



Comments from Imtac about proposals for a public realm scheme in Hillsborough village

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About Imtac

The Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (Imtac) is a committee of disabled people and older people as well as others including carers and key transport professionals. Its role is to advise Government and others in Northern Ireland on issues that affect the mobility of Deaf people, disabled people and older people.

The aim of Imtac is to ensure that Deaf people, disabled people and older people have the same opportunities as everyone else to travel when and where they want.

Imtac receives support from the Department for Infrastructure (herein after referred to as the Department).

Introduction

This report has been written following a request from Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council to review proposals for a public realm scheme in Hillsborough village. The report covers parts of Ballynahinch Street, Lisburn Street and Dromore Street as well as the entirety of Main Street, Park Lane and Park Street.

How this report was compiled

This report is based on a site visit to the streets mentioned above. The site visit has been used to audit current public realm provision, using current good practice in terms of public realm and inclusive design. An assessment has been made which also takes account of current policy around the provision of public realm across Northern Ireland generally. These policies promote prioritising space and streets for people rather than the movement of traffic. The report continues with analysis of current issues and barriers and includes recommendations for improvement.

The report concludes with an assessment of the current proposals to improve the public realm in the village. The assessment has been informed by meeting with LCCC officials to discuss the plans for improvements identifying issues being addressed by the plans, and those which Imtac considers remaining to be resolved.

Audit of current provision

Lisburn Street

Lisburn Street is characterised by narrow footways (which fall below minimum acceptable standards in places) on both sides with on street parking on the western side. There is constant heavy traffic on the street.



The street has an irregular building line with steps into houses narrowing the footway to unacceptable levels in places.



There are frequent vehicle entrances along the length of the street which are in use and these create potential hazards for people walking and wheeling.



The condition of the footway at some vehicle entrances is poor in places.



The wider condition of the footway is mostly satisfactory, although the use of dish drainage channels impacts on the comfort of the footway for some users.



Ballynahinch Street

Ballynahinch Street is characterized by narrow footways and on street parking on both sides. There is constant heavy traffic on the street.



There are several vehicle entrances along the northern footway that are a potential conflict between vehicles and people walking and wheeling.



The northern footway narrows to an unacceptable level because of the extended building line of the old bank.



There is no safe and accessible crossing across the junction with Hamilton Harty Court.



Generally, there is no safe and accessible crossing across Ballynahinch Street.



There are bus stops on either side of Ballynahinch Street. However, no provision has been made to ensure buses can access the kerb, rendering these services inaccessible to some potential users.



Parking on the pavement obstructs people walking and wheeling on the southern footway.



In use vehicle entrances are an issue on this footway too.



Footway conditions are poor in places along the southern footway and the use of dish drainage channels on both sides impacts on pedestrian comfort and accessibility.



Junction of Lisburn Street / Ballynahinch Street / Main Street

The junction where the three streets meet is exceptionally busy with heavy and constant traffic. This is not a safe place for people walking and wheeling.



Crossing the street here is only possible via an uncontrolled crossing on Main Street which has a traffic island at it's mid point. This crossing is extremely challenging for some people to use independently.



The public car park entrance on the east side of this junction adds to the challenges for pedestrians in this area. The current layout for pedestrians at this entrance is confusing and inaccessible.



Main Street Car Park

There is a public car park at the bottom of Main Street immediately adjacent to the junction with Ballynahinch Street.

Safe pedestrian access to Main Street to and from the car park is only possible currently on the church side of the footpath. Access here is very limited and does not meet inclusive design standards. (See image above)

People walking and wheeling from Ballynahinch Street have to step on to the carriageway to access the footway to the car park before crossing the access road again when the footway peters out.

The car park contains accessible parking and public toilets including an accessible toilet.



Main Street

Main Street is characterised by its steep gradient. On street parking is available on the western side of the street. There is constant heavy traffic on the street.



The area around the church contains vehicle entrances but also some seating, the uncontrolled crossing across Main Street and a bus stop with shelter and bus cage to prioritize bus access close to the kerb.



The building line reduces the east side footway width to unacceptable levels just after the church. After this point the footway broadens out.



There are a significant number of vehicle entrances along both footways on main street, representing potential conflict points between vehicles and people walking and wheeling.



Footway condition is poor in places, particularly around vehicle entrances. Although for the most part step free access is facilitated, the steep gradient of the street has made provision less than ideal in places.



Street furniture and other clutter including floral displays restrict footway width in places along Main Street.



The area around the Square is particularly problematic from an accessibility perspective. The existing footways on Main Street and Dromore Road terminate at the Square and there is no segregated step free pedestrian route around the Square. The area is dominated by cars and parking provision.



Access at the western side of the top of Main Street is particularly difficult with a very narrow kerbed footway, unusable to many.



At the bottom of Main Street on the western side, there is a bus stop with shelter and a public space with seating. Buses have priority access to the kerbside.



Park Lane and Park Street

Park Lane and Park Street are both narrow streets with limited discontinuous footway provision on Park Lane and no dedicated provision on Park Street. This means that on both streets, pedestrians in the main are forced to share space with vehicles.



Parking is present on both streets and given that Park Street is the main entrance point to the Forest Car Park, it is heavily trafficked making it a hazardous pedestrian route.



Dromore Road

The footways on Dromore Street are relatively broad and uncluttered on both sides.



There is on street parking on the eastern side of the street and a bus stop with a bus cage to ensure access to the kerb.



There is an uncontrolled crossing across the junction with Park Street. This crossing does not meet design standards.



There is a bus stop opposite Park Lane with no accessible provision to safely cross the carriageway.



Assessment of current issues

Based on the street audit there are a significant number of challenges and issues with the current public realm in Hillsborough. Some of these issues are created by the topography of the main street, others created by the historic nature of the village. In summary issues include:

- The complete dominance of cars and vehicles in the village with parking dominating streets
- Pavement parking on Ballynahinch Street restricting footway widths
- Very narrow footways in places and some footways in poor condition. The presence of dish drainage channels adds to difficulties for some.
- Footways without appropriate dropped kerbs at junctions and vehicle entrances meaning there is no step free route around the village for people walking and wheeling
- Multiple vehicle entrances (mostly in use) across footways, presenting potential conflict between vehicles and pedestrians
- An almost complete absence of crossings on the key roads in the town
- Poor and inappropriate provision of tactile paving
- Clutter on pavements including floral displays
- Lack of provision of accessible on-street parking
- Poor pedestrian links to off-street car parking and public toilets
- Unsuitable temporary surfacing on the footway on Main Street, attempting to reduce the impact of the gradient
- The current layout of Park Lane, Park Street and parts of the Square which have no or incomplete segregated footways making these streets a shared surface.
- Lack of bus priority at stops on Ballynahinch Street
- Lack of cycling infrastructure

Recommendations for improvement

Based on the audit of the streets in Hillsborough there is a need for significant improvement to make the public realm an accessible and inclusive space that can be enjoyed by everyone. The following issues need to be prioritised:

1. Providing a step free route around all the streets in the village
2. Widening footways particularly those that fall below accepted minimum standards
3. Improving footway surfaces especially around vehicle entrances
4. Upgrading and correctly installing tactile paving
5. Providing inclusive and accessible crossing opportunities on every street in the village
6. Addressing specific issues relating to an absence of kerbed footways around parts of the Square, Park Lane and Park Street
7. Improving the provision of accessible parking on all streets
8. Improving access to bus stops on Ballynahinch Street
9. Improving pedestrian linkages to off street car parking and toilet facilities
10. Improving cycling infrastructure in the village including inclusive parking provision

There are several other recommendations that fall outside the remit of the scheme, but which are essential in making the village a more inclusive place. These recommendations are:

1. Implement measures that will reduce through traffic from the village
2. Tackle pavement parking in the village particularly on Ballynahinch Street
3. Introduce a ban on A boards and street shop displays in the village
4. Provide a public Changing Places Toilet in the village

Summary of proposed changes

Having met with Council Officials many of the Committee's recommendations will be addressed or partially addressed by planned changes to the village streets. Importantly the scheme will result in step free routes around the village with kerbed footway routes everywhere including the Square, Park Street and Park Lane. Footway surfaces will be significantly improved with vehicle entrances in particular addressed. Pedestrian links to the car park off Main Street will be improved considerably.

Some, but not all the current narrow footways will be widened. The proposed provision of an additional controlled crossing on Main Street close to the Square is very welcome, as is the upgrading of some existing uncontrolled crossings.

Taken in the round the scheme will deliver significant improvements to the accessibility of the village.

Outstanding issues / recommendations

Despite the improvements there remain issues to be addressed in the village.

There are still places in the village where footways will be unacceptably narrow. The Committee recognises that the building line and restrictions with carriageway width means that little can be done to address the very narrow footway on Lisburn Street. The Committee recommends that an uncontrolled crossing be provided across Lisburn Street to provide a barrier free alternative route for pedestrians.

Currently it is proposed to exclude the narrow footway around the old bank building on Ballynahinch Street from the scheme as removing parking to widen the footway is deemed too controversial. Imtac believes that leaving an inaccessible footway is unacceptable when investing in public realm and recommends that the footway be widened at the expense of several parking bays. This will benefit more people than it will di24sbenefit.

Crossings will remain an issue throughout the village with no proposed crossing on either Lisburn Street or Ballynahinch Street. This makes it exceptionally difficult for disabled people and older people to move around the village. Imtac recommends that accessible crossing opportunities be provided on both streets.

Currently there is limited on street accessible parking provision in the village, restricted to a space opposite the CourtHouse at the top of Main Street. Given the services and facilities on other streets Imtac recommends that on street accessible parking bays be provided on Main Street, Lisburn Street and Ballynahinch Street.

Buses using the bus stops on Ballynahinch Street cannot currently access the kerb and therefore are not accessible to some disabled people. Imtac recommends that bus stops on the street have kerb access, using build outs if necessary.

Imtac recommends that the Council explore installing inclusive cycle parking in the village accessible to users of non-standard and accessible cycles.

Imtac recommends that the Council install a Changing Places Toilet in the village or at council facilities in the forest park.