

Access Audit: The access for disabled people to Wolverhampton's shopping centres is inadequate and needs to be improved.

Introduction:

When compared to Wolverhampton, Milton Keynes is just a baby. Built a little over 30 years ago, you'd expect that many issues and aspects of general life would be taken into consideration to build a town that custom fitted our personal needs. One of the biggest issues affecting a number of people is Disability. This project looks at just that and how each shopping centre has dealt with providing a warm, welcoming and enjoyable visit for the disabled members of our community.

Hypothesis:

Milton Keynes will have many facilities and good access for disabled people in relation to Wolverhampton. This is because Wolverhampton is a much older town and built in the era when disability wasn't widely accepted. However, outlook on disability has changed since then, therefore, Milton Keynes will be more suited for disabled people as the newest centre is more likely to have taken disabled members into account. This will also reflect on the towns attitude towards disability which are divided into two main groups; medical and social model. People who agree with the medical model of disability believe that disability is a problem and it is something that should be cured. Examples of people that fall under this category are doctors. The other group is the Social model which suggests responsibility lies within our society and that we should adapt our ways to meet the needs of people that may have impairment. Personally, I lean towards the second group as I believe that disability is something beyond our control. People should be accepting of this and learn to change their ways to help disabled people cope with their impairments.

Method:

To test my hypothesis out, I will fill in an access audit and conduct a series of questionnaires and interviews with the public, disabled people, selected shop managers and/or staff. As well as coming to my own conclusion, the response from the public can help me ensure that my views aren't biased. Depending on the results gained, I can validate my hypothesis.

Access Audit: Wolverhampton Shopping Centre

- Can a wheelchair get into the shopping centre?
Yes ~~there is~~ ~~the~~ access to shops ~~is~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ centre.
- How is this made possible?
W ~~to~~ ~~entrance~~ ~~doors~~.
- Is there a lift to use if someone in a wheelchair wants to access shops on the second floor?
Yes - ~~no~~.
- Are any steps or stairs marked clearly with strips so that it can help anyone who is sight impaired?
~~no~~.
- Are guide dogs allowed access?
Yes - ~~into~~ ~~the~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~centre~~, ~~also~~ ~~at~~ ~~some~~ ~~shops~~ ~~and~~ ~~shops~~ ~~to~~ ~~enter~~ ~~the~~ ~~in~~ ~~property~~.
- Is the lighting good for anyone who is visually impaired?
~~the~~ ~~lighting~~ ~~is~~ ~~adequate~~ ~~for~~ ~~a~~ ~~visually~~ ~~impaired~~.
- Are there any hand rails on the stairs?
Yes
- Are there any disabled toilets available?
~~no~~. Access to ~~to~~ ~~toilet~~ ~~for~~ ~~disabled~~ ~~is~~ ~~none~~.
- Is there anyway in which someone who is hearing impaired get a message that is given out on loud speakers?
~~no~~.
- Are there telephones or reception desks/counters at a height appropriate for someone using a wheelchair?
~~reception~~ ~~are~~ ~~at~~ ~~a~~ ~~reasonable~~ ~~the~~ ~~height~~. Some counters are ~~at~~ ~~a~~ ~~lower~~ ~~the~~ ~~height~~.
- Is there enough room for wheelchair access in shops?
~~no~~. ~~Most~~ ~~shops~~ ~~have~~ ~~a~~ ~~reasonable~~ ~~amount~~ ~~of~~ ~~space~~.
- Any notes:
A ~~few~~ ~~at~~ ~~most~~ ~~of~~ ~~shops~~ ~~is~~ ~~marked~~ ~~with~~ ~~braille~~.
Good ~~number~~ ~~of~~ ~~disabled~~ ~~parking~~ ~~spaces~~.
Shops are ~~too~~ ~~small~~ ~~or~~ ~~convenient~~ ~~direct~~ ~~to~~ ~~access~~.

Access Audit: Milton Keynes Shopping Centre

1. Can a wheelchair get into the shopping centre?

Yes - ~~very~~ easy

2. How is this made possible?

Wide doors and ~~staircases~~.

3. Is there a lift to use if someone in a wheelchair wants to access shops on the second floor?

There are lifts in ~~the~~ ~~centre~~ ~~is~~, Virgin ~~gas~~ stores (and ~~a~~ few other stores)

4. Are any steps or stairs marked clearly with strips so that it can help anyone who is sight impaired?

Yes - stairs in the new part of the centre are marked with strips.

5. Are guide dogs allowed access?

Yes.

6. Is the lighting good for anyone who is visually impaired?

Yes - ~~very~~ bright.

7. Are there any hand rails on the stairs?

Yes - ~~there~~ is one on each side in the main shops and it is leading to car parks etc

8. Are there any disabled toilets available?

Yes - ~~many~~

9. Is there anyway in which someone who is hearing impaired get a message that is given out on loud speakers?

~~No~~

10. Are there telephones or reception desks/counters at a height appropriate for someone using a wheelchair?

~~Reception~~ counters and ~~phones~~ are at appropriate height

11. Is there enough room for wheelchair access in shops?

Yes - most shops are big enough to accommodate wheelchairs.

12. Any notes or public responses:

Website is a ~~use~~ for the

Good access to most shops

Website/a ~~des~~

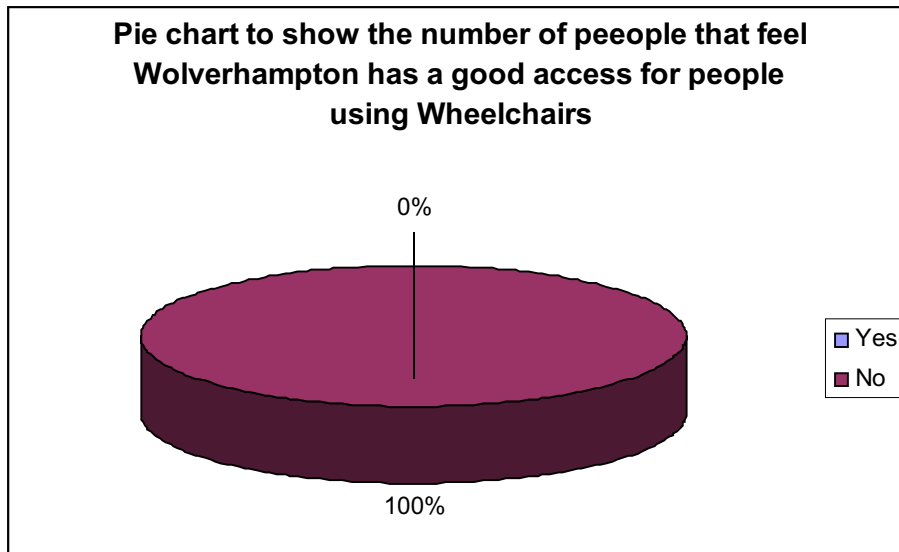
is ~~needed~~

lots of automatic doors

As well as the access audit, we decided to interview 15 people from each town about their views and opinions on the way their town had catered for the disabled people.

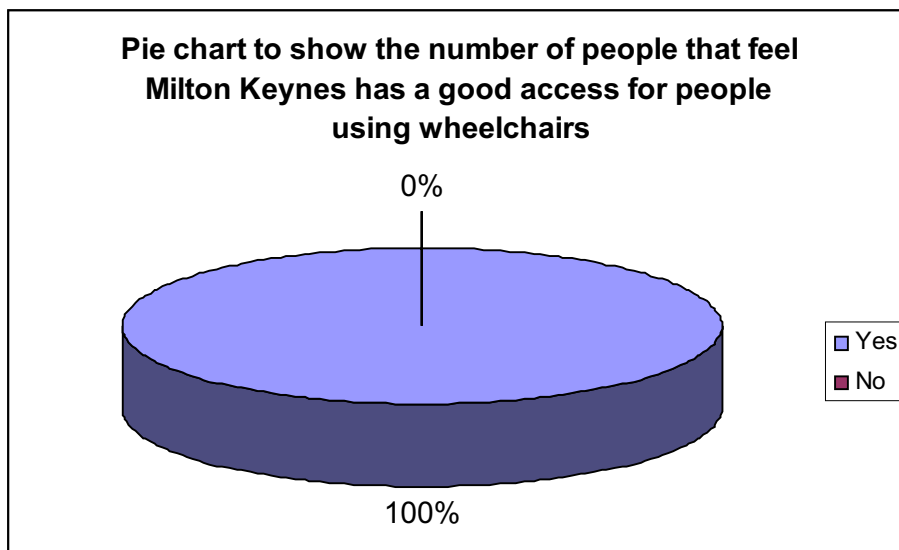
Do you think **Wolverhampton** has a good access for people using wheelchairs?

Yes	No
0	15



Do you think **Milton Keynes** has a good access for people using wheelchairs?

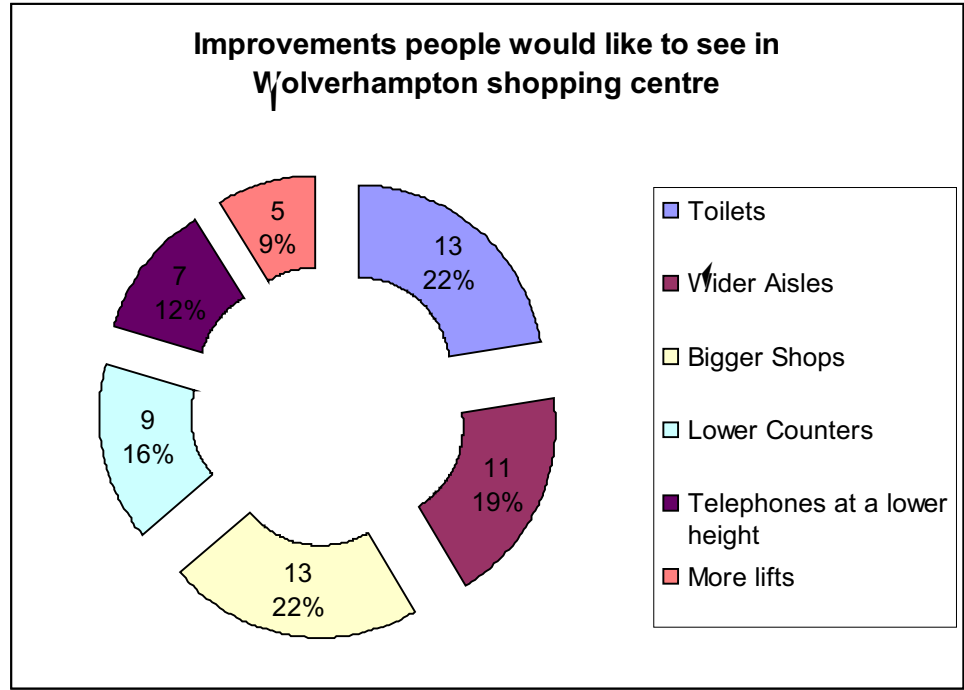
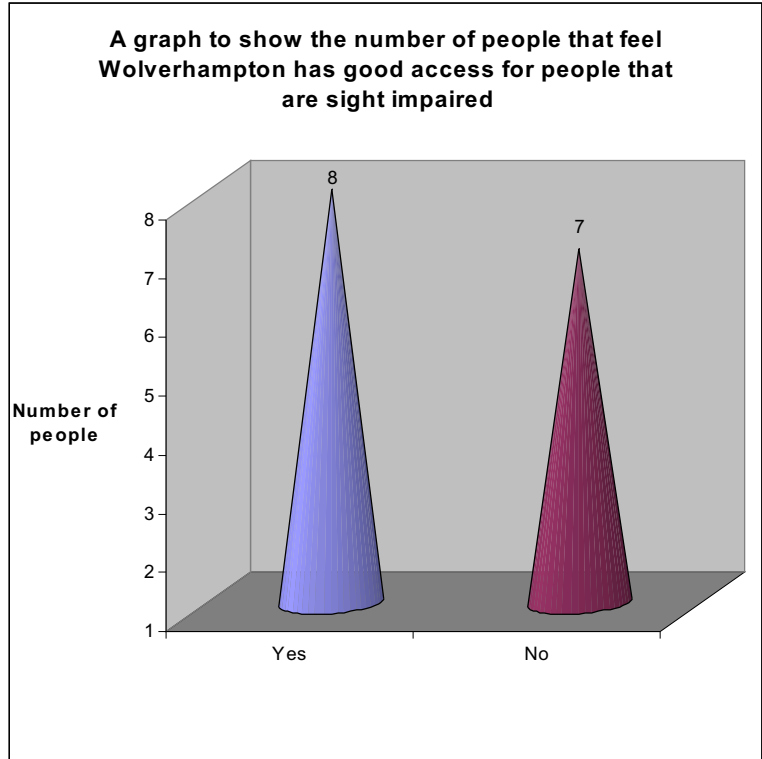
Yes	No
15	0



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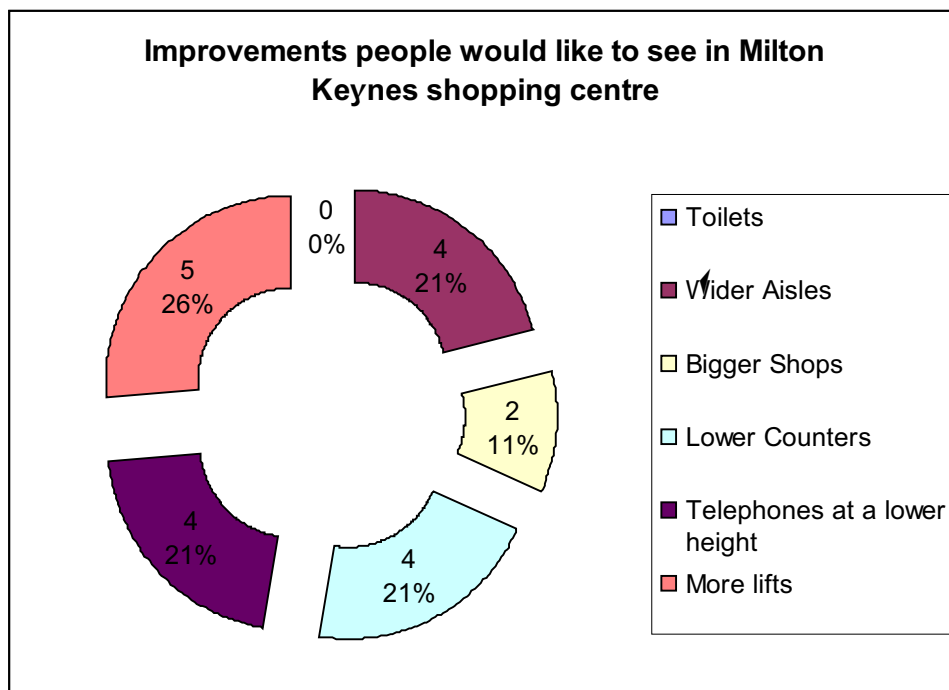
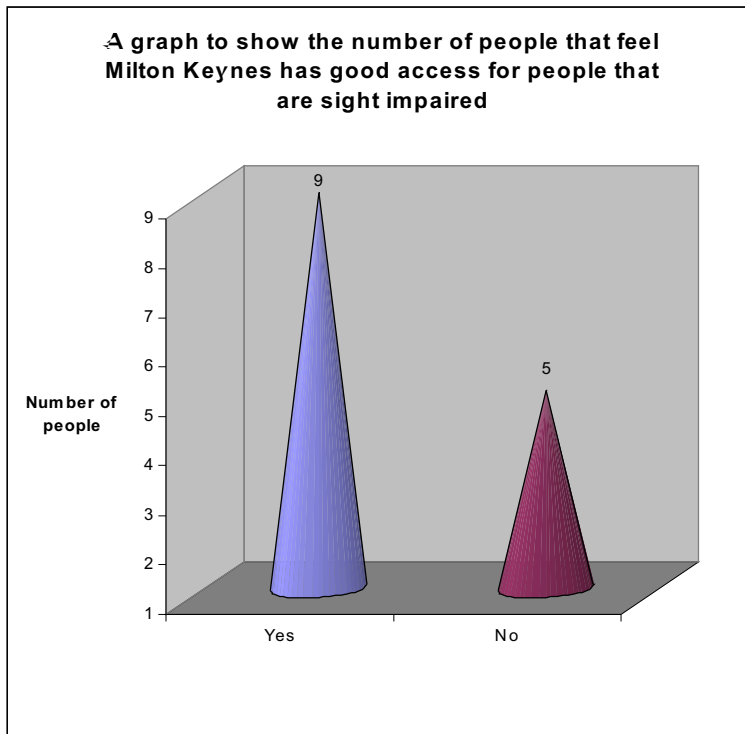
Do you think Wolverhampton has a good access for people
that are sight impaired?

Yes	No
8	7



Do you think Milton Keynes has a good access for people that are sight impaired?

Yes	No
9	5



Evaluation:

In my visit to Wolverhampton, I noticed that the town was not designed with disabled people in mind. I personally, was most shocked by the lack of disabled toilets in the centre and limited access to nearly every single shop. Most shops were

small and there was no possible way in which someone in a wheelchair could come and shop without knocking something over. A lot of the counters/tills were at heights that people in wheelchairs cannot reach. Ironically, many of Wolverhampton's inhabitants are those who are in their later years of life and would benefit from lifts instead of stairs and wider aisles for their wheelchair to get through. From my interviews, I found out that 100% of the people questioned were not happy with the accessibility to shops. My findings also show that 13 out of the 15 people would like to see improvements in the toilets and access to them. One person even quoted "I dislike the way there are no toilets for the disabled and what makes it worse is that to access any toilets you have to travel down a very steep set of stairs. This is unsafe for all and a cause of concern". Though most of the feedback was negative, people were generally happy about the way the town has provided for the sight impaired, "there is a good source of light, although it could be brighter and the staff are very friendly and always willing to assist you".

Conversely, the services and facilities provided my Milton Keynes seem to have won the hearts of many people. On the whole, disabled people visiting the Milton Keynes shopping centre are more than happy and satisfied with access and facilities provided, "there are wide aisles and plenty of toilets for the disabled". People also commented on the great accessibility to stores, "There are lifts, stairs, and escalators in most stores and lots of space for wheelchairs". When asked if any improvements or amendments could be made, most people said none. I too, agree with this but feel that to make Milton Keynes absolutely disabled people friendly, scrolling screens displaying text with announcements could be put up in aid for the hearing impaired. I am pleased with the automatic doors situated at every entrance so that that people in wheelchairs can enter the centre without difficulty. On the other hand, Wolverhampton has no automatic doors for the entrance to the centre but a few selected shops have kept this in mind and started to install sliding doors.

In the media, Disabled people are presented as a different group from the rest of us. This is backed by the statement from The Times – "what they want is for society to relate to them as a person, not as an individual, not part of a disabled lump". It is this statement that also supports the idea of why there are such a high percentage of people that have negative and ignorant views about disability. Statistics also show that 1 in 3 people think that disabled are less intelligent. This implies that they do not matter to the community as much as the rest of the people and therefore it is not necessary to make changes to the environment just to suit the disabled. In my view, perspectives such as this make me feel disgusted at our society. As part of humanity, we should make changes to our environment if it helps the disabled without being told to. The disabled cannot control the way they are and it is not their fault that they suffer from what they have, so we should change our ways to help them cope with it or make life that much easier for them. In another article, a man who spent a week in a wheelchair to find out what it felt like to be disabled said that "when I try to leave, both lifts are out of order...I am effectively stranded in my room for about half an hour". This shows the uncaring approach that this particular hotel had towards the disabled. If they didn't have this outlook on disability, they would have had the lifts fixed without having someone to point out that they weren't working. As the media generally tend to have a negative image of Disability, it may inflict some of its views on the public and therefore towns like Wolverhampton seem to have an apathetic attitude towards disability. However, newer towns and cities seem to hold their own opinion towards this unfair treatment and regard the disabled as part of the community and show this by making sure that the impaired

have enough facilities to get them through their shopping trip without any hassle.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, Milton Keynes has definitely pleased people with what it has to offer the disabled; the lifts, the toilets, the big shops, the wide tills and the ability to hire **free** wheelchairs. Wolverhampton is very outdated and as it was built a long time ago, I think it's time it went through redesigning to provide for its people. This would unquestionably require a large sum of money which may be the root of the problem but in order to follow the Act that was passed about Disability, it is necessary for the town to undergo changes. This Act states that 'Service providers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments to make their services accessible. This may take the form of providing wheelchair access, disabled toilets...'. In my opinion, Wolverhampton has not followed this very well as the town has little wheelchair access and there is no possible way for the disabled to reach the toilets.

I feel that visiting each town and interviewing people was a reliable method as it was a Primary source of information and not something that was passed down to me. This meant that I could rely on what was told to me and I could reach my own conclusion as well as hearing others views. I think my investigation could have been improved if I had interviewed someone that was disabled. This was my original plan but I felt uneasy stopping disabled people as I didn't want to create an awkward atmosphere. Another way to further my investigation would be to question a larger number of people to get a fuller picture and to ask open questions where people could express their opinions. Also, I feel that my investigation may have been a little broad and spread out as there were a lot of shops to cover and I was looking at the whole centre. Next time, I could look at certain shops so that my findings would be in more detail. All in all, I can say that my hypothesis was correct and that older towns do not have many amenities for disabled people as the disabled were overlooked in the past. Our society has become a lot more accepting and understanding and thus, bears the disabled in mind, giving newer towns a more disabled-friendly environment.

Bibliography

The Times Article (Thursday May 25 1998) – 1 in 3 people think disabled are less

Keran Sharma 11gLB
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intelligent
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