

20 Minute Neighbourhoods Webinar

Summary report



Introduction

The Scottish Government's recently published Programme for Government includes a commitment to support the aspirations of 20-minute neighbourhoods. This is where all your basic needs, shops, health centres, work opportunities and recreation are within a mile of where you live and close enough to access by walking or wheeling.

The aim of this webinar was to discuss the perceived challenges and potential benefits of the concept of a 20-minute neighbourhood and to hear from disabled people about their views.

Disability Equality Scotland worked in collaboration Transport Scotland and the Mobility Access Committee for Scotland to present this discussion.

The event took place digitally using the Zoom platform on 03 December 2020 in line with physical distancing guidelines for COVID-19.

There were 68 people in attendance. This report summarises the discussions at this event.

Background

In November 2020, Disability Equality Scotland asked a question about disabled peoples' experiences of accessing key services in their local community; specifically testing the idea of whether this was within a twenty-minute walk or wheel from their home. The majority of respondents (94%) said that they were unable to access key services in their local community and highlighted some issues and general concerns.

We wanted to explore some of these concerns with advocates of the 20-minute neighbourhood concept and hear feedback from disabled people about their views. This paper summarises the discussion.

Panel discussion

Emma Scott, from Disability Equality Scotland set the context of the day and introduced the panel speakers:

- Irene Beautyman, Planning for Place Programme Manager at the Improvement Service
- David Cowan, Head of Regeneration Unit, Scottish Government Social Justice and Regeneration Division.
- Rhona Arthur, Interim Head of Service, Connected Communities from North Ayrshire Council
- Kevin Murray, Professor of Planning at Glasgow and Dundee Universities
- David Hunter, Member of the Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland and
- Morven Brooks, Chief Executive Officer, Disability Equality Scotland.

Key discussion points

Impact of Covid-19

We heard from the panel that Covid-19 has given us an opportunity to radically rethink the places we live, in our homes and communities. Spending more time at home has highlighted a desire to ensure that our communities are vibrant hubs for people to live, work, keep active and socialise. For some people, it was noted that the experience of lockdown, showed the need for improved public transport and infrastructure, access to local or online services, working closer to home and access to greener spaces.

Concept of a 20-Minute Neighbourhood

The panelists were clear, that we should not get caught up with the 'twenty-minute' timeframe but focus on the services available to us within a reasonable distance. There were some concerns about the 'traditional high street' being in decline in most local areas, as banks and post offices are closing, but the 20-Minute Neighbourhood concept is about being creative about solutions and services.

Infrastructure

There were a number of challenges disabled people identified and these will be discussed in more detail below. Central to this was the importance of being able to walk or wheel safely on the surrounding pavements and roads.

“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.”

Disabled person

Panelists showed some images of street views that show ways of re-imagining spaces; some with pedestrianisation with flush and flat kerbs and where there are wide streets with flat paving on either side. Disabled people have had mixed views on shared spaces; often the flat and flush kerbs are suitable for wheelchair users, but to the detriment of those with visual impairments. Much of these issues have been highlighted with the recent implementation of Spaces for People initiatives which have seen pavements widened and roads closed to help with physical distancing during Covid-19.

Some recent changes have been perceived by disabled people as being to their detriment, as changes have not been communicated in an inclusive way, meaning that disabled people are confused and disorientated when out and about. Designs for 20-Minute Neighbourhoods need to balance the use of space between ‘speed’ for cars and cyclists and include visual and level clues for disabled people to understand the space. This could include having a clear lane that’s pedestrian and wheelchair user only, with no vehicle access. Fundamentally, designs should be able to accommodate everyone’s needs.

Public Transport Provision

One of the key aspirations of the 20-Minute Neighbourhood concept is to be able to reduce reliance on the car and try to encourage more active travel. Disability Equality Scotland's members raised concerns in response to the weekly poll and through the Q&A about a move towards reduced car use without accessible and frequent public transport in its place. Some disabled people continue to rely on their cars and a 20-Minute Neighbourhood would have to accommodate those who still need to drive.

"It's a reliance on the car for those who don't need to use it; it's not about reducing that reliance for those that need it in order to get access."

Panelist

Equally, as we ease out of Covid-19 restrictions there is a concern that car use is likely to increase as people stay away from mixing on public transport. The aim of the 20-Minute Neighbourhood is to encourage those with cars to leave them at home and to use a public transport system. This would have to be fit for purpose, accessible and affordable for disabled people. This could include creating new transport links, such as increased demand-responsive transport and not just re-introducing the traditional models.

Rural and Island Communities

There was a discussion about how the 20-Minute Neighbourhood concept would apply in rural or island settings, where communities and services are more dispersed. The Panel were clear that the concept of a 20-Minute Neighbourhood has to be adaptable and flexible for people who live there.

"It's not one size fits all and rural areas are different. Some of the rural areas and towns, you could easily walk or cycle, but the businesses often have a much bigger catchment and depend on people coming in from further afield."

Panelist

The webinar heard from North Ayrshire Council where work is ongoing to establish new housing, a community campus with health and leisure facilities in Ardrossan.

Consultation and engagement

It was clear from panelists involved in planning 20-Minute Neighbourhoods, that consultation and engagement with disabled people and others with lived experience is the best way to plan, design and develop inclusive spaces. The Academy of Urbanism indicated that in their experience, to understand what people need and how neighbourhoods can change; planners and people need to experience the space together as professional and policy perspectives are often very different from the lived experience of people in the space.

“People doing the planning, designing, engineering have to talk to people from all different backgrounds and perspectives and not lump disabled groups into one category.”

Panelist

By consulting and engaging, we can ensure that developers and planners have a better grasp of accessibility. Panelists gave examples of engaging with people with lived experience of an area which then highlighted issues that had not occurred to designers. For example, in one area a local person indicated the importance of having a bus stop with a bin. Designers had not appreciated that bins were used by those with health conditions to rest and lean on while waiting on buses. Something seemingly insignificant to a designer made all the difference to a disabled person.

“If we don’t have the bus stop and the bins, she is completely isolated. That showed that often our professional and policy view of things is very different from the lived experience of people.”

Panelist

In North Ayrshire, the council has been fortunate to engage with a stakeholder reference group, including the Access Panel Network to

changes in the local area. The Access Panel can advise on accessibility at the design stage.

Next steps

The Scottish Government were clear that organisations representing the views of disabled people like Disability Equality Scotland have a role to play in supporting progress of the 20-Minute Neighbourhood concept, ensuring disabled people have a voice in planning and development.

Disability Equality Scotland December 2020