

Blue Badge Group 2024 Discussion

First focused discussion

Topic: 'Accessible parking bays and everyone's different needs'.

We used the key points from the 2021 focus group as discussion points for the 2024 group. The 2024 focus group discussed the dropped kerbs installed at appropriate points and a strategy for ensuring WAVs can get an appropriate space.

The group discussed the issues of driving a WAV. If you are in a WAV it means that you often have to drive a long way round the city centre and you are never sure if you will find a space. One individual then relies on getting the tram, which is a 20-minute drive from their house, as it is such a stress to go to the centre using the WAV.

Disabled bays near the theatre have been blocked due to roadworks. There are no replacement bays for those that are blocked off due to roadworks.

Issues were discussed about people parking cars behind the WAV and so not being able to get the lift out of the WAV. When this has happened, individuals have had to call the police. The bays need to be longer so it is clear where people should and shouldn't park.

Supermarkets are a big issue when they are doing repairs. **"There should be a law that skips are not allowed to park in the disabled bays."**

Second focused discussion

Topic: Limitations of the bays: The limitations of the hours, issues on Charles Street and Surrey Street.

The limitations of the duration in the bay are still difficult. The theatre district is a problem if you are going to see a show. The time limits mean you are unable to go out for a meal and see a show. Clarification if the limitation still applies after 8:30pm is needed. **"Fear in your mind of getting a ticket... we are using the facilities."**

"I don't drive to the city in the day as there are parking issues. It is a long drive if there are no spaces. It puts you off going."

"I can't get in to or out of the vehicle if another vehicle has parked behind me... I have had to ring the police."

Charles Street

They have listened to feedback from 2021 about bigger parking bays. At least one bay is now bigger so people can get out of a WAV and **"It is a lot better"**.

Since Covid, the restrictions implemented have continued and things have become a lot worse for disabled parking.

Concerns were raised about Blue Badge parking bays being full early in the morning so that you can't park in the centre of Sheffield without the stress of worrying if there is a space.

"I don't go into the town centre because there is nowhere to park, if you go early it is already full and the parking spaces are not big enough...I can't get public buses so I am stuck."

Multistorey car parks have a limited height restriction so often the WAV vehicles can't park in there as they are too big.

Surrey Street- **"Still a no go zone for wheelchair dependents."**

The Deaf community have a separate issue of filling out the actual paperwork for the Blue Badge and there is no one for them to ask for help with it. Some of the deaf community really struggle to access the English elements of filing out the form. There needs to be a separate meeting to discuss the Deaf communities' barriers.

There are problems with the actual paperwork side of the Blue Badge and what happens with the mobility component on PIP.

The whole system for getting a Blue Badge is very complicated. The system is also complicated when you reach retirement age even if your disability has not changed. There are concerns that it will become harder to get a Blue Badge.

Third focused discussion

Topic: WAV cannot enter multistorey as they are too high, road parking is the only option for some people. Car park operators do not monitor blue badge bays. The timings are still restricted after 6pm.

"Why can't they make blue badge exempt." People before would be picked up outside the theatre near the bus stops, now they can't stop there creating unnecessary difficulty for disabled people. If they can monitor it is a taxi, why can't people with a Blue Badge have plate recognition so they can drive where the taxis go? It could be an online system where you nominate individual carers/family with the badge.

"Other cities use plate registration recognition, why can't Sheffield use that." In London we do not get fined so there must be a way to recognise Blue Badges. There seems to be different rules in different cities.

Due to the one-way system in Sheffield, it means you have a long way to travel to get to where you need. **"Why are they making it so hard for me to drive around the city centre."**

Fourth focused discussion

Topics: Rear loading, level access, distance to nearest bays, issues finding spaces, bay locations, dropped kerbs.

Dropped kerbs- If you park on an end space, due to other cars being parked, the location of the dropped kerb can be difficult to get to. I often must go in the middle of the road.

There have been no improvements in dropped kerbs and there has been no noticeable extra dropped kerbs in the centre.

Fifth focused discussion

Topic: Distance from Blue Badge Bays to destination

Compared to other towns and cities there seems to be less Blue Badge Bays in Sheffield. There are also fewer large spaces for WAV vehicles that need a lift and wider space.

Since there were some changes, such as the new children's park, there are less Blue badge spaces and these haven't been replaced. We must park a long way away from where we need to be. **"We have lost a lot of Blue Badge space in the centre."**

It is extremely frustrating when you drive a long way around the one-way system, and to where you thought there was a space and it has disappeared. The spaces seem to disappear but are never replaced. You don't have time to drive around again looking for more spaces when you have appointment times, the only option is to use a taxi.

There have been issues when an event is on, and trams not running after the event, so there are difficulties getting back to the car. Prams parked in the wheelchair spaces can create a real issue on public transport.

There are issues on match days, for example Hillsborough Park, they wouldn't allow any blue badge parking unless you had a permit from the football club.

Similar issues happen at retail parks because it is a match day. There are no posters to show it is a match day, but you get half the time even at 10am in the morning, so it catches a lot of people out as there is no information.

Public Safety- City Hall

A lot of blue badge spaces have disappeared. When it is late at night, you feel more vulnerable walking with a mobility issue, particularly if you must walk further. Before it was safer being able to just get in the car. **"They are ignoring a whole communities' needs and it is disgraceful. Some people need easy access parking close to venues."** Close to the venue is key for many people. Covid's affects and impact has been **"Seriously detrimental, it is a lot lot worse since Covid."**

Sixth focused discussion

Topic: Location and number of bays. What areas don't have enough spaces.

All areas don't have enough Blue Badge bays. The theatres and shops need to have more bays. They also need to be monitored. The bays need to think specifically about larger vehicles with space.

The Ridings in Wakefield have different types of disabled bays, they have a blue badge space, then a wheelchair only bay. There are cameras on the spaces, so it is more monitored.

In Sheffield, getting parked up outside the shops is very difficult, so often you avoid going to the shop in the car and have to only take a few bags on your knee via your wheelchair.

There was a large discussion about people inappropriately using the badge and people not finding spaces. There was a big discussion about who monitors the blue badge system and how this can be changed.

There was also discussion about lots of fines happening, and the fact that a blue badge has a huge monetary value, so people will steal blue badges by smashing your window to steal the blue badge. There was a question as to why the blue badge cannot be done electronically and registered to the vehicle rather than having a physical card. This would prevent temptation and the vehicle being at risk.