

Inclusive Environments: Sustainable and inclusive – can it be done?
5 October 2022

Breakout Group Questions and Responses

Question 1
What are the dangers of not including or working with disabled people when we design to lower our impact on the planet (Eco Ableism)?

Group 1

- Lead to poor design solutions as a result of assumptions that solutions for able-bodied people will work as well for disabled people/people with disabilities.
- Sustainability/low carbon/net zero emissions research, testing ideation etc. is not including people with lived experience of Protected Characteristics (PCs) Equality Act, 2010 leading to design solutions that are inaccessible.
- Sustainability solutions are not always accessible e.g.,
    - Increased move towards reducing car use in city centres, resulting in blue badge car users being restricted access.
    - Quieter electric vehicles and e-scooters are difficult to hear and this impacts a number of disabled people.
    - Energy consumption of disabled people is different, disabled people need energy for vital purposes, not

Group 2

- People are designing without consulting with disabled people, which requires things to be retrofitted/adapted and therefore will have a greater impact on carbon emissions. For example inaccessible EV charging points popping around everywhere.
- By not including disabled people, there is a risk of alienating a large group of people and losing support for certain initiative. – e-bikes & scooters example of pitting the disabled community against the Active travel community.
- There are many ambitious environmental targets, but we just have to meet minimum standards on inclusive design. We should be aiming for the best across the board.
- Going above and beyond what building regulations ask. What can we do to future proof it as much as possible.
- There is a lack of user testing. It may not be as easy to do on buildings, but for things like EV charging points, they should have never been rolled out without being tested with the wider community, especially disabled people.
- The relationship between regulation and involving people in our design. There is an over-reliance on regulations which aims for the minimum.
- Standard and guidance is based on research, but co-production is best, especially when the group members are provided training and the tools to be more affective in their involvement.
- How accessible is recycling? Especially for people in flats. Islington are looking at using more accessible bins.
- The battle between conservation/listed buildings and making them accessible.

Group 3

- Risk loss of people buying in to the concepts and the solutions - loss of involvement and therefore commitment. Creates more barriers and more isolation.
- Need to ensure that the quiet voices are also heard as part of the conversation - not always the loudest, and need to ensure disabled people are not part of the problem (plastic straws/fuel consumption for mobility aids/etc.) but are part of the solution.

- Risk inaccessible outcomes and then expensive retro-fitting ('build it in - don't bolt it on'!). Need to appreciate that inclusive design is for everyone's benefit.
- Risk understanding the impact of design and policy decisions - e.g. public transport cut-backs and accessibility limitations make that less of an option for disabled people (limited timetables; only able to take one wheelchair-user at a time), but taxis are expensive and not an option for everyone. Again creating barriers and further isolation.

Group 4

- References to the presentation on behalf of Stagecoach Bus were prominent, with group members expressing increased confidence that driverless bus services would be accessible (due to the commitment to staff each bus with a ‘captain’ and one other member of staff, and due also to evidence that consultation and engagement activities were well in hand), and that autonomous vehicles would include ‘large’ buses (i.e. not just small ‘pods’).
- One group member remarked that complaints and issues relating to the accessibility of services had not really changed since the 1950s.
- The slide shown by the first speaker of a power lead charging an electric scooter was considered to be a very powerful metaphor of the conflict between the sustainable mobility agenda and the need to maintain levels of mobility and inclusion.
- NaviLens app, for helping blind and partially sighted people with wayfinding, was identified as a particularly interesting innovation.

Group 5

- Not involving people Blinkered approach, high potential missing important issues that are really important to disabled people particular in changing processes, new technologies that aren’t always designed in an inclusive way
- Are the right people being consulted on technology design? Example being electric charging points, no able to use and cars unaffordable.
- Ensuring if technology is required it is affordable, does it work on out of date phones etc. Consider how things work, relying on people using data on phones which may not always be available – need to build in providing free wifi etc if it need to use systems.
- Recognising our lives are becoming more diverse and not many disabled people also fit into other equality groups but need to consider all communities and minority groups

- Coproduction with the right people at the right times
- Consider voices that may not be heard. Not involving people has a knock-on effect for example potentially putting a strain on our NHS and other and health issues.
- If we want to encourage people we need policies that can be easily understand
- Speed of implementing modern eco technology could leave many people, including disabled people, out as not able to keep up with the changes. Electric car not suitable or affordable, charging facilities not accessible,
- Short-termism on issues
- Consultation is key it should be a given in projects
- Risk putting barriers in place by overlooking view points so need to include people in design
- Can be major risks, disabled people may be highjacked and used to push schemes through.
- People don't use all areas, if we don't hear disabled people views someone may speak on their behalf
- If people don't use areas because they are inaccessible are their voices being heard? Need to ensure they are included, often socio economic issues that need to be taken into account.

Group 6

- If you have to re-visit any issues in a project it will have an impact on time and cost. Also it will impact on the environment which is counter-productive.
- There are dangers of ignoring the social component of sustainability if only the environment is taken into account.
- There may be an impact in the mental health and psychological wellbeing of disabled people if they are unable to contribute to a sustainable strategy due to lack of choice. E.g if a diesel car is only option of an adapted vehicle or only plastic straws available to those that use them regularly.
- Suggestion that co-production should be considered as well as consultation.

Question 2
What can we do to ensure that inclusion is at the centre of our sustainability plans, strategies and policies?

Group 1

- Emphasise the fact that this is about everyone to mitigate the misunderstanding that accessibility and inclusion in design is just about disability!
    - We can ensure clients, stakeholders etc. understand and acknowledge every human characteristic in design. Accessibility and inclusion is still seen as something separate and just for disabled people/people with disabilities. But we need to ask ourselves; how accessible is the product, space or service for Age (young and old) Height, Gender & Non-Gender Identity Groups, Neurodiversity, Ethnicity and Heritage, social mobility groups etc.
    - We can ensure we have robust, well-funded consultation made up of diverse lived experience user groups. We need to value the contributions of lived experience user contributions and pay people for their time.
- Not seeing access and sustainability separately – we need to consider the whole-life cycle of a product:
    - Sustainability and Inclusion are interlinked: We need to make sure that there are life-long and appropriate use of products and services. Currently there is a throw away culture in the service and design industry: ‘single use products and services!’
    - As an example, if we design future homes with wet rooms instead of traditional bathrooms we are likely to reduce the risk of retrofitting in the future as our needs change, thereby reducing carbon emissions.
- Cultural attitudes need to change to recognise that disabled people have valuable knowledge/ideas relating to sustainability, climate justice and inclusive design through our lived experience instead of adding disabled people as a tick-box exercise. We need more disabled-led sustainability and inclusion problem solving, testing and ideation to produce sustainable and inclusive initiatives.

Group 2

- Encourage local authorities to include disabled people on Council committees and panels so that inclusion is at the forefront of everyone's mind.
- Consider rephrasing the question, because when we use the work inclusion we think HR measures rather than Inclusive Design measures, meaning that Inclusive Design can sometimes get a bit lost. Obviously both are important, but if they get merged, inclusive design gets deprioritised further.

Group 3

- Pay people for their time and expertise with consultations, budget this into a project financially and time-wise, and take notice/act on the outcomes - not just a tick-box exercise.
- Ensure accessibility is in the brief from the outset and don't act in silos.
- Ensure accessible don't mean things are not affordable.
- Clarify legislation and guidance (Building Regs/BS8300) and ensure it covers existing building stock, not just new-build or a mention of heritage buildings - most property is existing but there is a great deal of misunderstanding about making it fit-for-purpose, sustainable AND accessible. Ensure that enforcement is used, following the clarified legislation and guidance.
- Teach accessibility up front as mandatory aspects throughout all built-environment training - not just two-week modules! Establish methods of accrediting trainees based on proven experience.

Group 4

- Without engaging with disabled people there is always the danger of missed opportunities for inclusive design, which will lead to the exclusion of some people.
- Failure to 'get it right first time', by engaging properly with disabled people, will lead to problems later on. This is because any inaccessible aspects of design WILL lead to problems sooner or later, with the result that reparations and retrofitting will be required, which are usually more expensive than designing engagement into a project in the first place. There is therefore a 'business case' for inclusive design, as well as a moral and statutory obligation. Inclusive design also avoids the prospect of legal challenges and damage to reputations in the future.

- A very valuable element of engagement with the community can be the opportunity to tap into local knowledge of a neighbourhood or an individual building, (e.g. “well actually, this lift always breaks down”).

Group 5

- Funding is an issue, projects, strategies are done in an exclusive way, someone writes a policy strategy and then funders place limits on time etc so procurement and funding needs to build in time and funding for consultation.
- How do we champion process and design, we have professional bodies signed up to inclusive design but see little reality as most projects are underfunded and don’t have a requirement for inclusive design to be supported, often very little potential for inclusive design process
- Working in local authority, some departments are all for inclusion from the outset but not everywhere education at grass routes, how can we embed if not taught from the beginning and the centre of everything rather than as an add on
- Making the process simpler, understanding policies and guidance documents, making them accessible in their own right, how to make process easier to reduce fees etc, easy read documents, raising issues in an inclusive way so people are aware of issues

Group 6

- Increase funding (government and private) so that inclusion is properly considered
- Ensure that procurement frameworks give due consideration to inclusion requirements as part of any selection process
- Social sustainability needs to be acknowledged as an important requirement
- Consultations- we need to find more ways of involve hard to reach groups rather than relying on the same groups all the time. Suggestions: contacting carers and advocates of disabled people; paying consultees.