

POPS Forum 18th September 2025

Accessibility – Facing the Fear and building confidence

CityCo – Alex, Jodie, Jess, Gareth, Luca

CCC/ City Access Solutions - Natalie Amber and Cherylee Houston

Places Made/ GNW – Emma James

Mayfield - Danny Williams

First Street - Rob Collins

New Bailey – Kasia Kaminska and Danny Nicholls

St Michael's - Gina May

Spinningfields - Caitlin Croughan

CBRE - Toby Smith

MCC Neighbourhoods - Juliet

Notes from meeting to accompany presentation slides:

Accessibility Welcome :

Even when introducing yourself in a meeting online or in person, accessibility needs can be considered, for example by giving additional information about yourself and your physical location.

City Access Solutions – Background:

CAS work with organisations and assist them in training, changing attitudes and approaches to accessibility. This has been shown to improve staff retention and the working environment. They provide advice from lived experiences for a full range of access needs from physical to neurological.

Their work in this area started in the arts and cultural sector, where they worked for example with BAFTA to advise to make the BAFTA Awards more accessible, leading to big changes in venues, sets and operations.

What is often seen as prohibitive for property managers?

Often property managers worry about reviewing their accessibility for fear of criticism, and fear of costs – that they will not have the budgets to make things right.

Legislative requirements really only provide the bare minimum in terms of accessibility, there is so much more that can be done.

Considering accessibility at design stage will save considerable amounts of investment later down the line, but even at later stages small changes can make big differences.

CAS are there to have open conversations as opposed to criticisms, and will 'meet businesses where you're at and explore options'. Lots of these situations haven't been explored before as people wouldn't find there is a need until the situation arises.

CAS want to make it a natural part of the dialogue as opposed to being used right at the end. Retrofit always has the highest cost implementation, if added from the start the costs are not as high.

What we mean by Accessibility:

1/5 people are disabled and this is not always visible. This results in a large number of people not engaging in spaces, events and communities.

Fresh perspectives on buildings and creative approach can come from including accessible design.

Accessibility is not just about physical requirements, it is also about an environment where everyone can thrive.

CAS Approach:

CAS want to make it a natural part of the dialogue as opposed to being used right at the end. Retrofit always has the highest cost implementation, if added from the start the costs are not as high.

Accessible spaces drive repeat custom; disabled people may not go to new places if they know somewhere they have already been is accessible. 53two theatre made accessibility central to their culture, with their new theatre space designed with this in mind.

Small changes can make big differences:

Small changes can drive large differences, they don't have to be obvious, big budget changes.

Adding it to every agenda embeds it as a cultural change which makes it easier every time.

Staff awareness – training your staff in accessibility, what facilities you have, and what facilities may be nearby if you don't have them yourself

Seating – having a range of seating at different points across your estate is a simple step – different heights, some with arms, allowing people to rest.

Quiet spaces – sometimes the city noise and speed can just be too much. Having designated quiet spaces can be a key facility to counter this.

Better communication – if your lift is out of action, does your signage give clear instructions on where to find another one, or does it simply apologise for being out of

order. On your event promotional material, do you give information about accessibility that might make it easier for someone with accessibility needs decide if it is an event that they can enjoy?

Change in Attitudes and approach:

Staff culture is at the heart of accessibility and can change everything. It can help you learn more about the needs of your staff, as well as the needs of your customers.

You can have an access lead, but by informing the whole team and making them part of the conversation it is easier and changes culture within the workforce.

If your staff are trained up, they feel prepared and can be confident to help without being nervous about getting it wrong.

15% of people are neurodivergent staff awareness can unlock huge hidden potential

Recently, there are more deaf/disabled/neurodivergent people in the workforce as more people are going through university and finding accessible roles at work. The new workforce will require accessibility changes soon so it would be cheaper to include considerations now. Also mentioned that retrofit designs often look clinical.

Championing inclusive design:

- Build it in early
- Talk to the people that will use it – ensure lived experience shapes the design, not just the legislation.
- Be creative - and don't let accessible area be clinical looking!
- Consider the full customer journey - for example you might have an accessible toilet, but is it big enough for a wheelchair to fit in it, is it easy to get to/find, do your staff know where it is, do you communicate on your website and promotional literature the facilities that you have.

Working with CAS:

CAS can work with you to review your place, and can start by advising on small wins. Can also give ongoing support, including staff training.

Benefits of revisiting your accessibility:

Position your POPS as leading in accessibility – stand out in the market place, competitive advantage

Attract a loyal customer base – customers with accessibility needs are incredibly loyal, and will revisit places that work for them.

Even making small changes now can have a big impact.

Comments from attendees:

Emma James, Great Northern Warehouse: the site is in meanwhile stage awaiting development, but are aware there is much more we can do, especially around communications.

Alex King-Byatt, CityCo:– CityCo’s events in the public realm aren’t completely inclusive – something we need to work on but is challenging as we aren’t operating in our own space. Physical, built changes are impossible to move so how do we work around them.

Danny Williams, Mayfield: – architects and designers often look at the bare minimum as this will make the space more appealing without high cost implications.

Toby Smith CBRE - use Bluemouse for their surveys and they offer lots of improvements but this is difficult to take back to their client especially with cost implementations in a new build.

Alex King-Byatt, CityCo - mentioned trauma informed spaces, as these can provide the same benefit as feeling comfortable for homeless people as disabled people.

Juliet, MCC Neighbourhoods Team, - Council are on a journey working with Highway Access Group, but there are still lots of public realm issues being dealt with eg Public waste bins, pavement licenses etc