

Accessible Parking - Countess of Chester Hospital

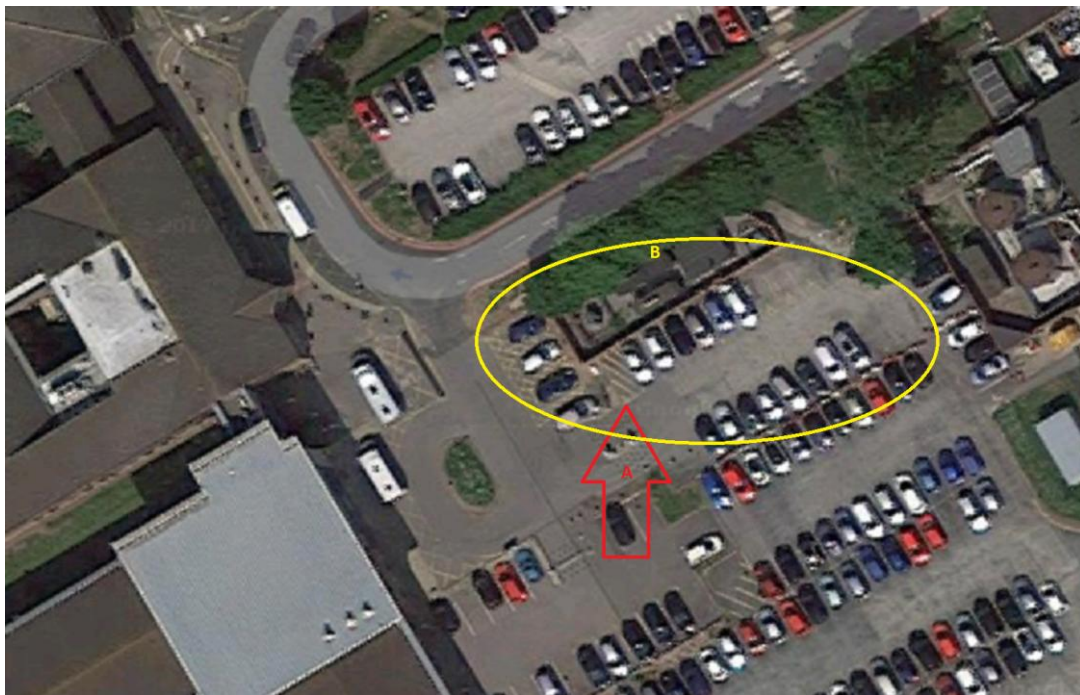
At the recent Trust Equality and Diversity Meeting (31/01/17) an issue was raised regarding the accessible parking area with a number of individuals reporting the following:

- Difficulty parking - finding a space
- Problems with access - difficulties with a walkway being blocked by parked cars.
- Difficulties with the size of spaces when trying to get individuals out of cars.

It is in light of these comments I have followed up concerns.

The current position - Observations 9/2/17 - 1.40 pm

It appears that around the period Autumn 2014 the location of the main accessible car park at the Countess of Chester Hospital was relocated to an area near to the south entrance of the hospital (blood clinic) using an existing car park that had formerly been barrier operated. (Marked as 'B' on aerial photograph)



On the photograph noted is a hashed area, (marked 'A'), this is approximately the size of a car parking space. It is hashed to indicate that cars should not park in this area; however, anecdotal evidence suggests that some individuals decide to ignore this; **something proved with my actual observations below**. To the left of this space; in the photograph; it can be seen that there are disabled bays also marked out in front of this car park (with correct spacing to allow restricted movement access). It is further noted, that although the car park is signed as for disabled use, the bays in the main part of the parking area are not all marked with lines and what lines there are indicate spaces of a 'normal' size. These 'normally' spaced areas allow about 20 spaces available currently, whereas if marked and spaced with full sized disability places a probable capacity would be down to 15.

The car park has a slight gradient falling from front to back (right to left in the photograph) of approximately 5° going downhill.

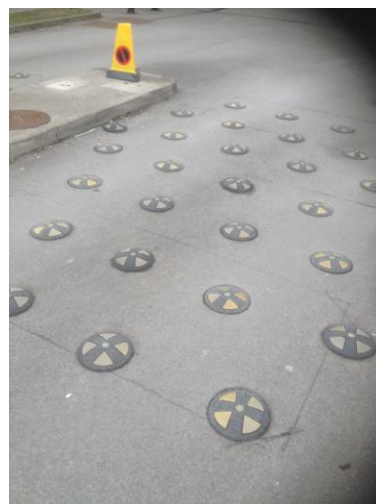
A short tarmac path about 4m in length, with dropped kerb on both sides runs from the hashed area of the car park into the marked out disabled spaces. This is the simplest, safest and shortest exit from the car park for someone in a wheelchair.

There are a number of other paved path areas around the site; however, somewhat surprisingly none lead to a safe clear wheelchair or powers-scooter exit.

Below are two photographs one a cropped version of the aerial view. Areas marked 'C' indicates the former position of the barriers on this car park prior to removal, however, it is noted that large rubber bobbles remain fixed to the tarmac shown in the second photograph.

The route marked in blue; 'D' on the photograph shows the route taken via the short path - the normal route out of this car park for someone in a wheelchair or powered scooter and has dropped kerb access.

It is noted, however, from this and site observations that there is no actual marked crossing at this point and that traffic flow here comes from the rear-right (following the one way system) and rear-left off the car park itself.



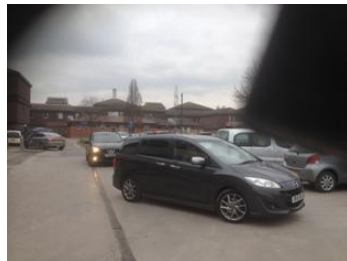
It should also be noted that this is the only area of dropped kerb for approximately 100m on the car park side of the area. The area with rubber bobbles is not a particularly safe area as cars are constantly moving across what is quite a narrow cut through.

Observations 9/2/17 - 1.40 pm:

Signage - around the hospital site to this car park appear good.



Car park use - At the time of my visit the car park was full - visitors were actually queuing to find a space. All spaces were taken people waited for spaces to become available. **Eight of the 20 or so cars on the parking lot failed to display a disabled badge.**



The photographs above show queuing traffic actually blocking the point at which a wheelchair would normally cross the road. **This is significant as during my time on site I saw a number of vehicles reversing in this area when the drivers realised that the car park was full.** The red car in the picture above was simply 'hovering' moving forwards and backwards waiting for a space to become available.

Access - This was somewhat difficult. At the time of my visit a car was parked in the cross hatched area next to the path providing dropped kerb access. This confirmed some of the anecdotal evidence we had received. A passer-by who told me that he visited the hospital at least once a week told me ***"There's always something parked there!"***



One lady had a small power scooter had real problems demonstrated by the second photograph. With her access blocked to the much needed path. She did not want to risk going over the large car sized bobbles on the entrance for fear of tipping over.

Comments received from individuals:

Whilst on site, I witnessed other individuals struggling and collected a number of comments:

- *“We have been here a few times - It is always difficult to get a disabled space. As you see there are none today and we have had to queue to get in.”* - FRANCES SPONDER
- *“My wife finds it difficult to get her power scooter over these raised humps. She is very frightened about falling off. If I was not here to hold her she would not go across. You can see the parked car there - It is blocking the way for us. It should not be there at all.”* - MR SALIM
- *“I have tried to park here and failed many times for an appointment. I usually wait over there (points to double red line non-parking area) and wait until she gets out. It’s a lot less hassle!”* - MARGARET DOLMAN
- *“I drop mum off and go over to Morrisons until she rings me then I pick her up. There seems to be less and less space on this car park.”* - JOHN DAVIES

Summary:

It appears comments generated in the Joint Equality meeting are founded on some fact.

- A short but effective visit to the site confirms that the area is busy, that there appears to be insufficient spaces on the car park and that access is difficult, particularly when vehicles park in non-designated places.
- On the car park itself, disabled spaces are not marked with correct line templates and spacing making getting in and out of a vehicle difficult.
- Observations suggest quite a number of individuals are using the car park without proper authorization i.e. disabled badge. *With an apparent lack of enforcement, could this be in an effort to avoid paying parking charges?*
- Cars are parking where they shouldn’t i.e. in front of and blocking paved/tarmac areas laid particularly for wheeled users with low kerbs.
- Old infrastructure (large rubber bobbles formerly under barrier) causes problems for wheeled users.
- The disabled crossing area itself (when it is free from obstruction) is placed in quite a difficult area for a pedestrian and particularly those in a wheelchair with vehicles coming from right-rear and left-rear - very difficult for someone with limited movement. The right rear view is also partially blocked by a building as is the view of the approaching driver. **It is noted that there is no actual marked crossing (zebra lines) at this point unlike similar areas all over the rest of the site that is generally marked with very clear crossing points.**

Recommendations:

The Countess of Chester Hospital should urgently review its current policy and provision for accessible parking.

Suggested actions:

- Removal of Plastic/rubber bobbles at entrance to car park and make good surface area.
- Prevent parking in hashed area near to dropped kerb footpath by installing immovable bollard(s)
- Consider the difficulties of individuals with a disability crossing the road at this point with no marked crossing visible.
- Provide a greater number of correctly marked disabled spaces.
- Reserved spaces should be clearly designated for use by people with disabilities and

should be clearly signposted and marked.

- Much stricter enforcement of parking - clamping should be considered.

Further considerations from best practice guides:

- The pedestrian route from the parking spaces to the point of entry should be clearly defined and well lit.
- Pathways should be a minimum width of 1.2 metres and if possible 1.8 metres to allow wheelchairs to pass. A greater width may be required if large pedestrian flows are anticipated. Path edges should be clearly defined and slip resistant surfaces should be used.
- All pathways should be clear and easy to follow. The use of colour contrasts can assist partially sighted people. The pathway system should where possible be designed to avoid crossing vehicular routes within the site. Where this is not practicable use should be made of "dropped kerbs" and textured surfaces so that the crossing point is suitable for both wheelchair users and people with visual impairments.

Authored by - Neil Garbett - 14th February 2017

Feedback

"Thank you for your report, I have found it very useful in arranging the suggested actions of recommendation.

- *This car parking area was a small paying barrier car park, however, to support the increase in disabled drivers to the Trust that end of the Hospital, we decided to convert the access purely for disabled badge holders.*
- *We do have a plan to mark the bays which will impact on a reduction of spaces. This was scheduled around November 2016, however, cancelled by the line company due to the ground not being at a certain temperature for the paint to stick! As I say, we have a plan in place for this to be actioned*
- *Only yesterday we replaced the broken red and white blocks that segregate the disabled car park from the staff car park.*
- *We do enforce the parking on site and issue offending vehicles with a Civil Penalty Notice (CPN). This is a £30 fine reduced to £15 if paid within 14 days of the ticket being issued. I have alerted my team to the area in question as any obstructions are normally addressed when they are on patrol.*
- *I will link up with our Estates Manager regarding the removal of the rubber discs as a matter of priority and ascertain a designated crossing point.*

Always willing to listen to our patients and visitors in improving our services.

Many thanks for sending the report which we will endeavour to work with.

TIM LISTER, SECURITY MANAGER & LOCAL SECURITY MANAGEMENT SPECIALIST, COUNTESS OF CHESTER HOSPITAL NHS FOUNDATION TRUST, LIVERPOOL ROAD, CHESTER. 15.02.2017