

## Disability Consultation and Advisory Service

### Poole Park Consultation

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DOTS Disability CIC  
Telephone 01202 771336  
Littledown Centre, Chaseside, Bournemouth BH7 7DX

## 1. Introduction

DOTS Disability is a community interest company that is the social enterprise arm of Access Dorset.

Access Dorset is an organisation run by and for disabled people, older people and carers. We're building a community where everyone gets treated with dignity and respect, where we support one another, grow together and make a difference.

All of our work is informed by an in-depth understanding of the Social Model of Disability. This means that our approach acknowledges that:

1. Impairments exist, and that people from across different impairment groups have access needs. Failure to meet those access needs results in exclusion and isolation.
2. Society imposes physical, information/communication barriers and attitudinal barriers on people with impairments, which create disability discrimination.

The aim of our work is to support organisations and communities to identify the barriers and solutions to inclusion for disabled people from across the different impairment groups, in a wide range of settings.

We believe that **Inclusive Design** creates environments that everyone can use to access and benefit from the full range of opportunities available – confidently, independently, with choice and dignity – which avoids separation or segregation and is made up of places and spaces that acknowledge diversity and difference, meeting the needs of everyone in society.

## 2. Commission

DOTS Disability have been commissioned by Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council (BCP) to undertake a review of new traffic management proposals in Poole Park.

6 members of DOTS Disability took part. All of the participants routinely visit Poole Park as a destination - for pleasure. These included a blind participant and his wife (who has a mobility impairment), who are also parents of two children who have visual impairments; an electric wheelchair user, a participant with a learning disability, a carer and the facilitator, Jonathan Waddington-Jones (DOTS Disability). Also present was Martin Whitchurch, Strategic Lead Greenspace & Conservation, Environment, BCP Council.

Participants met at the park café and had a walking tour of Poole Park.

## 3. Discussion

Background information was provided by Martin Whitchurch. Poole Park was opened in 1890 and essentially its layout remains much as it was then. Poole town has an industrial background and the park was then gifted to the people of Poole. Originally of course there would have been no cars, the only vehicles being horse and carriage.

In the 1980's efforts were made to reduce through traffic with all 3 vehicle access gates to the park being closed until 10.00a.m. - - which remains the case today.

There are 3 vehicle access points to Poole Park. These are:

- Dolphin Entrance (traffic in and out) – two ways.
- Civic Centre Entrance (traffic in only) one way.
- Whitecliff Road Entrance (traffic in and out) two way.

The park is used by a multitude of users, including Park Run, Rockley Watersports, school groups, café visitors, Poole Park Railway visitors and simply visitors coming to enjoy green space and nature.

Considering ever-increasing road traffic volumes, environmental concerns, and the impact on the experience of park users' consideration is being given to reducing through traffic – that is, reducing the number of vehicles passing through the park who do not actually use it.



A proposal has been made to permanently close the Whitecliff Road Entrance to vehicle traffic entering or exiting, and a temporary closure has been put in place to evaluate impact. Although the entrance is closed to vehicles, it remains open for pedestrians, cyclists and mobility scooter users etc. There is on-street parking outside of the gates for disabled visitors wanting to park there.

The proposal sees the Dolphin and Civic Centre entrances remaining unchanged and open to vehicles from 10a.m.

Poole Park is a popular destination for disabled people:

*“we love coming here, Come here all the time”.*

Participants valued being able to access Poole Park by car

*“I wouldn't want it completely closed to all cars”.*

The ability to park within the park is important for people with limited mobility or visual impairments, for example being able to park close to the café and lakes. Without parking within Poole Park access to these facilities would be impossible for some.



However, participants were relieved to learn that parking within Poole Park is not being restricted in any way for disabled and older visitors. All car parks within Poole Park will remain open, with ample accessible parking throughout the park.

Participants recognised that the closure of the Whitecliff Road entrance would potentially add to journey times for some, but:

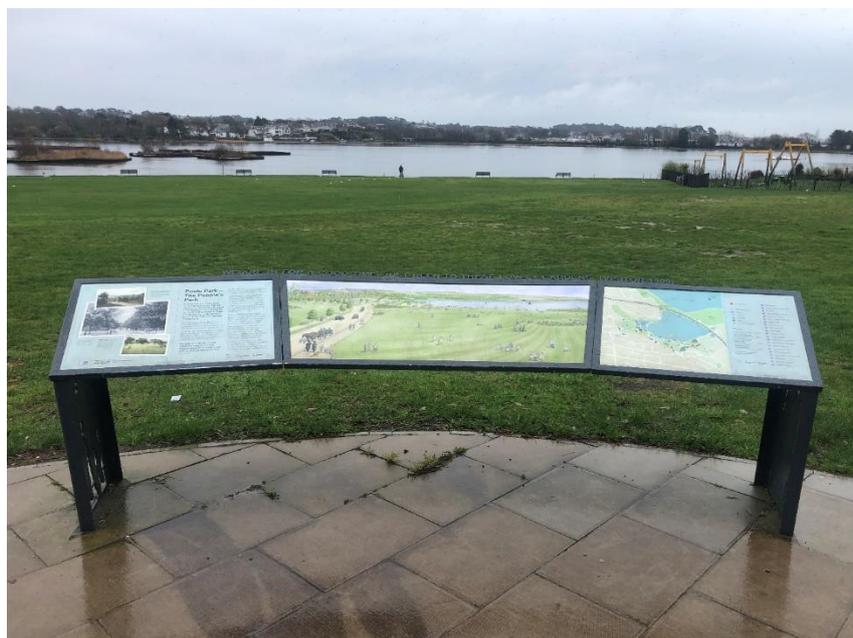
*“it’s just a little added on to your journey...it’s not a problem”*

*“in principle, fine! No problem”*

*“it’s a no-brainer!”*

One participant wanted to go further:

*“We should close the Civic entrance as well”.*





The group discussed how the area around the Whitecliff entrance gates might be improved should they remain permanently closed.

With cars unable to exit at Whitecliff Road entrance, a 3 point turn is necessary to turn cars around. The blind participant and his wife pointed out that this usually involves drivers indicating, before their cars over-hang pavements as they manoeuvre. This does not work for blind/visually impaired pedestrians who of course cannot see cars indicating. Therefore, a turning circle for cars on the inside of the entrance would prevent vehicles coming into conflict with pedestrians.

Additional seating within the park would be desirable – but seating should have arms to aid people to safely sit/stand, a space either side of benches for wheelchair users.





There is 'on-road' accessible parking for disabled visitors near the Whitecliff Road entrance.

This area of parking should be upgraded to match other parking areas within Poole Park. This would include transfer zones either side of parking bays (which prevents rear loading vehicles from getting blocked in, for example) and strategically placed dropped curbs.

#### **4. Recommendations**

1. Disabled participants involved in this consultation had no objection to the permanent closure of Whitecliff Road entrance - from an access perspective.
2. Disabled drivers who simply want to 'commute' through the park via Whitecliff Road entrance will be disadvantaged by a slightly longer journey time in the same way as non-disabled drivers.
3. Disabled 'destination' visitors retain the same parking facilities – there is no change.
4. Reduced through traffic will benefit the environment and disabled visitors in exactly the same way as it will non-disabled visitors.
5. Improvements could be made to the Whitecliff gate area with a turning circle for cars, improved seating and improved accessible parking.