

Innerleithen Street Access Audit

Tweeddale Access Panel

November 2022

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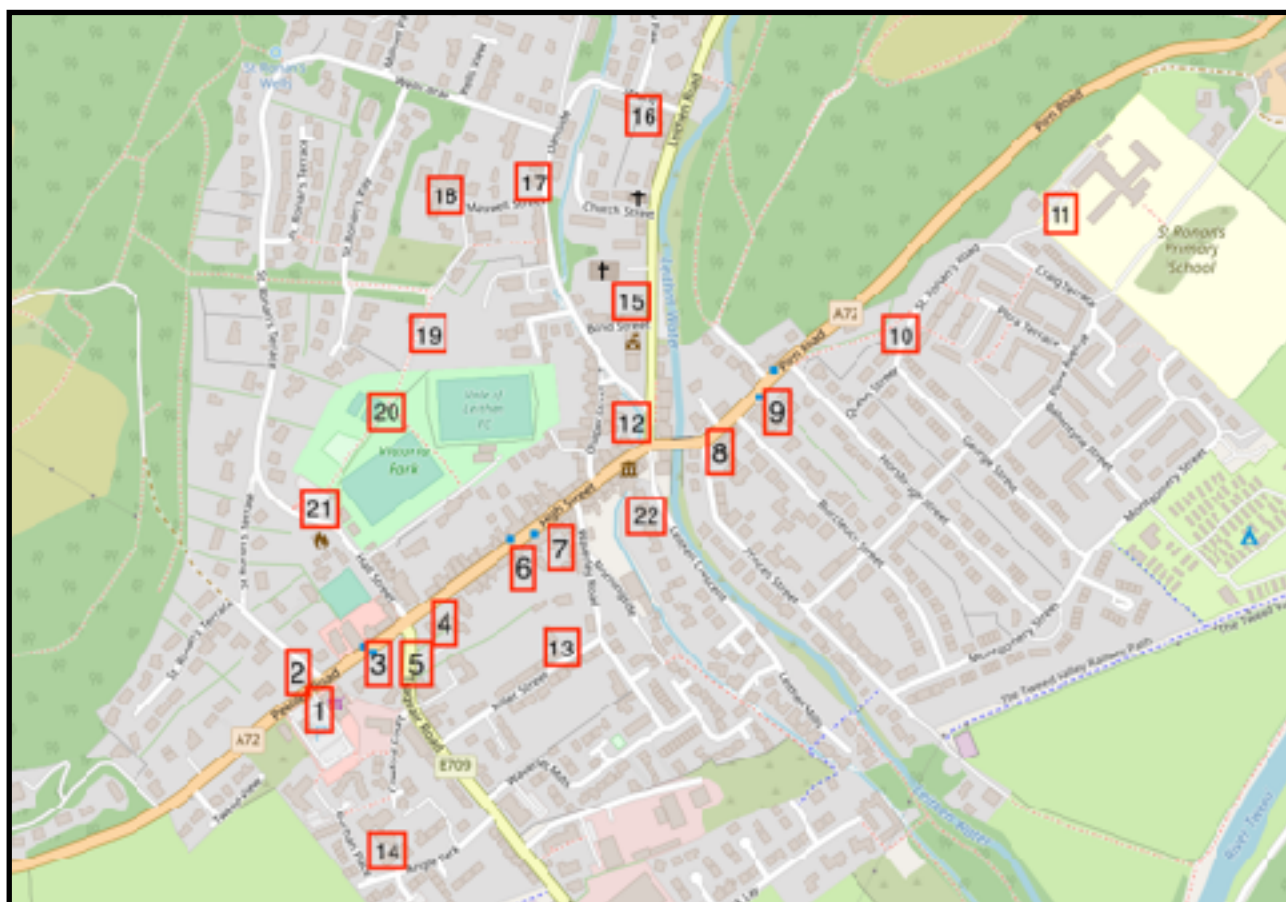
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1. Introduction

This report is the outcome of two street access audits of Innerleithen carried out by a number of local residents associated with the Tweeddale Access Panel (TAP) on October 21st and 28th 2022. It is part of a programme of audits organised by TAP in small towns and villages with the aim of identifying opportunities to improve the accessibility of public spaces.

The first Innerleithen audit focussed on the High Street, from the Co-op in the west to St Ronan's Primary School in the east, returning to the Co-op via the health centre. The second audit looked at the area to the north of the town. The routes are indicated on the map below.



2. Observations

Route 1: From the Co-op east to Primary School

Following the Peebles Road to the High Street along the southern pavement, the tactile paving at the access roads to both the Peebles Road Garage and the Co-op appears to be incorrectly laid at an angle, directing a blind person following the blister direction into the road (picture 1). The paving should be aligned parallel to the main road. Ideally the junctions could also be 'tightened' to reduce the crossing distance for pedestrians.

On the north side of Peebles Road (picture 2) was an example of how the combination of tables, chairs and bike parking presents difficulties to visually impaired pedestrians: this issue is discussed further in the conclusion.



1. CO-OP TACTILES



2. PEEBLES ROAD

There are no shelters at the two bus stops near the Post Office. The bus information at this and other bus stops is limited to a QR code: this is not accessible for many bus passengers and we would recommend printed timetables are supplied at all bus stops. However, like all bus stops in the town, they have welcome 'Kassel kerbs' which aid level entry onto buses for boarding and alighting.

The main road (A72) running through Innerleithen has a number of pedestrian crossing opportunities by way of 'double D' islands (picture 3). These were welcomed by audit members in providing confidence to cross the main road. The crossing immediately east of Traquair Road has tactile paving only on the north side - this should also be installed on the south side (picture 4).



3. CROSSING POINT



4. MISSING TACTILE

The junction with Traquair Road has a large splay which encourages traffic to travel into or out of the road faster than the 20mph limit permits; ideally the radius should be 'tightened'. The dropped kerbs are not on the walking desire line, requiring pedestrians to divert into Traquair Road somewhat: ideally they would be relocated adjacent to the High Street. There is a bench by the stone planters which will be welcome to many people, especially with walking difficulties (picture 5).



5. TRAQUAIR ROAD JUNCTION

The pavement on the south side of the High Street is protected by bollards and is of adequate (though not generous) width at around 2 metres and is in good condition (picture 6). A car was observed stopping at and potentially parking on the dropped kerb at 59 High Street (picture 7). As there is no Decriminalised Parking Enforcement (DPE) in the Scottish Borders at present, it would be welcome to see a strategic review parking enforcement arrangements, with a particular focus on effective enforcement of the forthcoming ban on parking on pavements and at dropped kerbs due to be introduced from December 2023.



6. HIGH STREET



7. CAR AT DROPPED KERB

There is an awkward corner for pedestrians to navigate at the junction with Waverley Road, with a narrow pavement and small control box for the pedestrian crossing at the corner. The tactile paving at the signalled (puffin) pedestrian crossing should be kept clear of A-boards at the Hub.

The western dropped kerb at Princes Street is far from flush with the carriageway (approximately 40mm) and this should be addressed. The eastern side has very little space for a wheelchair user to turn. The junction of Buccleuch St is another where the dropped kerb is located away from the desire line, and requires people using it to divert into the side road. There is also little space here for a wheelchair user to turn, as the dropped kerb is close to the wall of Craigside.

Just east of Princes Street there is a kerb at a private driveway which presents a significant and unnecessary obstacle for pedestrians (picture 8); this should be removed. The easternmost bus stop is in poor condition, dirty with a broken seat and constrained space as a result of the narrow pavement, exacerbated by the round litter bin (picture 9). If there is a possibility of extending the pavement here this would be welcome, as would replacement of the bus shelter.



8. KERB ON PAVEMENT



9. BUS STOP

The Horsbrugh Street dropped kerb is another that is too high at around 40mm, and should be reduced. At the eastern side, a 20mph speed limit sign seems unnecessary and the pole could be removed.

At this point, our audit route left the main road to follow the path down to the primary school. In places, this was steep and ideally would be levelled out (picture 10). We also recommend some resurfacing as some sections of asphalt are rough and uneven. Approaching the school, there is a small parking area on the north side of the road which causes the footway to divert around the back of these cars. It would be better to provide a continuous direct pavement - or possibly to remove the parking spaces entirely? The carriageway immediately outside the school gates is in fairly poor condition, with road markings barely visible (picture 11). The area would be improved by resurfacing and repainting, including the school crossing 'elephant' markings.



10. PATH TO ST RONAN'S



11. OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL

Returning towards the town centre on the north side of the A72, the slope (crossfall) on Main Street at the Horsbrugh Terrace bus stop was identified as a problem. The Bridgend development is another example of an over-wide junction splay which would benefit from tightening.

The junction with Leithen Road has a very wide splay which should be tightened to reduce the distance pedestrians have to cross in the road and also to slow traffic (picture 12). Consideration should be given to installing tactile paving. There is a variable speed indicator immediately to the east of this junction which narrows the pavement: if this is still required (it didn't appear to be in use) it would be better relocated from the narrow pavement (onto the adjacent lighting column?)



12. LEITHEN ROAD

The northern High Street pavement again appeared to be in quite good condition, but had rather more obstructions in the form of bins, A-boards etc (see also below).

After crossing to the south side of the town, the pavement on Miller Street was noted to be pleasantly wide and uncluttered (picture 13). At the western end of the street, there is no dropped kerb on the southern side, which forces wheelchair users to travel on the road rather than the pavement.

On the approach to the health centre, it was noted that the disabled parking bay in Buchan Place at Hanover Housing Association's supported accommodation is not a full size space and has no level access to the footway (picture 14). A full-sized Blue Badge space would be welcome here, and also at the health centre, where again there is a small 'disabled parking' space and again no access to the footway. Bushes are also encroaching onto the short path to the health centre.



13. MILLER STREET



14. BUCHAN PL PARKING

Route Two (Northern Area)

A second audit covered a loop from the High Street up Leithen Road, the Strand, Maxwell Street, through the parks to Hall Street and returning along the northern High Street pavement. Apart from the High Street/Leithen Road junction itself (see above), the initial route was found to be in quite good condition, with adequate pavement surfaces and dropped kerbs. Some small, hard-to-detect obstacles such as a poorly-sited water hydrant sign at 3 Leithen Road, were identified as a trip hazard (picture 15).



15. HYDRANT SIGN



16. BIN

The pavement on the south side of the Strand is in places rough and was partly blocked by bins (picture 16). The kerbs at the junction with Nursery Lane are not level and should be made flush. Undulating 'up-and-down' pavements at driveways were reported to be a problem; ideally at least 1 metre of footway width should be level.

As the road becomes Damside, there is no pavement at all although the carriageway is smooth having been recently resurfaced. A holly hedge at Hill House should be kept cut right back from the pavement - even small encroachment onto the pavement can be very unpleasant for people who cannot see well, and can't usually be detected by a mobility aid such as a long cane or guide dog. At the corner of Maxwell Street, a van was parked on the corner, completely blocking the pavement (picture 17).



17. VAN ON PAVEMENT

The entrance area to St Ronan's House Residential Home has a large tarmac space outside, with a number of 'false kerbs' (picture 18) perhaps remnants of an earlier road configuration? This may be confusing to people with dementia, and it is recommended that this is explored with residents and staff.



18. ST RONAN'S HOUSE

The Route from St Ronan's House to the parks area is initially well surfaced but suddenly becomes full of potholes and puddles, very hostile to any person with a mobility impairment (picture 19). It is unlikely that residents from St Ronan's would be able to reach the park area through this, the obvious, direct route. It is understood that the road is the responsibility of Traquair Estates and it is strongly recommended that they are encouraged to improve the road surface, especially in order to enhance it as a key route from St Ronan's House.



19. POTHOLED ROUTE TO THE PARK

Continuing past the tennis courts, cutting back vegetation would again aid access along the path (picture 20). There is a poorly maintained (and very low) seat just past the tennis courts; more availability of seating (and variety - for example including seats with arm rests) in the area, - would be welcome.

After crossing the Hall Street car park, the public toilets are situated on a very rough stretch of road which should be resurfaced (picture 21). The toilets themselves require 30p in coins to use them and we encountered two members of the public trying to access the toilets with some difficulty. While recognising the cost of maintaining council-run toilets, easily-accessible free toilets (as in West Linton) are very important in enhancing the accessibility of an area for many people, especially disabled people (and children. older people, women, etc.)



20. HEDGES



21. TOILETS AND ROUGH SURFACE

Returning to the starting point at the Leithen Road junction along the High Street, our visually impaired auditor encountered a number of obstructions that were difficult for him to detect including:

- a lighting column;
- a head-height estate agent's board;
- small 'A-boards';
- a 'windsurf'-type advertisement at the Indian restaurant;
- a small bench;
- telecoms cabinets.

South of the High Street, on the west side of Leithen Crescent, a telegraph pole was identified as a particular hazard, lacking visual contrast (picture 22). Adding high visibility tape to this, and other fixed obstacles, would help visually impaired pedestrians to avoid such obstructions.



22. TELEGRAPH POLE

3. Conclusions

Overall, the pavements on the main streets of Innerleithen are of quite good quality, generally free from clutter and pavement parking. The footways would ideally be made a little wider to be 2 metres wide at an absolute minimum along the length of the A72 at least. This would conform to national best practice guidance 'Inclusive Mobility' <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-mobility-making-transport-accessible-for-passengers-and-pedestrians>

Although there are generally dropped kerbs throughout the town, several places noted in this report have too big a vertical drop. A review of all dropped kerbs in the town would be a useful exercise to identify opportunities for relatively small improvements which could improve accessibility significantly, especially for wheelchair users.

The use of bollards along the High Street was generally welcomed as an effective measure to stop pavement parking. There is some 'pavement clutter' from advertising 'A-Boards', tables and chairs, bins and bike parking which creates difficulty for visually impaired pedestrians. One blind member of TAP commented that such objects, which may move from day to day, were much more of a problem than fixed items like bollards. The audits were carried out on weekdays but it is understood that pavements become much more severely cluttered by bikes especially, at weekends. Another visually impaired person highlighted the problem of poor contrast of obstacles.

It is understood that Innerleithen will soon benefit from a major investment in cycling businesses and infrastructure. Consideration of street accessibility issues should be built into business plans for the design and management of the public realm as a fundamental part of cycle-friendly developments. This could include for example adjusting side road junctions to reduce vehicle speed, in recognition of the benefit this would bring to both cyclists and pedestrians. It could also include adopting a bicycle parking strategy which ensures that pedestrians (especially, but not only people with visual impairments) are not disadvantaged by obstructed footways. This is likely to mean significant addition of bike parking facilities on space taken from the carriageway. There appears to be an important opportunity here to not only invest in active travel, but also to invest in accessibility.

Pavement parking was not generally encountered as a major hazard on the audits, but Scottish Borders Council needs to develop a strategy to encourage responsible parking, in line with the forthcoming provisions of the 2019 Transport (Scotland) Act, including parking at dropped kerbs as well as on pavements.

Potential 'quick wins':

- relay tactile pavements at the Peebles Garage and Co-op;
- install tactile paving on south side of the High Street crossing, west of Traquair Road;
- remove the kerb across the footway to the east of Princes Street;
- bus stops should have printed timetables and ideally shelters with seats;
- ensure that shops keep pavement space clear of unnecessary clutter such as advertising boards, bins and bicycles;

- cut back vegetation where it encroaches on pedestrian space;
- add colour contrasted reflective tape to make obstacles such as telegraph poles, bollards etc. more visible;
- contact Traquair estates to encourage improvement of the path from St Ronan's House to the parks;
- resurface the area outside the Hall Street public toilets.

More strategic issues to consider:

- investigate the possibility of improving the most important junctions of the A72, in particular Traquair Road and Leithen Road. The aim would be to shorten the pedestrian crossing distance as much as possible, ensure dropped kerbs are on (or close to) the 'desire lines' and possibly introduce traffic calming measures appropriate to the new 20mph speed limits. It is noted that build-outs have already been installed on some junctions (e.g. Hall Street) which improve them for pedestrians, especially those with mobility difficulties.
- plan for the introduction of the 'responsible parking' provisions of the 2019 Transport (Scotland) Act, especially to consider how to ensure that parking on pavements and at dropped kerbs can be curtailed.
- carry out a review of dropped kerbs throughout the town, in order to identify locations where a) the vertical drop is too great, b) there is adequate space on the pavement for a wheelchair user to turn and c) where they are missing entirely.
- consider how to provide the best possible availability of accessible, free public toilets in towns and villages.

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