

# Putting Inverness Streets Ahead



## Who we are

This leaflet has been produced by the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) Scotland in collaboration with:

Access for All - Inverness Access Panel  
Autism Rights Group Highland  
Guide Dogs Scotland  
Highland Cycle Campaign  
Highland Visually Impaired Working Age Group  
Living Streets Inverness  
Sight Action



Making life better for blind and partially sighted people



Supporting people  
with sight loss

## Building an Inverness that is accessible to all



As 'The Gateway to the Highlands', Inverness plays a pivotal role in promoting the region for its unrivalled quality of life and as an attractive place to live, work and visit.

But a vital element for any successful 21st century Scottish city must be inclusivity. A city that is open and welcoming to everyone, no matter what needs or disabilities they may have.

Key to inclusivity is physical accessibility.

An Inverness Street Charter would enshrine accessibility in street planning and help avoid flawed designs that could blemish Inverness for a generation or more.

## Why Inverness should have a Street Charter



Our streets must be more accessible, yet for too many they remain a daily obstacle course.

We, as a group of concerned organisations, are working together to persuade Highland Council to adopt a Street Charter that would put Inverness streets ahead.

This would be based on the Street Charter Toolkit published by RNIB Scotland. This covers relevant legislation applying to Scotland and identifies the main problems encountered on the streets by blind and partially sighted people.

An Inverness Street Charter would apply these principles to the local urban environment.

We want to make our streets more open to everyone, including those with disabilities.

## **For residents and visitors to Inverness:**

Designs that work for residents and visitors with disabilities can benefit many other groups, from parents with prams and pushchairs, to the elderly, to visitors with luggage. An inclusive streetscape would make Inverness more welcoming and encourage more people to go out secure in the knowledge that it is a safe and accessible environment.

## **For the Council:**

A Street Charter would offer planners and consultants a template for inclusive design, potentially saving the council money by cutting down on objections to plans or completed developments. It would hugely help to enhance the quality of life for residents and, vitally, would boost the reputation of Inverness as an open and welcoming tourist destination.



## Inverness streetscape at present

**What kind of problems are there currently around Inverness city centre? This is what we have been told:**

- There are too many bollards of different types and heights.
- ‘Shared spaces’ where roads and pavements are levelled and vehicles and pedestrians use the same space make people feel unsafe.
- Unfenced tables and chairs outside cafes migrate onto the pavement blocking people’s paths.
- Refuse bins on historically narrow pavements force pedestrians onto the road to get past.
- Random street clutter is a hazard.
- Pavements are blocked by road signs either giving traffic directions or marking road works.
- Pavement parking is a problem across Inverness.
- Knee-high public artworks can cause injuries.



## How can these problems be solved?

- Controlled crossings to give safe passage across roads.
- Kerbs to give definition and certainty on where road traffic is.
- Speed controls.
- Clear fencing-off of street cafes.
- Providing fewer but higher capacity bike stands that are properly fenced off.
- Good colour contrast for street furniture.
- Fencing or tactile paving warning of the presence of public art works.
- Clear delineation between pedestrians and cyclists, and between cyclists and vehicles.
- Avoiding shared use of pavements by pedestrians and cyclists.
- Removing on-street advertising.



## **Inclusive street design - the responses below address some frequently raised concerns:**

### **No formal objections were received during the planning application process.**

Few people regularly follow planning applications and all too often the implications of a street design are realised once it is literally set in stone.

### **If the design has been set, what modifications would you suggest?**

Those who object to plans are often told that the design is within national guidelines. But new developments should lead the way for accessibility rather than just meeting minimum standards. The regeneration of Inverness must not end up creating no-go zones for residents and visitors with disabilities.

### **Businesses say they need to use A-board advertising.**

The City of Edinburgh Council is just the latest local authority in the UK to reject this argument. Its Transport and Environment Committee voted unanimously to ban A-boards across the city and have asked businesses to consider alternatives such as wall-hung menu-board style advertising.

### **We want to encourage a vibrant street café culture in Inverness.**

Disabled residents and visitors also want to enjoy a vibrant street café culture. Café tables and chairs can be fenced off so they don't intrude further onto the street, blocking access.

### **We want to promote active travel like walking and cycling for health and environmental benefits.**

The layout for walking and cycling should work for everyone. Separating cyclists and pedestrians gives both groups reassurance they are safe. There are no health benefits in bumping into or colliding with obstacles or other street users.

**We cannot afford to retro-fit street designs at a time when council budgets are under extreme pressure.**

This makes it more vital than ever to get designs right from the start.

A 2015 House of Lords report on 'shared spaces' warned that "councils are risking public safety with fashionable 'simplified' street design", and noted that "as more and more local authorities are forced into expensive remedial work, often restoring crossings they have themselves removed, the need for urgent action becomes even more apparent".

The report calls for "an immediate moratorium on shared space schemes while impact assessments are conducted and for guidance to be updated so that local authorities better understand their responsibilities under the Equalities Act".

The report's calls have been echoed by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee.



## Research into shared space schemes

**Some research suggests that ‘shared space’ schemes can be popular with the public and traders and increase freedom of movement.**

However, the House of Lords enquiry found:

- “People’s experiences of shared space schemes are overwhelmingly negative”;
- “Over a third of people actively avoid shared space schemes”; and
- “Drivers consistently report being unsure of who has right of way, resulting in confusion, chaos and constant near misses.”

One person said: “The idea behind such spaces depends on every user being 100 per cent able and 100 per cent alert at all times, which just doesn’t happen in real life.”

People with disabilities face real danger if they no longer have a distinct pedestrian zone separating them from vehicles. Visually impaired people, who use white canes and guide-dog users, rely on kerbs as vital clues to let them know when they are on the footpath and out of traffic.

## What next?

Inverness can lead the way on inclusive street design. A Street Charter would work as a guide for this approach, ensuring that any new developments don't exclude people with disabilities and make Inverness more welcoming for visitors.

A Street Charter would also make for a more pleasant environment for people who don't have disabilities as clutter free streets and logical street layouts would make getting around easier and more appealing.

## We want an Inverness for everyone.



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