physical distancing should be speeding things up.”

Public Transport

Many disabled people rely on public transport to access key services in their local communities. This includes travel to medical appointments, which can be made challenging by the accessibility of the route to the bus stop and the frequency of services. Alternative modes of transport, such as

taxis can be expensive, with no guarantees on the availability of an accessible vehicle.

“I can’t even get to the local bus stop 200 yards away because of the pavements, people parking on them, wheelie bins and overgrown garden hedges. Everything is a struggle, even getting to the bus.”

“Being able to access health services locally would help a little with the problems getting transport to medical appointments - and the cost of this.”

“To get around my neighbourhood I need to use taxis as bus services are terrible. Taxis are unaffordable and I need to use them because the bus service is failing communities.”

“No buses on Sunday or any public transport after 6pm.”

Some respondents identified the importance of community transport operators, who provide flexible door-to-door services for disabled people. This helps individuals to stay independent, participate in their communities and access vital public services and employment.

“The only thing that helps us get to the services we need including hospital, banks and shops is the community transport. Local communities need community transport, and it should be funded by government like bus services are.”

“Please ensure community transport are involved in the planning as they understand and respond to local people’s needs and how to access health services.”

“I live in Grant-on-on Spey and would like more facilities nearby but not sure how this would work. We rely heavily on community transport to get to

appointments because of failures in bus services. Also - we lobbied against local services being taken away so we would welcome them coming back.”

“Please ensure the community transport providers are integral to these conversations and the planning. They provide a lifeline service and should not be overlooked.”

Availability of Key Services

Respondents recognised that key services such as banks, building societies and post offices are closing in town centres across the country. Some disabled people reported that health and social care is being delivered at larger health care facilities in centralised locations, rather than in the local community.

“We need to see more community hubs where we can access all services such as GPs, banks, post offices and pharmacies all in one complex or area. High streets are full of empty shops and derelict space because it is too expensive for rent and rates. All this needs to be looked at to bring things back to local.”

“For this concept we need the reform of services that were integral to our communities such as post offices, banks, pharmacies, local GP practices and not having to travel further to health centres and public toilets.”

“It would be good to be able to access healthcare closer to home rather than having to travel miles to the centralised services.”

Green Spaces

It is important for the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods to include access to safe and accessible green spaces. Respondents living in urban

areas were concerned by the lack of green space, and the potential health impacts of poor air quality.

“I had to give up so much to live in a 20-minute neighbourhood in Edinburgh. Less green space and more air pollution not to mention property prices.”

“Although I have access to services, my local community in Parkhead in Glasgow is like a concrete jungle. There are no nearby parks that I can go to and every road is congested or full of speeding traffic and cars parked on pavements.”

“Having nice accessible parks in my neighbourhood would make a difference. The route to these places, be it pavements or other paths need to be maintained and well-lit.”

“Better street lighting and more safe, accessible green spaces would make such a difference.”

“We need our parks and open spaces back to get the heart and soul back into communities.”

Rural Communities

People living in rural communities recognised the benefits of a 20-minute neighbourhood; however, the concept will bring its own challenges, where key services may not be close by and public transport is less frequent.

“I live in rural Scotland and this concept would be welcome but seems impossible at the moment - I rely on neighbours to help me out with shopping etc.”

“This will work well in urban areas, but we also need to look for similar solutions for rural areas. I currently have a 5 hour round trip for medical appointments and as some of my tests are bloods and other physical checks this can’t be done by video conference. Many local people take the same journey. Why can’t the doctors and nurses come to us, even once every couple of months instead of whole villages of older and disabled people travelling to them?”

“We do not have the luxury of a bus service, unlike those who live in towns and cities and who bury their heads in the sand when it comes to rural areas.”

Engage with Disabled People

To create vibrant and accessible neighbourhoods with key services in walking or wheeling distance, it is vital to engage with all members of the community, ensuring disabled people are involved at each stage of the consultation process. At Disability Equality Scotland, we are the umbrella body for Access Panels; groups of disabled people working in local communities across the country to improve the accessibility of streets, paths, buildings and transport for disabled people. More information about Access Panels can be found on the Access Panel Network website:

www.accesspanelnetwork.org.uk

“I like the idea of 20 minute neighbourhoods. Please speak to disabled people and local communities when progressing this work. We want to be included on designing what will work for us in our neighbourhoods and this sounds exciting and welcome.”

“We need to look at how we regenerate high streets. In doing so, we need to deal with all the accessibility issues and Access Panels are ideally placed to assist with this.”

“I sometimes think disabled people have been overlooked, but they’re not, they are deliberately ignored. If neighbourhoods are going to be for everyone then disabled people need to be involved in the design.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, the majority of respondents are currently unable to access key services within a 20-minute walk or wheel from where they live. The infrastructure of pavements, with narrow pathways, lack of dropped kerbs and safe crossing points makes it difficult for disabled people to access their basic needs. This is made more challenging by pavement obstructions, such as street signs, A-boards, bollards, wheelie bins and pavement parking. The availability of key services in local communities is another factor that must be considered, with health centres, banks and post offices closing or moving to more centralised locations. Bus services in some locations are becoming less frequent, resulting in a reliance on expensive taxis or the use of community transport. A 20-minute neighbourhood is a concept which can provide a number of potential benefits for disabled people. To ensure the concept is implemented in a safe and accessible manner, it is vital to engage with disabled people and Access Panels in communities across the country.

Disability Equality Scotland, November 2020

About Disability Equality Scotland

We are a national charity working to make life more accessible, equal and inclusive for disabled people in Scotland.

We promote access in its widest sense, including access to the built and natural environment and access to the same opportunities as are enjoyed by others in our communities thus promoting a life of dignity, respect, choice and independence. This extends beyond physical access to include access to information, access to inclusive communication and inclusion in decision-making, whether with planners over inclusive design or transport providers about accessible travel.

We represent the views of individuals with any type of impairment, as well as disability organisations and groups who share Disability Equality Scotland's values.

We are also the umbrella organisation for all disability Access Panels in Scotland and the principal provider of support and guidance to the Access Panels presently representing disabled persons at a local level throughout Scotland. Access Panels are committed to improving access and equality in its widest form, which means access to the physical environment, Education, Housing, Health, Transport, Leisure & Recreation and Social Justice amongst other areas.

We are membership led. If you are an individual or an organisation, you can [join our membership](#) for FREE and help to further our aims. We work to influence the policies of the Scottish Government, which affect how disabled people live and we work to encourage others to be inclusive and informed in their attitudes towards disabled people.