

## Accessible Cities in the UK

By Tracy Winchester, Occupational Therapist.

Have you researched accessible cities lately? The logistics and practicalities of visiting a city in a vehicle can be quite daunting. One-way systems, busy junctions, possible road restrictions or zones can all be hard to navigate. If you are then asking the question, is the city accessible, it adds a whole new level to your planning. You need to consider suitable parking spaces, accessibility via lifts, ramps, locating [Changing Places](#)... It can all be rather a lot to think about.

The good news is there are now many more accessible cities. Whether your client is a wheelchair user or having what many would consider a more hidden disability, individuals are increasingly able to access cities, amenities and attractions alongside each other and with due consideration given.

### Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles - Which are best for City Driving?

A WAV that leads the way is the Sirius Ford Grand Tourneo Connect. This offers accessibility with a smaller sized vehicle and the option for the wheelchair user to [drive from your wheelchair, transfer internally](#) to a driver seat whilst having the option to travel upfront. Its compact size along with the automated side access door with short ramp length (just 70cm) means a typical disabled space or parking space on the street is suitable. Unlike rear entry wav's, you will be able to park on the road without fear of getting blocked in, as you enter and exit from the side door.

### Sitting Upfront

Driving or [sitting in the front seat](#) allows for the occupants to take in the sights and everything the city has to offer your client the freedom to enjoy and explore the accessibility of our cities. [Find out more](#) about the benefits of travelling in the front for passengers.

### In-Car Technology

Emerging car technology offers potential further enhancements for the future too. As an example, the [Ford SYNC 3](#) with its intuitive voice control allows you to find café's, fuel and hotels without having to take your eyes off the road. You can also add in destinations, so you can check out the nearest accessible car park on the [Parking Mobility App](#) and pop it in the system and it will take you directly there. All the high-tech options make the ride much more pleasurable.

### Helping Your Client to Plan a Visit to an Accessible City...

To help with the planning, here are some recommendations that you could give to your client to start their city exploration, perhaps some you might not expect.

## CHESTER

Think of Chester and you may conjure up thoughts of City Walls and elevated walkways, known as 'rows', but Chester boasts another important accolade. In 2017, Chester was the first British city to win the European Commission's Access City Award (Ryan, 2017).

[Motability](#) endorse that Chester is a truly historic city offering a modern approach to accessibility. The rows are accessible with ramps, a lift and an escalator. There are multiple accessible changing places around the city and with further planned in the emerging inclusive developments. The entire City Wall area is wheelchair accessible and in parts where that just aren't possible for heritage preservation, tactile paving and handrails have been installed to assist people with visual impairments or mobility problems. In particular, The Storyhouse, a cultural centre designed with direct feedback from disability groups throughout the city, has a theatre, cinema and library but also seven accessible toilets, a changing place, flexible seating for groups of disabled theatre-goers, audio description and hearing loops. Even backstage, there is an accessible toilet, accessible changing rooms and lift (Ryan, 2017, Salman, 2018).

So, whether it be shopping, nightlife or history, Chester has a lot to offer and its approach to accessibility has other cities looking on enviously to try to re-create what they have managed.

## **GLASGOW**

Edinburgh gets all the attention, but its nearby neighbour and Scotland's biggest city, Glasgow, is packed with opportunity; culture, shopping, outstanding period and modern architecture, restaurants, theatres and galleries to name but a few (Euan's Guide, 2019).

The legacy of the Commonwealth Games 2014 has given Glasgow a great reputation for accessibility ([Able Magazine](#), 2019). Motability lists Glasgow in its top six accessible cities in the UK, quoting both the Riverside Museum and the Kelvingrove Art Gallery as accessible and inclusive attractions. The Riverside offers vast space, a delightful café restaurant and wheelchair accessibility with specific wheelchair lifts to see inside the trains. Whilst the Kelvingrove delivers equally on accessibility and list facilities including BSL guided tours, hearing loop, disabled parking and accessible toilets. When you've exhausted the museum and gallery, head on over to the Buchanan Galleries or St Enoch Centre to see what retail Glasgow has to offer. A Changing Place available there if you require one (Muldoon, 2018).

With Pizza being a popular culinary choice in Glasgow, make your destination [Pizza Punks](#) on Saint Vincent Street which offers portable ramp access or [Paesano Pizza](#) on Miller Street with level access (Euan's Guide 2019).

## **NORWICH**

A medieval city with much to offer, the River Wensum at its heart and typifying its charm and appeal. Much like Chester and Glasgow, Norwich is the East of England's offering for history, shopping and entertainment whilst ensuring great accessibility

too. Norwich Castle, historically a prison, but now the home to many art and history exhibitions, with accessibility to main areas with just the exception of the dungeons and battlements. Further attractions for art lovers would be the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts where again there is good accessibility and a restaurant offering a welcomed rest and refreshment (Muldoon, 2018). Norwich Cathedral offers a different option for some quiet reflection with disabled access to the Cathedral and disabled parking spaces in The Close. Retail therapy can be provided at the two big shopping centres, into Chapelfield and Castle Mall. Both offer disabled parking spaces as well as a dedicated shop mobility centre at the into Chapelfield shopping centre.

A more relaxing scene can be found at Fairhaven Woodland and Water Garden. Perhaps hire a boat, which is suitable for disabled users, or enjoy the wheelchair-accessible garden, tearoom and gift shop, that also have Braille and hearing loops installed. There is also a purpose-built sensory garden for those that would benefit and enjoy it (Norwich: City of Stories, 2016).

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