



Improving the accessibility of Abingdon town centre Final Project Report

Client - Healthy Abingdon

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Executive summary

Our client for this project was Healthy Abingdon, a charity focused on improving health and wellness in the town in collaboration with the NHS and social care services. The project involved investigating accessibility in Abingdon's town centre, in particular the possibility of dropping two kerbs at the top of Bridge Street to make it wheelchair accessible.

The client wanted us to identify who in the council should be approached about this matter, and help build a case for change. We spent a day in Abingdon town centre and conducted a survey, asking the residents, especially pedestrians with reduced mobility about their experience with accessibility in the town centre. The results of our survey demonstrated that less mobile residents have severe difficulties navigating the town centre, even to the extent that some avoid coming into the town entirely.

Unfortunately, we found out that it would be impossible to drop the kerbs at the top of Bridge Street due to the narrowness of the road and the lack of a sufficiently wide pedestrian island. For this reason, we have proposed that a map of dropped kerbs in Abingdon Town centre should be developed in order to allow residents and visitors to plan their journeys more safely and easily.

Results

Stage One: Survey

We conducted an in-person survey in the centre of Abingdon on the morning of Saturday 2nd November where we asked residents about their opinions regarding the accessibility of the town and which streets and kerbs in particular proved most challenging. We tried to approach residents who were more likely to be affected, namely pedestrians with reduced mobility such as wheelchair and pushchair users. However, we also found that shop assistants working in charity shops were also open to offering their views on the matter. Here is a breakdown of the responses that we received (responses from wheelchair users or pedestrians with reduced mobility marked with an asterisk):

1. A respondent working in the charity shop on the high street (very near the 'Throwing Buns Café') said that many of their clients with reduced mobility frequently ask for help to get up onto the kerb (in reference to the section of pavement where there is no crossing or dropped kerb, between the town square and the side of the road where the Punchbowl is located -



please see Fig. 1 below). Despite there being a pelican crossing further down the high street towards the Co-op, this particular spot is known as a convenient place to cross so people continue to do so.

2. The precinct around the Co-op is problematic because of the drains not working properly and the tiles sticking.
3. Respondent 3 said that they have had to pick people up from pavements in the past. They emphasised the lack of dropped kerbs and the difficulty circulating around the Co-op in a wheelchair due to the sloped pavement.
4. *This respondent cited the pavement on Abingdon bridge and the top of Bridge Street as problematic for ordinary circulation.
5. The pavement on Abingdon bridge is sloped and only accessible to pedestrians on one side. It would be difficult to cross for wheelchair users.
6. *This respondent cited the same crossing area as Respondent 1 (The street facing 'The Punchbowl') as well as the top of Bridge Street as problematic areas.
7. The respondent mentioned the multi-storey car-park, the top of the shopping precinct and the area near the library as places with room for improvement accessibility-wise, also expressing that the pavements were not wide enough in the town centre. They said that the county map of dropped kerbs should be made public, but currently was not, due to it needing updating. (see below for details about our inquiry into this matter).
8. *This respondent was pushing a pram and reported that they found getting round the town centre rather easy.
9. This respondent mentioned the top of Bridge Street and the Guildhall as places with room for improvement, and lamented the widespread presence of slanted pavements, which present a significant obstacle for wheelchair users.
10. *This respondent said that cobbled areas in the town centre were an obstacle to easy circulation around the town, in particular at pub entrances. They emphasised that it was certainly not easy to get around the town centre.

Survey results:

We concluded from the responses we received during the survey that there is a general consensus among residents of Abingdon that the current infrastructure presents significant difficulty to mobility impaired pedestrians, in particular the lack of dropped kerbs.

We resolved to pursue the possibility of applying for a dropped kerb at the Bridge Street and making the county map of dropped kerbs available to the public.

Stage Two: Contacting Oxfordshire County and Vale of White Horse Council

Our correspondence with the Oxfordshire County Council resulted in the discovery that dropping the kerbs at the top of Bridge Street would not be a possibility, due to their being insufficient room to install a traffic island large enough for wheelchairs. (Mark Bostock, Principal Officer (Highways and Drainage South))

Stage Three: Existing Map of Dropped Kerbs

While discussing the project with staff at the Abingdon Visitor's Centre, it was suggested that a map of dropped kerbs might already exist, but that it had not been released to the public due to it being out

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of date. However, having asked Mark Bostock if he knew of this map, he was under the impression that no such map exists.

The general consensus of the staff at the Visitor's Centre was that this would be an extremely useful document to be able to give out to both residents of Abingdon and visitors. Furthermore, if the map was to be uploaded to the Visitor's Centre website, tourists would be able to determine in advance how easy it would be for them to visit and find their way around Abingdon and plan accordingly.

Conclusion:

Due to the difficulty and complexity of re-mapping the town, we determined the best way to produce this map would be to annotate an existing map that can be found in the Visitor's Centre. Due to time constraints, we believe this would be an attainable and interesting task for a future student consultancy group to complete. We have recommended that this task be introduced as a new Student Consultancy project for Hilary Term 2020.

Recommendations for next steps:

- 1) We recommend that the next Student Consultancy team assigned this client use this data and work to produce a map which clearly indicates the location of dropped kerbs and accessible crossings around Abingdon town centre, based on an existing map available at the Visitor Information centre.
- 2) We recommend our client approaching the city council with the map that is developed, so it can get released to the public and be used to strengthen the case for the need to improve the accessibility of Abingdon town centre.

Appendices:

Details about how the street survey was conducted

We informed respondents that we were working with Healthy Abingdon to improve accessibility in the town centre and asked the following:

- What their opinions were on this matter
- If they had personally experienced difficulty with this, or knew someone had
- If there were any particularly problematic areas (crossings, kerbs and kerbs).

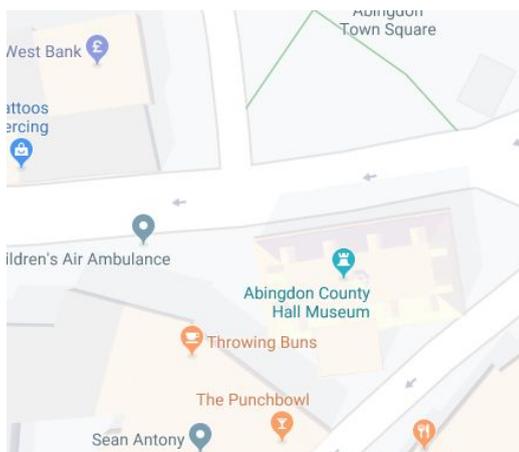


Fig. 1 (left) showing popular crossing spot between the town square and the side of the street where the punch bowl is located.