

Walkerburn Street Access Audit

Tweeddale Access Panel

November 2022

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1. Introduction

This report describes a street access audit of Walkerburn carried out by members of the Tweeddale Access Panel (TAP) and the Walkerburn Community Council on October 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 route taken is illustrated below, starting from the west of the village along the A72, down to Tweedholm Avenue East and back to the main road via the primary school.



2. Observations

A72 from the Purvis Hill Garage eastward

The westernmost bus stop on the south side of the A72 has flowers planted beside it, but the shelter is in very poor condition: dirty with, no seat or timetable information (picture 1). The pavement suffers from overhanging branches and other vegetation (picture 2) which needs to be cut back regularly. This is a particular hazard for visually impaired people.



1. BUS SHELTER



2. BUSHES AND BRANCHES

There is a very dilapidated (and low) bench which could be repaired, including adding arm rests (picture 3).



3. BENCH

The chief problem with the pavement here is that it is severely obstructed by both pavement parking and bins (picture 4). In places, the gap for pedestrians was only 70cm. Many disabled people, including wheelchair users, would be unable to navigate the pavement and the carriageway is not safe for walking or wheeling.

There are some 'disabled parking' spaces marked on the road which are so narrow that it is not possible to park a normal sized car in them (picture 5); this effectively appears to encourage pavement parking.



4. PAVEMENT PARKING AND BINS



5. TOO-NARROW DISABLED PARKING BAY

There are no pedestrian crossing facilities of any sort across the A72, and apart from some dropped kerbs near bus stops, there appears to be nowhere for anyone requiring level surfaces to cross the road (using for example a wheelchair or mobility scooter) from one side to the other. Formal safe crossing opportunities would be useful at various points, such as at the bus stop at the bottom of the steps from the High Cottages, at the war memorial and in the eastern part of the settlement.

The junction with Caberston Road has a wide splay with poor dropped kerbs (picture 6). It is understood that the road is used by many heavy vehicles which may limit the opportunity to 'tighten' the junction.

Continuing east along the A72, the southern pavement is in reasonable condition, although narrower than desirable. There used to be a bench outside the Post Office/village shop which was reportedly well used and enquires should be made if this is to be re-instated.



6. CABERSTON ROAD JUNCTION



7. BUS STOP

At the village hall, a car was seen parked close to the bus stop which could impede buses accessing the kerb (picture 7). Some protection of this (and other?) bus stops such as yellow lines might be considered. There is no information at bus stops other than in some cases, a QR code: this will not meet all passengers' access needs and would be better replaced by printed timetables.

On the north side of the A72, there is a pavement eastward from the Caberston café. However much of it is very narrow and in places lighting columns leave inadequate pedestrian space for a wheelchair user to pass. There are no dropped kerbs at the entrances to Tweedvale House and a level pavement should be provided.

To Tweedholm Avenue East, then returning west to the primary school.

Leaving the main road southward down Hall Street, there is a hand rail along the western pavement, which was reported to be welcome (picture 8). The steep south-facing incline of the village presents fundamental accessibility challenges. An unnecessary 20mph sign and pole at the top of Hall Street Brae (east side) could be removed (assuming 20mph is to stay in place for the whole village). The junction would be improved by reducing the radius of the western part of the junction splay to make it 'tighter' (picture 9).



8. RAILING



9. HALL STREET JUNCTION

In Tweedholm Avenue East, on what was probably a fairly quiet Friday afternoon, we saw seven cars parked on the pavement on the north side very close to garden walls or fences, to allow room for traffic to get past (picture 10). This made the pavement completely unusable by any pedestrians.



10. PAVEMENT PARKING

The pavement approaching the primary school on the north side of Caberston Road ends with a kerb: this should be 'dropped', permitting level access to cross the road to the school (picture 11).



11. CABERSTON ROAD AT SCHOOL

Conclusions

Two particularly significant challenges were observed in Walkerburn:

- how to use, and cross, the main road (A72), and
- the proliferation of pavement parking, both on the main road and in residential streets such as Tweedholm Avenue East.

Peebles Road, at the west end of the village, is fairly narrow for a busy main road, forming part of the A72. There is no footpath on the north side for much of its length, and it has a high retaining wall to support the streets running above. This means that residents of the High Cottages and Caberston Avenue are currently unable to negotiate the shortcut footpath down to Peebles Road and must follow their roadway down to the A72, cross it, and then negotiate the pavement obstructions to get to the village centre. It is acknowledged that space is very constrained, but as there is only a pavement on the southern side of the road, efforts should be made to improve its accessibility.

There is a general absence of pedestrian crossings, compounded for disabled people by a lack of safe, step-free routes across the road for those using a mobility aid such as a wheelchair, stroller or mobility scooter. It is recognised that this will be challenging; there is insufficient space for informal pedestrian crossings with pedestrian refuge islands (such as used widely in Innerleithen). Signalled crossings would allow safe, accessible crossing, and possibly could be combined with alternating one-way traffic flow, instead of the current uninterrupted two-way flow. This may not be considered acceptable or achievable on such a key main road, although a precedent has been set by the installation of traffic lights on the same road at Neidpath Corner. As noted in other TAP reports, Scottish Borders Council might consider that zebra crossings are now a potentially suitable option to investigate, assuming that 20mph speed limits remain.

In the eastern part of the village, there are pavements on both side of the Galashiels Road, although in places these are so narrow and obstructed by lighting columns and lacking level surface that they will be of little use to many pedestrians, certain if using a mobility aid.

The western pavement on the south side of the A72 is difficult or impossible for disabled people to use owing to the proliferation of pavement parking. The extremely narrow disabled parking bays marked out by SBC suggests that pavement parking is effectively condoned by the Council in this location in order to aid traffic flow. The problem, of course, is made worse by additional obstructions on bin collection day, which coincided with our visit.

Pavements in Walkerburn were generally found to be in generally good condition, if rather narrow. Ironically, the main problem was not so much the condition of the pavements, but getting access to them, in both Peebles Road and Tweedholm Avenue East because of the extensive problem of pavement parking which makes several streets difficult or impossible for disabled people to use safely, if at all. Most of the village was built long before motor cars became common, so most of the housing was built with no provision for off-street parking.

Pavement parking will become illegal from December 2023 when the 'responsible parking' provisions of the 2019 Transport (Scotland) Act come into force. In advance of this, it is

recommended that Scottish Borders Councils prepares a 'parking strategy' for the village, in conjunction with local residents and organisations such as the community council.

It is recognised that finding solutions to the parking problem in the village will be challenging, but options to explore include introducing a permit system to limit on-street parking, and relocating parking to other parts of the village (such as Park Avenue?) where there appears to be spare carriageway space.

It is hoped that Scottish Borders Council is not be minded to seek to exempt any streets from the ban on pavement parking, as this would simply maintain the current accessibility problems. While official guidance on exemption processes has yet to be issued by Transport Scotland, it would be necessary under the Public Sector Equality Duty to carry out a proper Equality Impact Assessment for any such proposal.

Potential 'quick wins':

- cut back vegetation on the A72;
- repair the seat on the A72 (picture 3 above) and replace the seat at the Post Office;
- ask Borders Buses to post up to date timetable information at bus stops;
- 'drop' the kerb on Caberston Road approaching the primary school.

More strategic issues to consider:

- Consider if the junctions of the A72 with Caberston Road and Hall Street can be improved;
- investigate the possibility of addressing the lack of crossing opportunities on A72 including step-free crossings at each pair of bus stops;
- develop a parking strategy for the village focussed on addressing the problems of pavement parking.

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