

Out-of-town Developments: Are they a more accessible option for disabled people?



Following on from a recent report on BBC News about Out-of-town developments affecting town centre trade we write today with some thoughts on the debate between out-of-town shopping developments versus the traditional town centres. An aspect of this debate that is often overlooked is access for disabled people.

Accessible Wales are big supporters of the traditional town centre, with many friends owning or working in businesses on the high-street. They can be the heart of a community, bustling with shops, cafes, and other amenities. However, they can pose significant challenges for disabled people.

Narrow pavements, no dropped kerbs and insufficient / inaccessible parking are three examples of issues that affect disabled people when visiting the town centre. Coupling those issues that affect people with mobility difficulties with busy streets, poorly identifiable shops and excess street furniture which can impact people with sensory impairments and you have a melting pot for inaccessibility.

In contrast, out-of-town shopping centres are often purpose-built with accessibility in mind. Wide, walkways make it easier for people with mobility impairments to move around freely, while fewer crowds and quieter surroundings can make it a more comfortable and less overwhelming experience for those with sensory impairments or learning disabilities.

On top of these plus points, many out-of-town shopping centres offer accessible toilets that are not used as storage cupboards and are open 24/7, they usually have good parking.

Additionally, it's not just physical accessibility that makes out-of-town shopping centres a more attractive option for people with disabilities. Many of them offer a wider range of facilities and services designed to meet the needs of a diverse range of customers. These facilities include accessible changing rooms, quiet rooms for people who need a break from sensory stimuli, and other amenities that can help make the shopping experience more comfortable and enjoyable for everyone.

Obviously, it is important to recognise that accessibility is not a one-size-fits-all solution. While out-of-town shopping centres may be more accessible for some people with disabilities, they may present challenges for others. However, by acknowledging the unique needs and preferences of disabled people and striving to create spaces that are as inclusive as possible, we can work towards creating a more accessible world for everyone.

Principal Consultant, Richard Jones believe that out-of-town developments have huge benefits for disabled people, but also makes the following comment:

"I am a big supporter of the town centre and would strongly urge decision makers to invest more time and money in improving access. If thought was put in to the access and provision in a town centre and disabled people were engaged with a big difference could be achieved."

Accessible Wales is willing to work with any business or town planner to help improve access as are many other access consultants and access groups, it's just a case of reaching out and engaging. For more information contact us using the details at the foot of this statement.

"Because an accessible Wales benefits all"



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