

York Disability Rights Forum | Response to City of York Council Communications on Blue Badge Changes

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Introduction

This document outlines the concerns raised by current members of the York Disability Rights Forum advisory group about the way in which the measures taken by City of York Council to restrict access to York city centre for Blue Badge holders have been implemented. The Forum's intention is that these views be recognised and considered, particularly where matters directly affect the disability community of York. Our aim is to highlight the implications of such measures for people who are disabled in order to improve and inform future decision-making procedures. We are open to discussing these matters further, as well as working with individuals and organisations to improve the experience of disabled people living and working in York.

General

- There has been advice and guidance issued by the City of York Council to Blue Badge holders in York. This advice was issued by post, as a leaflet, to all Blue Badge holders resident in York. ([View a PDF of the Blue Badge leaflet here](#))

- Changes to vehicle access and footstreet extensions were implemented on the 15th June. The date that the changes were to be implemented was not included on the publication.
- The publication does not indicate for how long these measures will be in place or when it is expected for the measures to be reviewed.
- This and more contributes to the lack of clarity on the measures that the Council have taken to be safe, welcoming and considerate. The publication states, in bold, “We especially need to help you, our Blue Badge Holders, feel safe and confident about coming into the city.” We believe that the Council is currently failing in its aim to do this.
- The Council has been slow to communicate the changes it has implemented, with most people receiving the publication by post after the 17th June (the publication date printed on the leaflet). Forum members, and people we have consulted, report having not received the publication until July. Any person requesting the document in an alternative format, such as Braille, large-print, email etc. would experience further delay to the communication of important information.
- The publication focuses on wheelchair users where it is referring to Blue Badge holders. The publication does not account for Blue Badge holders who may not be wheelchair users, for example those who have visual impairment, people with cognitive impairment, people with extreme anxiety etc.
- The publication states that the Council “hope the additional measures we are putting in place will go some way to continue to allow you to access the facilities that are re-opening in the city centre”. These measures are outlined in the publication as:
 - an additional 40 disabled parking bays allocated for Blue Badge holders in Monk Bar car park; and
 - a free taxi service.
- The information required for an individual to make a choice about whether they’re able to access and safely use the taxi service is not given.
- Given that gov.uk states “The Blue Badge scheme helps you park closer to your destination if you’re disabled” the location of the additional parking bays

makes it likely that someone who uses a Blue Badge will be required to make use of the taxi service in order to be able to access the city centre. (Monk Bar car park is located around 500 metres from the centre of York; a person who is unable to walk more than 50 metres will automatically qualify for a Blue Badge.)

- When one is effectively given only a single option to access the city centre, it is imperative that all the information available accompanies this option. Full details of the additional measures are neither included in the publication nor available to access online. The Council have failed to recognise the level of planning required for many disabled people to plan a journey into and around the city centre.
- There are no details given to describe the ways in which the 'taxi shuttle' that runs from Monk Bar car park has been adapted for use by people with disabilities. This is imperative to be able to make an informed decision about its use. As an example, a vehicle that has been adapted to accommodate an electric wheelchair requires a ramp or passenger lift and a means of securing the wheelchair and the wheelchair user.
- Concerns raised by local disabled people include those around lack of information on:
 - cleaning and sanitising of the taxi in between journeys,
 - safety and social distancing in the context of interactions with the driver (for example if the driver is securing the passenger's wheelchair),
 - the capacity of the vehicle (ie. transporting more than one wheelchair user, accompanying friends, family or carers),
 - the regularity and availability of the service,
 - the consideration of the use of the track and trace system,
 - the availability of accessible toilets at the pick-up and drop-off points, and,
 - the details of the queuing procedure as well as its route, drop-off point and how to arrange a return journey.
- The publication states "We're displaying a range of friendly helpful guides and signs throughout the city to remind everyone how we can help each other be

safe” however (as of 23/7/20) there is no signage at Monk Bar car park to provide information about the taxi service.

- The inconsistent description of the taxi service (“adapted taxi shuttle”, “free taxi service”, “the Dial and Ride vehicle”) further adds to the difficulty in following the guidance on its use.
- The leaflet states “During the footstreet times, barriers ... will be in place in Goodramgate and Blake Street to control access, but emergency vehicles and the Dial and Ride vehicle will be permitted access at all times.” It is unclear whether ‘the Dial and Ride vehicle’ refers to the taxi service or the Dial and Ride community transport service. If the Dial and Ride vehicle refers to the community transport service then it should be made clear why the ‘free taxi service’ is not permitted access to the same areas.
- On page 4 of the publication, Dial and Ride is advertised under the heading ‘Let’s be welcoming’. This is a paid service that, according to the text in the leaflet, has access past the footstreet barriers at all times. The implication of this is that priority access is given to those who are able to pay for transport. However, despite promoting this service on the publication, the [Dial and Ride website](#) states that “due to the coronavirus emergency, the Dial & Ride service will not operate until further notice” (accessed 24/7/20).

Language used in the publication

- The language used throughout the publication is inconsistent with the stated aim of the Council to help Blue Badge holders feel safe and confident about accessing the city.
- It is unclear how the measures taken by the Council are ‘safe’, ‘welcoming’ or ‘considerate’. It would be easy for recipients of the publication to interpret these words as instructions on how it is possible for them as Blue Badge holders to make the city safe and welcoming for others by being considerate of the needs of the non-disabled majority. As a hugely diverse community,

disabled people are often acutely aware of the need to be considerate of others.

- The approach the Council has taken to implement and communicate these changes does not support the statement “We do understand the difficulties that will be caused by not allowing Blue Badge holders to park in the city centre...” The lack of information provided and the delay with which it was communicated shows a profound lack of insight into the needs of Blue Badge holders.
- The statement “... we hope that you can understand and support the really important reasons for doing this” would benefit from being supported by evidencing what those reasons are. This would show that the Council themselves have considered the reasons and have recognised the consequences of lawful indirect discrimination as a “proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim” (section 19(2)d of the Equality Act (2010)). Lawful indirect discrimination exists whether or not it is recognised by the Council. Recognising it would aid the Council in taking appropriate steps to mitigate the negative consequences of this indirect discrimination against Blue Badge holders.