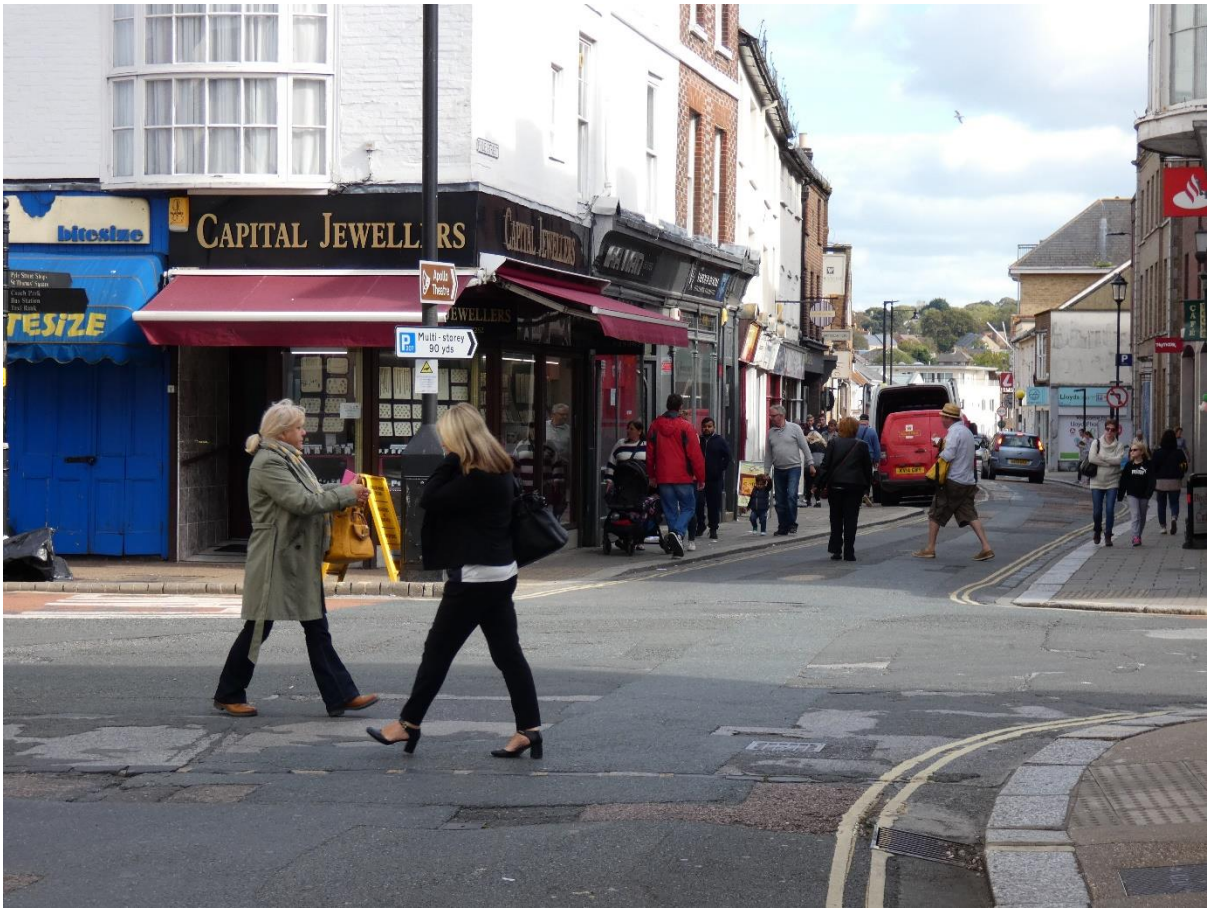

Newport Town Centre & Carisbrooke High Street

Pedestrian Environment Audit

Summary Report

October 2017

Contents

This is a sumamry of the full audit report. More detail on the methodology and detailed findings are included in the main report, along with additional maps and illustrations.

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Why is the pedestrian environment important?

Walking is an important mode of transport. Almost everyone walks as part of a journey, and walking is the sole mode of travel for many trips. On the Isle of Wight 52.6% of adults walk (for at least 10 minutes) at least five times per week – more than the south east average of 49.9%. However, when it comes to walking for utility purposes that number falls to 17.7%, dropping well below the south east average of 22.7%, suggesting that this could be increased locally.

Walking is particularly important in Newport. Car ownership is very low. Census data shows that around the study area 49.9% of households do not have a car.

> "If everyone in England were sufficiently active, nearly 37,000 deaths a year could be prevented . Being physically active significantly reduces the risk of several major health conditions by between 20% and 60%, including heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, colon and breast cancer and Alzheimer's disease. Physical activity helps maintain a healthy weight, improves cholesterol levels, reduces blood pressure, builds healthy muscles and bones, improves balance and reduces the risk of falls."
>
> (Source: Walking for Health: Walking Works)

If walking is convenient, safe and efficient then more people will opt to walk, and those who have no other choice will enjoy a better quality of life.

Increasingly High Street shopping is under threat from out of town shopping and Internet sales. Providing a high quality experience for people visiting town centres is a vital part of ensuring they continue to thrive; a strong pedestrian environment is a key part of this.

"Across Europe, studies have linked the quality of public spaces to people's perceptions of attractiveness of an area, contributing towards their quality of life and influencing where they shop…there is consistent evidence that customers like pedestrian environments and dislike traffic. Retailers have been shown to over-estimate the importance of the car for customer travel."

(Source: Living Streets, The Pedestrian Pound, The business case for better streets and places)

Almost 1 in 5 people in the UK has a disability, 57% of whom have impaired mobility. For this group of people the quality of the pedestrian environment can have a critical impact on their ability to access places to enable them to lead full lives. An accessible pedestrian environment must consider more than just mobility-related disability however.

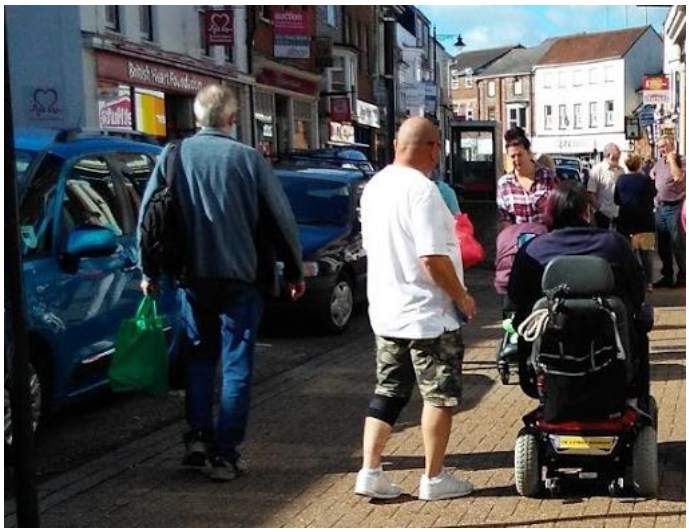

Figure 1 - Many people use some form of mobility aid to help them get around town

With an aging society, and a high proportion of older residents on the Isle of Wight, providing an accessible environment becomes even more critical.

Issues

A variety of different issues have an impact on how safe and comfortable an area is to walk around.

Permeability

For walking to be effective as a means of transport it is important that distances from point to point are as short as possible. This enables walk time to be competitive with other modes and maximises the convenience of walking. A more permeable environment ensures more destinations are accessible within typical walking times. This is even more critical in town centres, where people often walk to multiple destinations. Reducing the length of each walk has a large cumulative effect, and encourages people to visit more places, helping encourage a thriving retail area.

Junctions

Road junctions often create extra complexity for pedestrians. There are more potential conflict points with motorised traffic, more directions to look for traffic, and often a need to look over the shoulder which can be difficult for some people. In addition vehicle drivers will be dealing with extra complexities and so may have less attention focused on pedestrians.

Vehicle speeds

Children have reduced abilities to judge speeds, and vehicles travelling at above 20mph might not even be perceived as approaching. Older people also typically struggle more to assess vehicle speeds accurately.

When pedestrians are struck by cars the chance of the pedestrian being injured or killed increases with speed. Studies on fatality risk from a collision vary in the risk levels found at different speeds, yet the change in relative risk between collisions at 20mph and 30mph is always high. ROSPA use a figure of 1.5% fatality risk at 20mph and 8% at 30mph. As speeds fall below 20mph risk of fatality and injury gradually falls further. At speeds above 30mph small increases in speed lead to much higher risk of serious injury or fatality.

A further consideration is the ability of drivers to stop at a given speed and hence avoid an accident. A typical stopping distance at 20mph is 12m; at 30mph this distance doubles to 24m.

> *"A vehicle travelling at 20mph would stop in time to avoid a child running out three car-lengths in front. The same vehicle travelling at 25mph would not be able to stop in time, and would hit the child at 18mph (29km/h). This is roughly the same impact as a child falling from an upstairs window."* *(Source: Brake)*

Vehicle volume

There are various obvious effects of increased traffic volume in local streets. In general increased volumes of motor vehicles leads to more pollution, noise and risk of collisions. There are also broader social impacts of increased traffic volumes. Various studies have shown that social interactions on streets with higher traffic levels are significantly lower. Higher traffic volumes clearly create a barrier effect between the two sides of a residential street, and it would appear likely that this impact will also be felt on retail streets, with less movement from one side of the street to the other on busier roads.

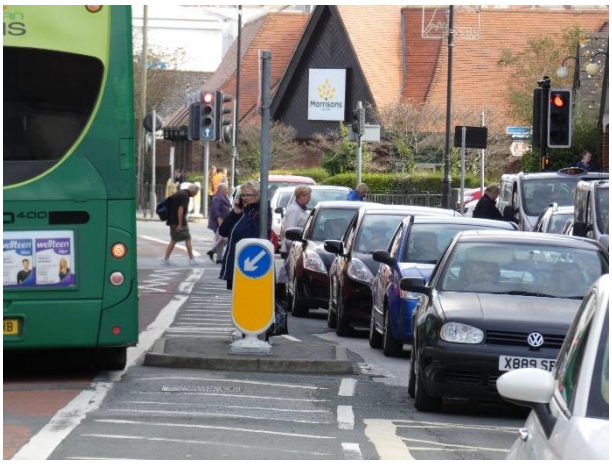

Figure 2 - Traffic can act as a significant barrier between different parts of town

Footway widths

Adequate footway width is vital for walking to be comfortable and efficient. Government guidance on footway widths is given in Manual for Streets and Inclusive Mobility. In general 2000mm is deemed the minimum unobstructed width required for footways on quiet streets; this allows adequate width for two wheelchair users to pass comfortably. Where this is not possible due to physical constraints 1500mm should be regarded as the minimum acceptable, allowing a wheelchair user and a walker to pass.

Useable width is often lower than physical width due to enclosure. Greater width is needed when one or both sides of a footway are enclosed. Enclosure can be created by walls, obstructions or parked cars. Research carried out for Transport for London identified the need for an additional 200mm buffer around an obstacle, wall or kerb, as people do not walk right up against a wall or other object.

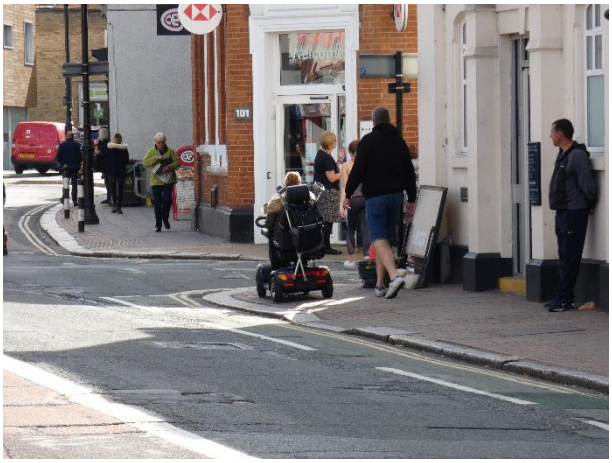

Figure 3 – Footways need to accommodate various users. Wheeled users require turning width at junctions

Formal crossings

Formal crossings form an important part of the pedestrian environment. Uncontrolled crossings provide the opportunity for various more vulnerable or less confident groups to cross. They are particularly important for visually impaired people, children, wheelchair and scooter users, people with pushchairs and people with impaired mobility. Controlled crossing points (such as zebra crossings, puffin crossings and crossings at traffic lights) provide the additional benefit of priority over vehicles and are particularly important on busier roads and for the most vulnerable pedestrians.

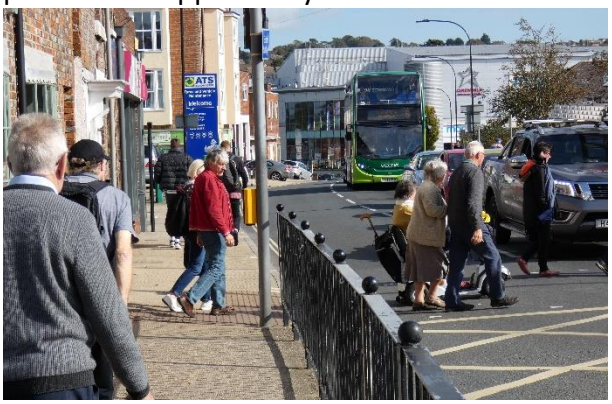

Figure 4 - Controlled crossings are particularly valuable for more vulnerable pedestrians

Parked cars

Parked cars often create problems due to the enclosure effect on the adjacent footway. They also create a risk of pedestrians being struck by car doors (dooring) or obstructed by open car doors. Parked cars can also create a barrier to crossing the road, both in terms of physically restricting where people can cross and reducing visibility.

Parking on the footway causes obstruction to pedestrians, often forcing them into the carriageway. This can particularly be an issue for wheeled users who are unable to pass but also cannot move freely onto the carriageway away from formal crossing points. Footway parking can also cause damage to footways which are typically not built to withstand the same loads as vehicle carriageways.

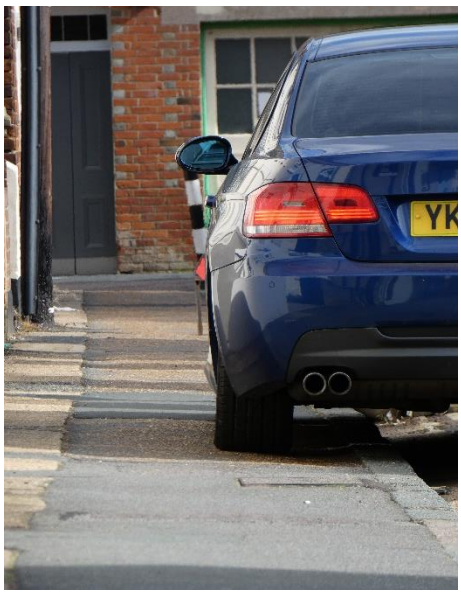

Figure 5 - Footway parking is especially problematic on narrow footways

Retail areas

In retail areas the movement needs of pedestrians is supplemented by additional requirements. People need space to browse, look in shop windows, shops often want to display their goods outside; streets also serve as a meeting place where people stop to chat. Road crossing needs become more frequent, as people may wish to go from shop to shop on different sides of the street.

Findings

The survey work revealed a large number of issues with the pedestrian environment in Newport.

Footway width

Footway widths were generally found to be inadequate, often falling well below acceptable standards. Increasingly there is a need for our street environment to cater for people using various mobility aids, from walking sticks to mobility scooters, and this highlights the inadequacies in footway width even more. Many footways have inadequate space for two pedestrians to pass. Many more would not permit a walker and wheelchair user to pass.

Footway width is often compromised by obstacles. Many of these are related to vehicle use such as road signs and parking meters. During the survey work it was observed than footway width is often most compromised around junctions, where greater width is typically needed.

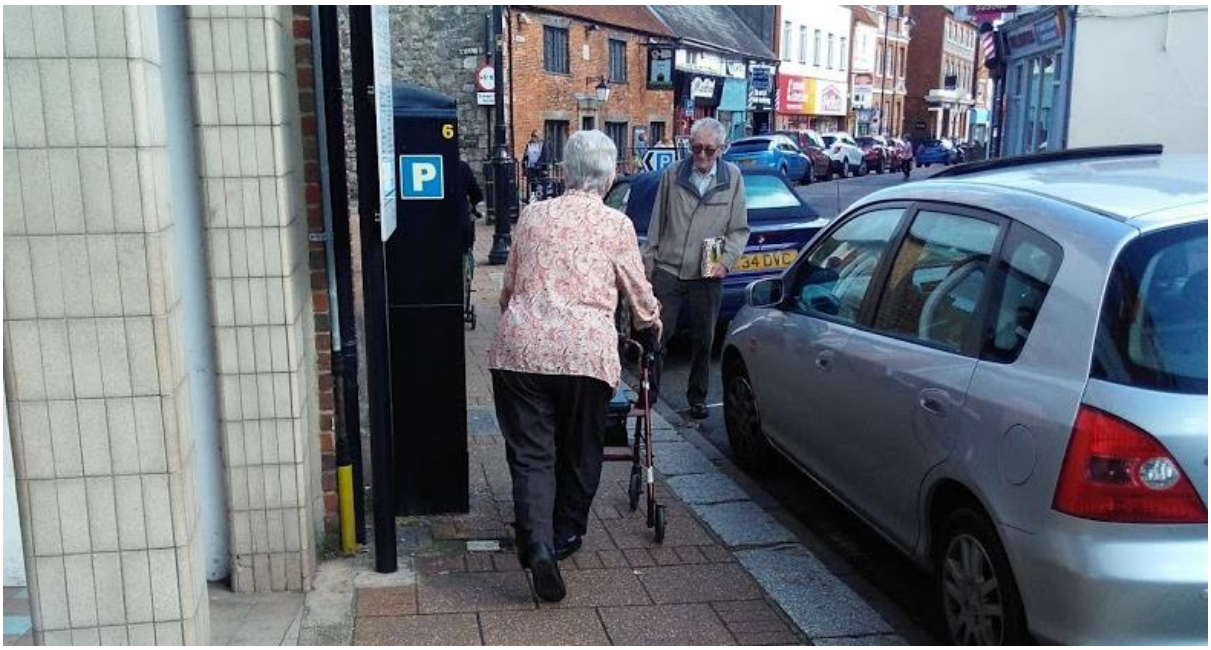

Figure 6 - Parking meter leaves inadequate space for pedestrians

Formal crossings

In some streets formal crossing points are completely absent, while in other streets they are not provided frequently or consistently enough. Many are of a poor standard, with a variety of issues including inadequate width, excessive slope or crossfall, missing or incorrect tactile paving and non-flush kerbs. Turning circles of wheelchairs and scooters are often not accommodated by crossings.

People on foot often have to make frequent changes in level to cross roads while vehicle traffic is unimpeded by level changes. In addition crossings frequently disrupt the level of the footway for users walking along it.

Traffic speeds at some crossing points are too high to allow for safe, comfortable crossings.

Parked cars

In many streets space is provided for parking alongside inadequate space for pedestrians. Free on-street parking (sometimes time restricted) is often found alongside/nearby chargeable car parks. This discourages people from parking in the more appropriate place. Footway parking is an issue in some areas, though the impact on the area studied is relatively small. However, in many areas footway parking has been stopped by introducing bollards and other physical prevention methods. These measures often reduce already inadequate footway widths and create a hazard for pedestrians, particularly those with disabilities.

Problem junctions

Many of the road junctions cause some level of difficulty for pedestrians and could be modified to improve the pedestrian experience. Typically this would involve improving crossings, reducing vehicle turning speeds, reducing crossing distances and improving inter-visibility between pedestrians and motorists. Some examples of junctions that provide a particularly poor environment for pedestrians are shown in the annotated maps following.

Seating

Provision of seating is mixed, both in terms of presence and quality. Many key areas in the town centre are well provided for, though there is a shortage of benches with arms which are important for some people. Distance between seating exceeds 100m in some places within the town centre, and outside of the main shopping area provision is sparse, even along key walking routes.

Wayfinding

Wayfinding information is patchy and often out of date. A series of black fingerpost signs exists within the town centre, along with an assortment of other signs and maps. These do not form a coherent system of wayfinding information and indicate incorrect destinations in some cases (for example to the post office which moved location several years ago).

Quality of the environment

Many stretches of footway use a mixture of materials, sometimes in a considered way, but often looking rather uncoordinated. Changes in surfacing type within a street are common. Quality of materials used varies greatly, but overall the pedestrian environment across much of the town feels rather neglected and tired.

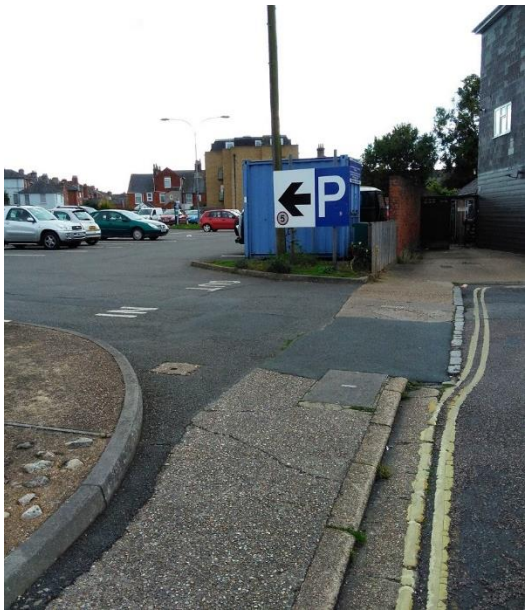

Figure 7 - Patchwork footway surface

In many areas there is evidence of footway widening, addition of build-outs and so on. In many cases these works have been carried out as an “add on” leaving the previous footways and kerbs in situ Often the end result is less attractive than if the old and new sections had been fully integrated. In some cases the integration is so poor as to affect the utility of the footway and not just the appearance.

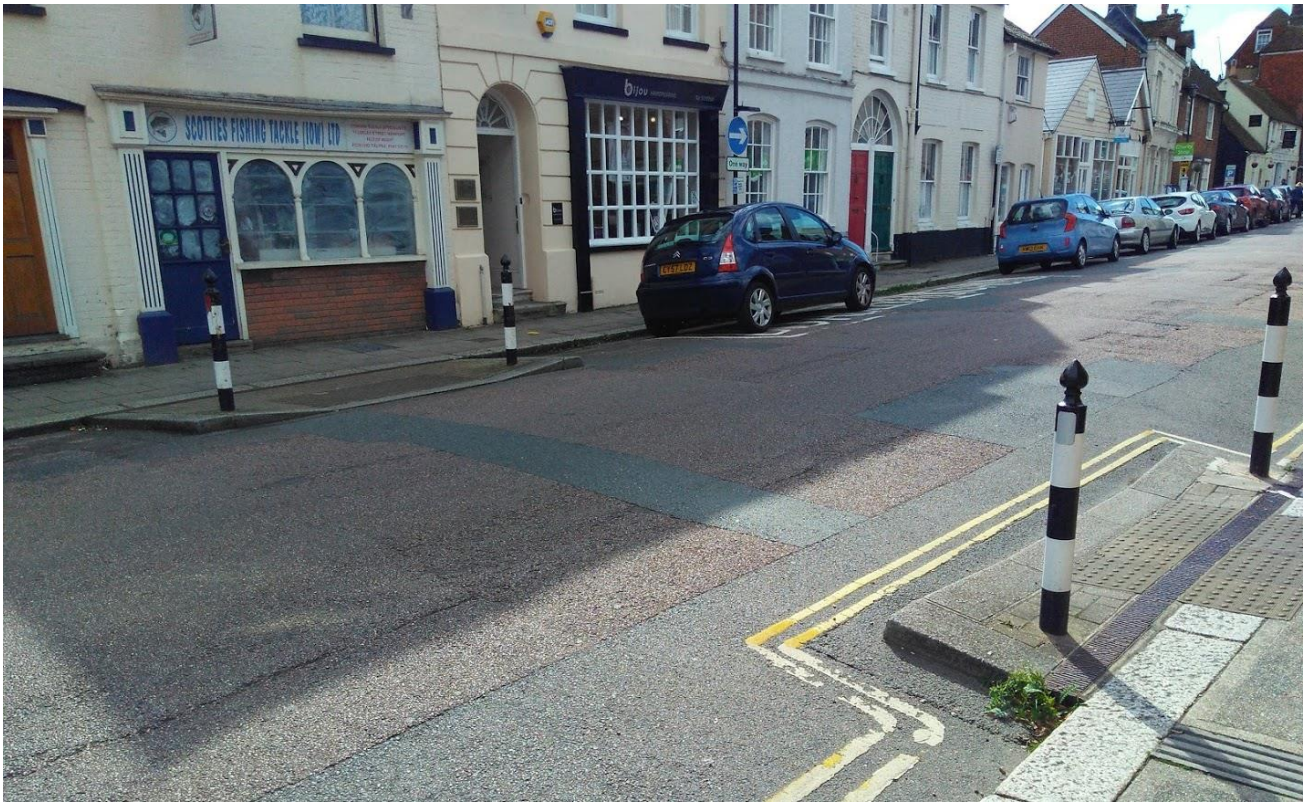

Figure 8 - Poorly constructed build out leaving original kerb raised up

Many footways have uneven surfaces. As Island Roads completes its upgrade programme improvements to the surface of many footways should be seen. Footway levels vary frequently in many areas, with dropped kerbs for vehicle crossovers and crossing points causing significant

variations in level. Typically these variations lead to a change in the crossfall across the path and can significantly reduce walking comfort and cause severe inconvenience or danger to people in wheelchairs or with children in pushchairs.

Planting

Planting can add significantly to the appeal of urban spaces, and in areas like St James Square and Sts Thomas Square planters, beds and hanging baskets add significantly to the appeal of the area. Elsewhere planters are overgrown with weeds and have a detrimental effect. In other areas some additional planting would enhance the environment and soften an often harsh urban environment.

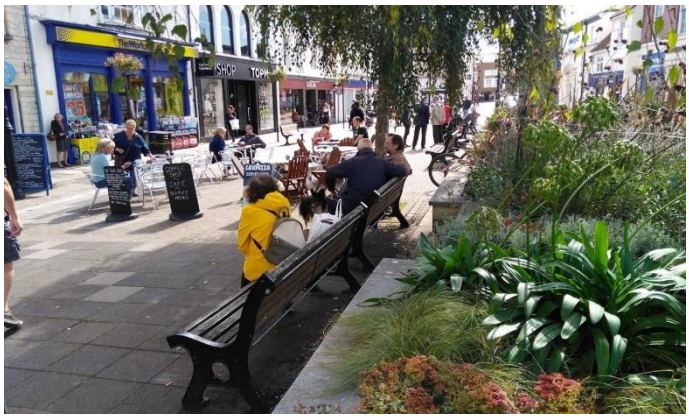

Figure 9 - Planting in St James Square adds to the sense of place

Discussion & recommendations

The audit has highlighted that there are major shortcomings in the pedestrian environment in Newport. The sheer number of positive changes that could be made, often at a very detailed level, means it is almost to list everything, however the following gives an indication of the sorts of changes that could be made.

For the town to thrive and residents to enjoy a good quality of life improvements need to be made. In some cases these improvements may be simple correction of things that have been done badly in the past, or updating something to cope with a changed situation. However, to create a good pedestrian environment across the study area requires more fundamental changes and a re-thinking of how we prioritise use of our urban spaces.

Roads in the study area were largely laid out before the motor car was invented. Over the last hundred years our streets have changed from places where motorised traffic was almost unknown to places often dominated by vehicles. Growth in traffic has happened over a long period, and society had adapted to it and patterns of life have changed around it. In many areas that has had a deleterious effect on quality of life, and this is often most acute in our town centres. In order to reverse some of that decline in quality of life we need to re-think how we use our streets, and in particular how we use them for motor transport.

It is now a broadly accepted principle that in dealing with issues of how we use urban streets we can’t treat all places the same. Government guidance, including Manual for Streets places

significant evidence on planning based on a user hierarchy that puts consideration of pedestrian needs first. This contrasts with much of the current situation, where pedestrians are (quite literally) squeezed to the edges, and accommodated around motor traffic. It is important to remember that streets are important social spaces, not just transport conduits.

There are a number of different ways the pedestrian environment could be improved. Perhaps the most important is limiting the impact of motor vehicles and minimising the interaction between pedestrians and vehicles. A key part of this is distinguishing between the different roles of different streets and their purposes. We would suggest that most streets in the study area should be treated as local streets – where motor vehicle movements are primarily local and low speed and there is a greater focus on provision for safe walking and cycling. Through traffic, and traffic moving between local streets in different parts of town would be expected to use main traffic streets, which would have a key role in providing vehicle access within the town. These streets would be organised to minimise the impact of through traffic on key pedestrian movements. Various systems exist for categorising streets based on their use. For simplicity in this report we will refer to streets in the town centre as "local streets" and "main traffic streets".

Creating a forgiving environment

Just as a parachutist would not jump out of a plane without a reserve chute, so our streets need to be designed to allow for things to go wrong. A child suddenly running into a street, an older person not noticing an approaching vehicle, a motorist not seeing a pedestrian because the sun was shining in their eyes; these are all situations which happen on a daily basis. If our streets are designed to be forging, then these issues are less likely to lead to a collision, and if there is a collision it is likely to be less serious. Essentially forgiving design moves beyond designing for how people **should** behave in an ideal world, and looks at what is needed to keep people safe when considering the range of human behaviours and potential for errors being made.

Recommendation: Ensure design of all new highway schemes in central Newport are designed to create a forgiving environment that minimises the impact of mistakes and poor judgements

Removal of through traffic

Much of the traffic in the central part of Newport is simply passing through. In many cases people don't particularly want to be in the centre of Newport, it is simply the most convenient route. junction improvements planned for Newport open up opportunities to increase capacity on some main traffic streets in the town and main roads they connect into. This could help reduce traffic volumes in many parts of town but only if measures are introduced in parallel to reduce the ability for through traffic to choose alternative routes through the town. Without these measures existing

town centre and residential streets will simply act as rat runs, providing additional motor vehicle capacity and inducing demand for new trips.

Recommendation: Determine which streets should be treated as local streets and develop a plan to modify traffic flows to minimise their use as through routes. It is highly likely Newport junction changes can provide the catalyst for this.

Simplifying car parking

Currently car parking provision is spread across the town in a rather haphazard fashion. In the long term it would be useful to master plan car parking arrangements, with a view to having parking spread across fewer locations, and ensuring that car parks are located in areas that are accessible from the main road network, without having to drive into or through the centre of town. As an interim measure it may be possible to encourage drivers to park in the closest car park to their access point into the town through reorganisation of traffic flows in key locations.

Recommendation: Develop a plan for routing car-park traffic more effectively to minimise use of local streets to access car parks.

Reduction of vehicle speeds

Speeds in excess of 20mph are not compatible with areas with high level of pedestrian activity. Keeping speeds below 20mph reduces risk, improves liveability and helps create a more forgiving environment. During the survey various locations were observed where speeds in excess of 20mph were common, often within local streets heavily used by pedestrians. Reducing vehicle speeds in these areas is vital to create an improved pedestrian environment.

In some areas even 20mph is too fast, and this is often reflected in driver behaviour. However, in some situations roads are laid out in a way that encourages excessive speed, leaving the driver *feeling* they are driving safely but putting vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, at risk.

Recommendation: Implement a 20mph zone encompassing the area shown in the main report Accesses to this area are limited, which should help reduce costs for signing the zone. This action alone is likely to reduce speeds sufficiently in various streets.

Recommendation: Implement a 20mph limit along Carisbrooke High Street. Where width is at a premium and volumes are high, slowing vehicles is one of the few available measures to make the environment less intimidating for pedestrians.

Recommendation: Investigate opportunities to modify traffic flows to reduce traffic speeds. Modifications to one way restrictions, changes to on street parking locations and similar measures can reduce speeds with minimal re-engineering of streets required.

Recommendation: Introduce measures which improve the pedestrian environment while also reducing vehicle speeds. Interventions include raised crossings, build outs, footway widening, and surfacing changes.

Footway parking

Measures to tackle footway parking have typically been physical, and these very often result in detriment to the pedestrian environment – most commonly bollards are installed on footways. New measures have been recently introduced empowering local authorities to create area-wide footway parking bans. These allow breaches to be enforced through civil parking enforcement. Introducing such measures could allow some of the physical barriers to be removed, relying on enforcement to drive a cultural change towards footway parking being unacceptable.

Recommendation: Introduce a footway parking ban zone across the same area as the 20mph zone.

By combining the two zones signage clutter can be minimised, clear gateways into the zone can be designated and a strong message that drivers are entering an area where motor vehicles are not seen as the primary street user.

A people-first zone

Within the new zone there will still be main traffic streets, where high volumes of vehicles might still be expected. However, the majority of streets should be designated as local streets, with measures taken to minimise motor vehicle use and priority in these streets. A culture of “cars are guests” should prevail in these areas.

Recommendation: Categorise appropriate streets as local streets and develop phased plans to modify them to re-prioritise pedestrians.

Footway width

Footway width is less than ideal almost universally across the study area. In general any opportunities to widen footways will help improve the pedestrian environment

Recommendation: Identify priority footway widening projects and funding opportunities to progress these.

Recommendations: Utilise opportunities through regeneration programmes, highways works and new developments to widen footways.

Three links stand out as requiring urgent attention and might form the starting point for a priority list.

South Street (Morrisons to Furlongs)	Very narrow, busy section of footway. Important link between town and outlying retail, cinema, car park and residential areas.
Mill Street	Narrow/absent footways. Key link between town and Sainsbury's residential areas, car parks and retirement developments. May be appropriate to close to through traffic to give space for active travel.
Holyrood Street	Narrow footways, key link between town and car parks, Lidl, Riverway retailers, also has significant retail frontage.

Absent footways

Some streets have missing sections of footway on one side. Where there are houses or other places people need to access, or the missing section interrupts a pedestrian route, footways should be added where possible. If this is not possible then measures should be taken to ensure the main carriageway is treated as a shared space, rather than simply a motor vehicle route. This may involve changes to surfacing, traffic calming measures and signage.

Recommendation: Develop footway creation plan, prioritised based on need for footways on both sides of a carriageway. Priority areas are likely to include Drill Hall Road and Crocker Street.

Formal crossings

A number of issues have been highlighted regarding existing crossings and in many areas there is poor provision of crossing points.

Any opportunity to create a crossing where one is currently missing will add to the quality of the pedestrian environment and particularly the accessibility of the town. Improvements to existing crossings may be possible through planning gain or as part of a wider improvement programme.

Dropped kerbs for crossings are a vital part of pedestrian infrastructure, however in many places around Newport they also create a hazard, as footway widths are not sufficient to create a reasonable gradient. Consideration should be given to placing crossings onto raised tables wherever possible within the study area to rebalance priority on streets back towards pedestrians.

Recommendation: Identify opportunities to create and improve crossings as part of other initiatives and new development in the area.

Recommendation: Convert crossings to raised crossings in areas where this would improve existing crossings. Ensure new crossings are raised where this is appropriate.

Improving junctions

Many junctions in the town have features that make them difficult for pedestrians.

Design of corner radii can have a critical impact on pedestrians. A large radius creates a wide crossing point, and increased traffic speeds. Pedestrian crossing points are either offset from desire lines or start/end on a radius section which is not ideal. Within urban areas keeping junction geometry tight should be a priority, to create improved conditions for walking and cycling

In a number of areas the use of continuous footways across junctions could improve the pedestrian environment. This goes a stage further than providing a raised crossing, and switches priority, with the pedestrian route taking priority, and vehicles having to give way to pedestrians as they cross a pedestrian space (in much the same way as vehicle crossovers function). Locations where this treatment is likely to be appropriate include St Cross Court/Crocker Street, Bignor Place/Trafalgar Road, Scarrots Lane (both ends), Castle Street/Carisbrooke High Street, Ford Mews/Cross Street, Prospect Road/South Street plus all car park and private entrances.

Recommendation: Seek opportunities to remodel existing junctions to a more pedestrian friendly format, in particular alongside other street works.

Recommendation: Asses potential to convert minor junctions, car park entrances and private entrances to continuous footway as part of wider improvement works

Recommendation: Ensure new junctions and redesigned junctions are laid out to provide the best pedestrian environment possible

Recommendation: Ensure that all new minor entrances are configured as continuous footway unless there is a compelling reason why this cannot be accommodated.

Car park entrances

There is a wide variation in the treatment of car-park entrances. Some are configured as continuous footway (where vehicles cross the footway to access the car park, as they would when entering a private driveway) others have road-like entrances while some have a layout which is unclear, sitting somewhere between the two. Entrances are often excessively wide, encouraging faster vehicle speeds and increasing crossing time for pedestrians.

Recommendation: Improve car park entrances with a focus on vehicles entering/existing at walking pace and with clear, level pedestrian priority across the entrance wherever possible.

Private entrances

In similar vein, some private entrances create undue inconvenience to pedestrians. Wherever possible footways should be kept level and with priority, with vehicles accessing premises expected to slow, adapt to level changes and give way to pedestrians.

Recommendation: Ensure all new entrances are designed in a way that doesn't compromise the pedestrian environment.

Recommendation: When other works are taking place use the opportunity to improve existing entrances. Where new development is planned ensure new entrances are laid out in a pedestrian-friendly manner, and use the opportunity to improve poorly designed existing layouts.

Missing links

There are various places where additional pedestrian links would help break up block size and increase permeability. In practice this is likely to be beneficial anywhere in the zone where block size exceeds 100m. Two specific locations were identified where creating a link would be physically possible (without wholesale redevelopment). The first is Langley Court, used as an unofficial link already. Making this a formal link, either by right or through a permissive agreement would allow the route to be formally recognised and signage improved to encourage, rather than discourage, its use. The second is through the Crocker Street car park. This would assist people using the car park access it safely on foot and provide safe access to residential properties beyond, including various retirement homes. It would provide a continuation of the pedestrian-only link which runs from Pyle Street.

Recommendation: Investigate the potential for creating these new links.

Rationalisation of on-street parking

In a number of areas on-street parking compromises the pedestrian environment. Removing some on-street parking spaces would free up space to be used to improve the urban environment,

through providing wider footways, creating “pocket parks” or simply removing the enclosing effect of parked vehicles. In some streets free on-street parking sits alongside paid for off-street car parking. Off-street parking should always be encouraged over on-street and charging structure should reflect this priority. Removal of short stay parking in many situations is unlikely to reduce retail trade, and the improved urban environment is likely to encourage a thriving town centre. Removal of residents on-street parking is a very different issue, and is likely to undermine town centre living if suitable alternative options are not provided.

Recommendation: Review all on-street parking in the central area to assess its necessity against its impact on the pedestrian environment and develop plans to remove parking in places where the balance is against its provision.

Key pedestrian routes

A number of key routes have been identified in this study. These are significant routes that would benefit from enhancements to make them more coherent and improve the quality to help make walking a viable transport mode for more people to access the town.

Recommendation: Develop a programme of upgrades to priority routes, and establish opportunities for funding or delivery of work as part of other plans.

Wayfinding

Improving wayfinding information would enhance the usability of the town centre especially for visitors. To be effective it is important that the whole central area is considered to ensure a consistent and high quality end result.

Recommendation: Develop a wayfinding strategy, identifying where maps, fingerposts or other forms of wayfinding would be helpful and identify funding opportunities.

Street furniture audit/removal

Various street furniture was identified in the survey which has a questionable value. Some items will have been placed some time ago to deal with an issue which no longer exists. Removal of these items would often bring benefit to the pedestrian environment. Initial costs of removal are likely to be modest compared with savings in ongoing maintenance and replacement.

Recommendation: Street furniture should be reviewed and removed if found to be redundant.

Public realm improvement projects

Much of this report deals with inadequate provision and recommends steps to improve standards. However, for Newport to thrive it needs to provide more than just basic standards of footways and crossings. Attractive and interesting urban spaces create a more pleasant, vibrant town and help

encourage people to choose to shop, eat and spend leisure time in the town. There is also a place for developing specific projects to improve the public realm beyond basic standards, enhancing particular places with good quality seating, planting, public art and similar. Various positive examples of this can be found around the town and elsewhere across the Island. The Parish Council could encourage the development of new improvement projects at key sites around the town.

Recommendation: Investigate the opportunities to develop public realm improvement schemes in partnership with other local organisations.

Ensuring new development enhances the pedestrian environment

Where new development is proposed, developers should be expected to ensure the pedestrian environment within and around the development is of a high standard. For larger developments developers should also be expected to contribute to wider public realm improvements, such as widening of key routes into and around the town centre.

Recommendation: Through the planning system, ensure developments meet a high standard for pedestrian accessibility and contribute to improving the pedestrian environment in town.