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Patron: Baroness Tanni Grey-
Thompson

11th October 2021

Dear City Council

Re: Traffic Regulation Order – City Centre Transformation Plan

We are a user-led charity campaigning for equality for disabled people across the North East. This letter is to provide some feedback on the above TRO as part of your consultation process. We broadly support the intention to develop the city centre and the desire to make it a more pleasant environment for everyone. To achieve this aim, the plans will need to carefully consider how 'everyone' will be affected by the planned changes.

We would like to see a set of proposals that directly consider and address the needs of disabled people. We would advocate a co-production approach, whereby we and other disability organisations work with the Council to develop plans which use our lived experience to inform the

plans, so that our needs are fully considered at all stages.

In the meantime, we would make the following comments on the proposals:

- Access to the city centre for disabled people can be difficult and we are concerned that these plans may make this worse. The plans risk excluding people whose only means of safe transport is private car or, bus or taxi.
- We have already seen the Council remove free parking for Blue Badge holders and we do not want to see further changes that restrict access for disabled people.
- We do not think the current proposals take adequate account of this and would like to see further provisions to help disabled people reach this new, vibrant part of the City.
- We have concerns about the safety of shared surfaces and ask that the plans include ways to minimise the risks. Cyclists, skateboarders and e-scooter riders will pose a real risk to people, especially those with sensory impairments, children and elderly people
- We also suggest that careful consideration be given to the design and management of the pedestrianised areas. If they are left as a 'free-for-all' with businesses able to expand outwards, street furniture that clutters up routes, street performers/buskers all around, then these areas could quickly become difficult to navigate for some people, noisy and overwhelming for others. We would like to see proper consideration given to this, so that the environment that results is

pleasant, uncluttered, calm and accessible. We think everyone, not just disabled people, will benefit from this.

- To assist people getting around the new pedestrianised centre, we suggest consideration be given to some sort of city train – a slow, safe method of helping people who might not feel able to manage for whatever reason. We would advocate making this free for Blue Badge holders. This could also be a nice addition for tourists, especially for children. It could be an essential support for people with a range of mobility impairments.
- We would like to see plenty of seating for people and would like this to be designed with many different needs in mind, with disability groups involved. For example, can seating be provided at different heights? Can charging points be included for powered wheelchairs?
- We suggest that it would be helpful to include plans for some ‘quiet space’ – somewhere that people can go for a break from the usual noise and bustle of the city centre. This is very important for some people who find crowds and noise overwhelming. It would also give everyone a safe, calm space in which to relax.
- We would also advocate having some people employed by the Council to provide assistance and/or guidance to anyone who is struggling to get around the city centre. Similar to COVID Marshalls, this could provide real hands-on support for people when they need it. This is something we would like the opportunity to explore further with the Council as part of a broader discussion about the Newcastle 2030 development plan.

Disabled people in the North East are among the most disadvantaged people in the UK. It is incumbent upon the Council to start addressing the shocking inequalities that exist today and we think that making a real and meaningful effort to amend these plans to make them more inclusive is one way to start. Difference, along with other disabled people's charities, want to work with Council planners to make this a reality. We want Newcastle to be among the most accessible, inclusive cities in the UK. We urge the Council to work with us proactively to achieve our shared goals so that this can be a city that is truly for everyone.

Yours faithfully,

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