

ADEPT President's Awards 2023

Entry form

Main contact name Donna Whinham

Email donna.whinham@southglos.gov.uk

Award category Shaping Places for People

Project Title Thornbury High Street Investment Project

Local authority entrant South Gloucestershire Council

Headline summary (150 characters max.)

Delivering a £4.6 million investment in Thornbury to support a sustainable High Street that recognises its heritage and is fit for the future.

Shaping places for people: How was this project an innovative response to a significant concern? (150 words max.)

Exacerbated by Covid restrictions, local residents expressed significant concerns around the redesign of their High Street. The high-level vision for the scheme included an Equality Impact Assessment identifying accessibility as a critical consideration.

How could a project team truly understand the consequences of decision making without working with a diverse range of local individuals and groups, especially people with disabilities and older people with accessibility needs?

A working group was convened (including representation from Accessibility Thornbury, Over 50s Forum, Disability Equality Network, Sight Loss UK, RNIB and local residents) allowing the members to directly feed into the design on an ongoing basis, highlighting challenges and barriers, developing inclusive designs and creating community spaces that enable people to socialise and build community cohesion.

Opinions were often divided; however, the transparency of the work allowed the council to make open, honest, balanced, informed decisions on the design and delivery of the project.

Shaping places for people: Please give evidence of the quality of outcomes obtained from the project (for example improved/more efficient services, increased inclusivity for residents, futureproofing the service). (150 words max.)

The group met regularly to discuss the design, the points raised were recorded in an action log ultimately containing 137 items, 94% of which were partially or fully accommodated within the scheme. The team visited the High Street with group members to provide first-hand experience of using a wheelchair, guide dogs, canes etc. This enabled officers to make informed decisions based on a greater understanding of a range of conditions to ensure high levels of accessibility.

The group influenced the implementation of staff training, thus creating positive impacts for this as well as future projects across the district.

Accessibility is key, not only from an inclusion perspective, but also an economic perspective (disabled people in the UK have a spending power of circa. £274bn per annum (source: Scope) and as such,

traders and the local economy at large will benefit from an environment that is accessible to this spending power.

Shaping places for people: Please give evidence of the level of collaboration between place and people services (both within the council and with external partners/providers). (150 words max.)

Feedback from the group delivered a range of outcomes that have required collaboration and buy in from key stakeholders to include external design consultancy, construction and delivery teams, Traffic Regulation and enforcement, Public Transport providers, political and senior decision makers.

- Inclusion of a bus stop and shelter on the High Street, enabling access to facilities for people with limited mobility.
- Inclusion of 9 enforceable blue badge parking bays on the High Street.
- A range of street furniture designs to suit a range of accessibility needs.
- A reduction of street 'clutter' to enhance accessibility.
- Relocation of blue badge parking bays allowing close access to GP surgery and pharmacy.
- Additional dropped kerbs/tactile paving.
- Car park design included a blue badge EV charging bay (contributing to future-proofing for the needs of drivers with blue badges), additional parent and child bays and standard size parking bays.

Shaping places for people: Please give evidence of the level of buy-in to the project or its goals from members of the local community, health and social care and external organisations. (150 words max.)

Ultimately, the approach has been 'community conversation'. Group members actively engaged, whilst respecting each other's sometimes differing perspectives and views. The group committed to meetings, site visits, correspondence that provides insights, information, research, photos, observations and reports. Members of the group put forward their ideas and needs for their High Street across a series of meetings; on feeding the results back to the group, the response was "94% of our points have been accommodated - Wow!". Group members are fully aware that they have positively impacted their environment, with a legacy that is welcoming and accessible to all, made especially poignant with an ageing population – including an increasing disabled population.

Officers within the Local Authority continue to share learning with teams around this approach to highlight the benefits of community conversations.

Benefits of enhanced accessibility include greater independence for people which contribute to better health and social care outcomes.

Shaping places for people: Please give evidence of the use or consideration of new sources of investment to fund projects. (150 words max.)

In response to learning from the group, the Council has invested £27,000 in rolling out staff training in Access and Inclusive Design by the Centre for Accessible Environments.

Conversations in the working group have influenced the council's new Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy; this now details the provision of accessible charging points across the district and inclusion of charging infrastructure for blue badge spaces.

We have submitted a successful bid for funding for the implementation of new, additional Changing Places facilities across the district.

Learning has been documented for future projects.

The Council has also identified a practical, easy-to-use, accessibility toolkit for businesses and will

work with local businesses and the VCSE to identify funding to roll this out on the High Street and across the district.
Importantly, the council's reputation as an organisation working directly with the people it serves, listening and taking action in response, has been enhanced.