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WALKING WITH FREEDOM AND CONFIDENCE

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Abstract

Introduction

All members of society whether they have a disability or not should be able to participate in and contribute to the life of their community and their family.

In the modern world our communities and infrastructure become more complex and our families become distributed over a wider area.

It follows that we need to be much more mobile than in past years. Everyone should be able to move around safely, independently and without undue restriction.

Many people of course, are totally dependent on public transport or on just walking from one place to another.

Walking is becoming much more of a problem. In many cities and indeed in some rural areas, the external environment can be a hostile and intimidating place.

If you cannot see clearly or at all, cannot hear, have learning difficulties or are just becoming a little frail, many features that you would not have noticed in the past now become major obstacles. These might be:

- Poor quality of pavements
- An absence of accessible and safe places to cross the road where you know you have priority

- Unobstructed footways, clear of fixed obstructions such as sign posts, lamp posts, and other pieces of fixed street furniture
- Moveable obstructions, such as improperly parked vehicles
- Poor maintenance of overhanging branches and other vegetation
- Poor housekeeping of streets, so that they become covered with litter and rubbish
- High feeling of insecurity to crime

From my travels around many European cities I have recognised great diversity in culture and architecture but also many common problems that would benefit from European wide solutions.

What is needed?

We may have different ideas on what makes a high quality environment and will lead to the creation of a city suitable for walking but we may agree on a number of critical issues.

- Affective consultation between local people and providers of the environment
- Professionals to have a sound understanding of the needs of people with reduced mobility
- Agreed standards for design construction and maintenance of the environment
- A new sense of responsibility by all users whether they be drivers, cyclists, pedestrians or others
- A regular review process to ensure a high quality is maintained and if possible improved
- A significant degree of harmonisation across Europe, to reflect the fact that many people with reduced mobility travel internationally on a regular basis

My aspiration is that our cities in Europe should be designed for walking, with motorised transport taking second place. By walking I mean not just getting around from one place to another, but doing so safely, independently and without undue restriction and that should happen in streets which are pleasant places to be. They should be an attractive, clean place where we can stop to meet friends and family, or just to pass a little time, in short, places of fun and enjoyment not fear and stress.

Biography

Peter Barker graduated as a Mechanical Engineer. His qualifications are BsC (eng) FBIM, MILT. He worked in the engineering, petro-chem and food processing industries until failing eyesight caused him to take early retirement in 1991.

He, then, set up the JMU Access Partnership as a joint venture between RNIB and Guide Dogs. The JMU Access Partnership became the leading pan - disability service in the UK working in Research, Policy and Consultancy on behalf of disabled people.

He was a member of the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee from 1993 and became chairman of the Built Environment group when it was established in the year 2000.

He was a member of the Ministerial Steering Group developing a National Walking Strategy and advised on the drafting of Inclusive Mobility. He continues to act as an Advisor to Government.

He is chairman of the Joint Committee on the Mobility of Blind and Partially Sighted People.

He is Professor of Inclusive Environments at the University of Reading where he is Chairman of the MSc course in the Design and Management of Inclusive Environments and was awarded an OBE in 1999 for services to the mobility of disabled people.

He is co - author of :

Building Sight- a handbook of building and interior design solutions to include the needs of visually impaired people;

ICI - Dulux Colour Contrast Guide; Sign Design Guide: a guide to inclusive signage. He is a Trustee of Living Streets and Tripscope.

He now acts as a consultant on disability Policy and strategy and DDA compliance projects.