

SEMINAR

The External Environment and the Experiences of Disabled People

Proceedings of a Seminar held on 21 October 1986 at the Policy Studies Institute, London

ceh Centre on Environment for the Handicapped

CENTRE ON ENVIRONMENT FOR THE HANDICAPPED

CEH provides a specialist information and advisory service on the environmental needs of all handicapped people - the physically disabled, the mentally ill, the mentally handicapped, the elderly, blind and deaf people.

Our aim is to encourage environments which enable handicapped people to make the most of their lives. While our principal focus is on the built environment and the contribution to be made by thoughtful design, we are aware that good environments are the result of complex processes, and we seek to achieve our goals through informed communication and debate between handicapped people and those whose policy, design and management decisions help shape their world.

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THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT AND THE EXPERIENCES OF DISABLED PEOPLE

The Chairman, Sir Peter Lazarus, Permanent Secretary at the Department of Transport from 1982-85, welcomed the speakers and delegates to the seminar. He hoped this series would be enjoyable, interesting and above all useful.

Sir Peter said he became familiar with the problems covered by this series of seminars when he worked at the Department of Transport. He said it was important that the seminars were successful and produced useful results and he was pleased to chair them and to see what they could achieve.

This seminar was the first of four seminars on 'Disabled People in the External Environment'. The other three seminars would cover 'Pedestrianised Areas', 'The Orange Badge Scheme' and 'The Way Ahead'. Many of those present in the audience worked to prevent these problems and it was important that we heard the views of a number of people who suffer from these problems and of their experiences in order to make useful steps forward. This would be more productive than we ourselves judging what we think are the problems.

We were looking for new insights at this seminar but because essentially we were talking about disabled people and transport all of kinds and access to transport, and because Sir Peter spent most of his working life concerned with transport issues, he thought he might begin the series by telling a story which would throw some light on the problem. In the 1950s the traffic in London stopped. A beer lorry in Oxford Street had parked well out from the kerb so the barrels could be unloaded easily. It was very convenient for the operators but it blocked two traffic lanes. A badly parked car can cause queues and chaos whether or not it has an orange badge.

Sir Peter said transport was unlike other problems faced by disabled people. In many cases it is a question of resources - for instance WCs for the disabled could be provided if the money was available. However, in transport, particularly when we are discussing roads and parking spaces, the resources are finite. One cannot increase the amount of parking space on the street. If this cannot be increased then what we are talking about is sharing these spaces. There has to be a balance or compromise of some kind. Sir Peter believed that if anything useful is to be done we needed to find a balance which we can put to the authorities, which will be thought to be an acceptable and fair balance by both disabled people and able-bodied people.

Sir Peter stressed that he wanted this series to be useful. He emphasised the fact that these problems are not going to go away and they cannot be ignored. This is an opportunity which we could use successfully if we confronted the issues.

The Chairman introduced Miss Sarah Langton-Lockton, Director of the Centre on Environment for the Handicapped, who would give a brief outline of the organisation's aims and its aspirations for this series of seminars.

Miss Langton-Lockton said that CEH was concerned with environments and disabled people. CEH was committed to improving the environments disabled people use. We tackled this task in two ways: by giving out information and by operating as a forum.

There were two important words in our vocabulary - macroism and microism. The former is about environments which are convenient for everyone, including disabled people, and are exemplified by the new building regulation, intended to ensure that buildings are designed for the comfort and convenience of all the building's users among whom will be disabled people. Microism, which is how we have traditionally treated disabled people in Britain, is about diagnosing special needs and applying special solutions. In some circumstances, for instance house adaptations, microism is useful, but in other areas it can be problematic. Sarah Langton-Lockton hoped the principles of macroism and microism would illuminate discussions during this series of seminars.

Today CEH was meeting in its forum role, assisted by the Access Committee for England which the Government invited CEH to set up in 1953, and for which CEH provided the base. The Access Committee is a forum agency. Its membership comprises building owners, architects surveyors, planners, fire and building control officers, and people with individual experience of disability. The organisation has observers from many government departments and influential national bodies.

The Access Committee for England believed that environments should be accessible to all disabled people. However, it proceeded pragmatically, acknowledging that there are conflicts and it believed we must confront them honestly if we are to make progress. Macroism is essentially about concessions from all sides.

Sarah Langton-Lockton said it was good to see representatives of all the interests and influences who have a part to play in ensuring that external environments cater for us all. The timing of the series was opportune because it coincided with two Department of Transport consultation documents on the orange badge scheme and pedestrianisation.

The aims of this seminar were to listen to personal evidence which would form the basis of discussions at this and in subsequent seminars, and to engage in a forthright discussion which would culminate at the end of the series in constructive advice to the Department of Transport on the issues on which it seeks guidance. The aim was to obtain consensus where consensus was achievable, and to identify for the Department where a consensus was not obtainable. The slogan for this series might be 'Getting the Balance Right'.

THE EXPERIENCES OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN THE EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

The Chairman introduced Dr Patricia Pay, Vice Chairman of the Spinal Injuries Association.

In 1975 Patricia Pay broke her back at the base of the rib cage after a car accident. Two main consequences which affected mobility followed on from this. First, she cannot walk and, second, she suffers from incontinence. The latter is of crucial importance from the point of view of mobility because her bladder empties when it decides to, and she has very little control over it. This has been the most devastating problem to cope with and it colours everything she does in the external environment.

She gave an account of a typical day confronting these twin problems. Being able to drive a car is essential because she lives in the country. The car is a life-line and it allows her to be mobile and go to work. In her previous employment, her employer provided two WCs and two parking places at each end of the building, and her name was written on her parking spaces. However, at her present employment, her employer accepts the need to make space available, but this does not have her name written on it, instead it has the international disability symbol on it. This space was created in full accordance with the guidance available and it ought to work, but sadly there are many occasions when it does not. One day she went into work to find a car had parked in her place. This was not an orange badge holder and there was no other available place with the extra space in which to park. She therefore parked end-on across the car. Five minutes after this she was confronted by an angry colleague who said he was in a hurry and she had parked in his way. He was under the impression that anyone could park in a disabled person's place. This is one of the problems disabled people come up against in the external environment

Occasionally Dr Pay goes shopping, which takes a lot of time. In the middle of the town there are double yellow lines and there are no adequate spaces in the multi storey car park with enough room to get wheelchair out. She therefore

tends to use on-street parking, which is sufficient during the week, but two hours is not long enough. Or Saturday it is impossible.

Once she has parked the car she can cover a large distance unless badly paved areas and steep kerbs prevent her going far. The High Street is semi-pedestrianised and if she can get a parking place in this area she can get along most of the High Street. All other areas are out of bounds because of steep kerbs and poor paving. She tends to avoid going shopping on her own, for instance for a newspaper, because it can be very tiring getting in and out of the car with a wheelchair just to go ten yards across the pavement and then find that there are two steps to the shop and you cannot get in. It is easier to stay in the car and ask someone else to do it for you.

Dr Pay enjoys her leisure time. At the moment her main hobby is flying micro lights. This does not present a problem because the runway is smooth. However, other activities such as going to the theatre are more difficult, because there are steps everywhere which mean that her husband must carry her. The cinema is even worse.

Dr Pay tends to speak a lot at conferences. On these occasions one relies on the information provided by the organisers. If the environment is accessible then she is indistinguishable from anyone else, but if the doorway is too narrow or there are blockages, then she cannot get in. Her biggest problem is the well-meaning person who is convinced their premises are accessible, but when she arrives she finds she cannot get around the building. On one occasion she had to use a commode in a hotel corridor because the toilet provision was inadequate.

Motorway service stations can be very problematic. Often, badly designed doorways and WCs at the wrong height make life very difficult.

One of the main problems one must face in a wheelchair is the sudden feeling that one has become an object. One loses control over one's life and is unable to use facilities with the same convenience and dignity as everyone else. This can be devastating.

Dr Pay travels by train a great deal, but cannot use the WCs, so she must therefore use a portable urinal on the train. She has the nerve to do this, but many people who suffer from the effects of similar disabilities avoid these kind of train journeys and so are deprived of this service.

Patricia Pay leads a very active life despite the hostile external environments, but said that unless we have parking places, toilet provision and shopping areas which disabled people can use with confidence, then people will not have the

courage to get out and use the external environment. There is no reason why disabled people should be imprisoned in their own homes.

The Chairman thanked Dr Patricia Pay for her honest and detailed account of her experiences and said we were very grateful to her for giving such an excellent start to the series.

The Chairman introduced Mr Mike Brace, Social Services Team Leader, LB Islington. Mr Brace was going to give an account of some of his experiences of the external environment as a visually impaired person.

When Mr Brace was ten years old he had a firework accident which left him partially sighted until two years later when he became completely blind. Some of his experience has therefore been as a partially sighted person and latterly as a totally blind person.

Mr Brace spoke on some of the hazards which confront him on the street. In autumn his greatest problem is the position of trees, especially their leaves, thorns and branches. These can cause nasty facial and neck scratches. Another hazard is the position of a lamppost on the pavement. Often they are situated well in from the kerb and they can take up a lot of the pavement width. This can be very difficult and dangerous for a blind person.

Ramps can be very confusing because the visually impaired person does not know where they are supposed to be leading and does not know which way to turn. The provision of a rail on a ramp would alleviate this particular problem. Mr Brace recalled when the pavements on Oxford Street were ramped for the benefit of people in wheelchairs, but this meant that many blind people accidentally slipped off the pavement onto the road.

In Islington the council has confronted the problems of disabled people with regard to pavement car parking and have provided bollards to stop cars parking on the pavements. Unfortunately, many of the bollards were the same colour as the pavements and so people with a visual impairment could not see the difference between the pavements and bollards and walked into them. However, Mike Brace reported that these bollards have now been painted so they can be seen better.

Many of the problems associated with disability could be eliminated if more thought went into the planning of the environment - for instance, stairs could be colour contrasted, especially in subways. Visual contrast can be an important way of transmitting a warning. A number of British Rail stations have provided context contrast in some areas. The floor texture changes at the approach to a

stairway or escalator so the visually impaired person realises something is coming up which is potentially dangerous and can be prepared.

He stressed that lack of thought is a big problem. Many construction companies use diagonal scaffolding which sticks out over the pavement at the same height as the throat. A person using a cane or guide dog has no way of determining the existence of these harmful obstacles and they are an extremely dangerous hazard. Many other types of road works cause difficulty, for example, badly placed lamps are an unnecessary obstacle and holes in the pavement should always have barriers around them to prevent people falling in them. These kind of obstacles are not just hazardous for visually impaired people but are lethal too for elderly people and others. People should be alerted to these possible difficulties.

Too much space can also be a problem because it is difficult to orientate oneself and this can be daunting and frightening – for example, the concourse at Euston station has a lot of echoes with no audio clues to aim at. If there is a major noise like a fountain which one can concentrate on, then it is possible to work out one's location in relation to the noise.

In huge office blocks with many levels and corridors it is easy to get lost. Mike Brace suggested the use of colour contrasting on these occasions so that everyone would know which way they were facing and which floor they were on. One of the main difficulties is about using colour to the benefit of others.

In Tower Hamlets the road and pavements are in an appalling state and they pose major problems in terms of hazards. Small holes can cause a person to trip up and twist an ankle. Mr Brace was once walking in Tower Hamlets when someone told him to stop walking immediately - he then discovered that the pavement ended in front of him and there was a five-foot drop. There were no barriers or anything to indicate the existence of this hole.

For most people sight is their primary sense. When there is danger notices are generally put up without giving any thought to those who cannot see or read the notices and who need more physical warnings.

Mike Brace said the more he travels he realises that the situation is not getting any better. We must think about the environment and the people who need visual clues to problems so they have access to places and can move around in areas feeling as safe as anyone else.

The Chairman thanked Mr Mike Brace for his presentation.

The Chairman introduced Mr David Sindall, Employment Policy Officer, RADAR. Mr Sindall said he is hard of hearing and this can cause problems in communicating with people. Generally people do not understand hearing problems and often they do not notice the problem.

Mr Sindall said the range of topics covered so far do not seem to be problems for those who have hearing difficulties, for instance, pedestrianised areas. However, noise is the hearing impaired person's greatest problem in the external environment and it can be very confusing. Fountains and clocks in shopping centres cause people a great deal of difficulty. Hearing aids are primitive and pick up all sounds - fountains can cut out all other sounds. Floors in shopping centres and pedestrianised areas tend to be noisy and can cause echoes which can make communication impossible. If we did not use this type of flooring then we would have a better and more quiet environment.

Public transport can be very harrowing for the person with a hearing impairment. David Sindall finds that in train or coach stations there is no information to tell him where to go for his train and quite often displays which indicate changes in platforms do not operate efficiently. There are few adequate maps and guards tend to speak very quickly so it is difficult to understand them. In London people tend to rush and they do not have time to help. It is like being a foreigner in one's own country. He had just returned from France where he found people were much more helpful because they spoke clearly and slowly, there were many signs and maps and other types of visual indicators available.

Without signs and maps people tend not to bother going out because they do not like asking people the right direction, particularly if they suspect that people may be unhelpful. Mr Sindall had friends who do not go shopping because they become confused and do not know where to go for a bus to get home. They do not have the benefits of an orange badge or mobility allowance and so most of the time they either rely on someone else to go shopping with them or they spend their time wandering around shopping centres wasting their time.

New environments can cause even greater embarrassment, particularly in modern shopping centres where one can lose a sense of direction and waste more time asking people for directions, which can cause more delay and force problems to escalate.

When one discovers that a loop system has been introduced in a theatre one gets optimistic. On one occasion he visited the Watermans at Brentford which boasted of a loop system. When he got there he had great difficulty in locating the loop and when he did he discovered it did not work. No-one had taught the staff how to operate the system and turn it on.

Often people give assurances that the system will work but upon arrival one realises that it is not working or it has not been turned on. It should always be left on as a matter of course.

David Sindall believes the problems hearing impaired people experience in the external environment quite often conflict with those of other groups of disabled people. The environment can be improved for a person who experiences difficulty in hearing if visual clues are provided and by the eradication of background music, for instance, in supermarkets. It would be helpful if people could remember that if a person who is hard of hearing approaches them, they should speak slowly and clearly. It would also be helpful if sufficient visual information was provided so there is no need to go and look for help, and if public address systems were easier to hear. Loop systems should be checked regularly to ensure that they are functioning effectively.

The Chairman thanked Mr David Sindall for his discussion.

The Chairman introduced Mrs Crooke, Publicity Officer, National Federation of Old Age Pensions Association. Mrs Crooke has been involved with elderly people for 33 years.

She said that elderly people share many of the problems already mentioned by other speakers in their attempts to confront the external environment.

Modern shopping centres and busy railway stations can cause confusion, and disorientate an elderly person who may suffer from some form of sensory impairment. Often the fear of going out renders an elderly person a prisoner in his or her own home and this can have further psychological and emotional problems. This problem could be alleviated by more care and thought in the planning of buildings and shopping areas and by providing good acoustics, clear announcements and plenty of visual signs and notices and by using colour contrasting when possible.

Often elderly people cannot walk very far or they are dependent on a helper who is also frail. In these cases it is important that adequate parking space is provided as close to the shopping area as possible. The orange badge scheme is of vital importance in this respect, especially as public transport is not always the most convenient form of transport for the elderly. The London Underground, for instance, can be overcrowded, claustrophobic and with many steep steps to and from the platforms. Staff in stations or on buses do not always have the time or the understanding of an old person's problems and are therefore incapable of giving advice and information. This can be additionally frustrating.

Blockages on pavements can cause many problems for elderly people as well as for those who use pushchairs and those in wheelchairs or with walking aids. Inconsiderate shopkeepers tend to place their goods on the pavement where pedestrians are supposed to walk. Pavement cafes are another unnecessary pavement obstacle which must be overcome. Lampposts and bollards in the middle of pavements are also confusing and potentially hazardous. Similarly, cars which park on the pavement can cause difficulty for elderly people, and may force them to go on the road in order to pass by. This is very dangerous, particularly busy roads where cars hurtle by at great speeds.

Mrs Crooke stressed that a great deal of thought and imagination are necessary when people are designing and planning shopping areas so as to ensure the safety and convenience of elderly people.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Crooke for her presentation.

The Chairman introduced Mrs Anne Davies, Member of the Prince of Wales Advisory Group on Disability.

Twenty-five years ago Mrs Davies led a very active life. She was a solo singer and travelled a lot. She also had many other interests such as tennis, riding and swimming. When her daughter was eleven months old she developed multiple sclerosis. Shopping became a problem because parking spaces were such a long way from the shops. On one occasion she took a coach ride and found she could not get up the high step into the coach so had to crawl up.

After the introduction of the mobility allowance she found she could order a mini-cab and go shopping at a shopping centre. This became easier with the introduction of the orange badge scheme which meant she could go shopping in a friend's car, to a large shopping centre which had parking for those who had orange badges.

Multiple sclerosis is a progressive disease. On some days one feels unbelievable fatigue. The illness affects people in different ways, Anne Davies has difficulty in sitting up for a long period of time, and she also feels extremes of temperature very keenly.

Mrs Davies gave up driving, not only because she found it difficult getting in and out of the car, but because she felt she was a threat to other road users. She has never used buses or tubes during the time of her illness. Occasionally she uses the local dial-a-ride but finds this uncomfortable. London taxis are unsuitable for her because they lack the necessary space for a wheelchair and

she finds it difficult to keep upright. Her main means of transport is in other people's cars. For meetings in London she has a mini-cab firm who are familiar with her problems.

The weekly household shopping is done by a neighbour. If she wants to do some personal shopping, she must contact one of her friends who has the time to spare and the ability to push her wheelchair. Then they must decide where is the easiest and most convenient place for parking. She keeps her orange badge in her wallet and only displays it when she is in the car.

When she goes to a local meeting in Barnet there are never enough marked parking spaces and invariably one or two of these spaces are taken up by cars with no badges. This is very annoying and happens too often. If she cannot get into the designated parking spaces she must find another and this involves a long push, which is particularly nasty if it is raining or very cold.

Mrs Davies said she has found the police generally helpful throughout the country. Traffic wardens are not always helpful and some in London have been unhelpful. Their attitudes are occasionally unfriendly. She has carried the rules and regulations with her on many occasions because the traffic wardens never seem to know what they are. Another problem is trying to shop in those boroughs which do not recognise the orange badge.

In her travels around the country she likes to visit the stately homes. Many of them have car parks which are a long distance from the house and only disabled drivers are allowed to park nearer to the property; not orange badge holders. In these instances Anne Davies must be got out of the car near the house while her driver goes back to the car park and walks the distance to the house. By this time she is miserable and cold or sweltering in the heat - neither good for anyone with multiple sclerosis.

Mrs Davies recalled one occasion at a service station on the motorway when an RAC van was parked in the way of the ramp which led out of the car park. The RAC officer was rather rude and refused to move his van. People can be very difficult sometimes.

Anne Davies has had some unhappy experiences of pedestrianised zones because invariably one has to park on the outskirts of the town, if and when you can find a space. Then you have to be pushed a long way, which is difficult both for the person pushing and the person in the wheelchair, especially if the paving stones are broken and there are dropped kerbs. Returning to the car is even worse because of all the extra shopping to carry. This is the result of bad planning by developers.

Anne Davies prefers shopping centres which are like the one at Wood Green which has parking undercover and carefully marked out spaces for orange badge holders. At this particular parking area there is a large sign indicating a fine of £400 for anyone who misuses the spaces. She feels that one or two test cases would be useful to prevent abuse. This is an ideal undercover shopping centre with large lifts and you can get around very easily on both floors.

Mrs Davies also finds it useful to use her orange badge on the few occasions when she goes to the local supermarket. She can park on the main road right outside the shop. She could not do this without her orange badge.

Anne Davies said her main grievance is the lack of thought on the part of those who park in designated spaces and have no badges, and those who plan parking spaces too far away from shopping centres. The orange badge is vital and she would not be without it.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Davies for her presentation.

Q U E S T I O N S

The Chairman asked the audience if they had any questions to ask the speakers in the morning session.

Mr Florin, Technical Services Department, Mansfield DC, asked the speakers if they experienced any problems going in and out of multi-storey car parks. Mrs Davies said that sometimes the doors are very heavy to push open. Lifts are usually large enough but the controls tend to be out of reach. Sometimes she experiences nasty jolts when she is pushed over rough areas of the floor surface. Dr Pay said the main problem can be the texture of the floor which is sometimes difficult to get over. Thick carpets, pebbled streets and gravel are the worst offenders in this respect.

Mr A Kotnis, Urban Design Unit, Northampton BC, asked Mike Brace for his views on pavement cafes because his council was getting enquiries from traders who wanted to provide these. Mr Brace said the pavements were for pedestrians and cafes are a blockage because they take up space which is for the use of pedestrians. Pavement cafes are not a good idea unless there is some provision made for widening the pavement.

Mr R A Maylin, Principal Assistant Engineer, Wandsworth BC, asked the speakers for their views on the design of wheelchairs. Anne Davies said she finds her own wheelchair comfortable to be pushed in, but weight is the main

problem for pushers. All wheelchairs are built to go inside and out. Patricia Pay said that the DHSS has limited lists and there needs to be more imagination. Dr Pay finds her wheelchair is too heavy but the lighter ones are not British and therefore the DHSS will not supply them. If one does not fit the standard criteria then one is at the mercy of the private market and can make expensive mistakes. Mr Peter Large, Chairman of the Joint Committee on Mobility for the Disabled, said that the problems disabled people face in the external environment are not caused by the design of their wheelchairs. Mrs Nancy Robertson said that a wheelchair is a very individual thing.

Sir Peter Lazarus commented on the car park which Mrs Davies described which has a heavy fine for people who misused the spaces. He said a notice is better than a fine because enforcing parking legislation is not always very useful, and if a magistrate is generous to the offender then it may have a counter effect. A notice is a good method of preventing this type of abuse if people believe it.

Mr Neville Rees of the Department of Transport asked Mike Brace if he found the 'wandering kerbline syndrome' difficult and what were his prescriptions for it. Mike Brace said that often he cannot work out what is ahead and without some form of standardisation this is going to be worse.

The Chairman brought the question time to an end.

The Chairman introduced Nancy Robertson, Chairman of the Prince of Wales Advisory Group on Disability. Mrs Robertson suffered from polio when she was sixteen years-old. She has had experience of being able-bodied and this has helped a great deal. Polio affects the motor nerves and although she cannot move the lower parts of her body she does have feeling in them. Nancy Robertson has a disabled husband who is also in a wheelchair and therefore she does not have an able bodied helper. This can be difficult when she is wanting to park her car.

Nancy Robertson lives and works in London. Her journey to work takes her at least 90 minutes each way. This is very frustrating especially when the traffic is busy. The cars are the most valuable asset the family have from the point of view of mobility because they provide a great sense of freedom. They had previously benefited from using a trike - this was much better than a car both for parking and for loading and unloading a wheelchair. With a car one must find a place to park. The orange badge scheme is useless unless there is a place to park. Both Mr and Mrs Robertson have orange badges. Central London can be a major problem when it comes to find car parking space. Camden Council provided Mrs Robertson with a parking place outside her office, but often an

orange badge holder takes the place because it is not marked with her name. Frequently it is used by someone who has not got an orange badge.

She admitted that she does abuse her orange badge. If she wants to go shopping in Central London, it is unlikely that she will complete her shopping within two hours. Because there are so few parking places in London she generally parks illegally and stays longer than she ought to. She has had four tickets in central London and in each case she has written and explained the circumstances and in each case she has been cleared of any offence.

Mr and Mrs Robertson never use public transport except very occasionally when Mr Robertson uses the train because he has to travel around the country a lot. Trains can be a problem because one must get both to and from the station. They do not use buses at all. Although there are some accessible buses, one still has to get to and from the bus stop which is a major problem.

Because they are both disabled they must be independent and they both work. It can be quite difficult to combine work with running a home and shopping. They share their lifestyle between them, both do the shopping and cook. They find places like Brent Cross are super because they can do all their shopping under one roof. One can usually find a parking space and once inside the centre there are no thresholds in and out of shops or doors and hazardous baskets in the way. The shops stay open late which is a great asset if one is working full-time. However, if you are on a limited income this is not ideal because there is no opportunity to shop around for cheap offers. Large supermarkets like the huge Tesco at Neasden are excellent. The parking is good and one can get everything under the same roof.

Petrol stations are sometimes a major problem. There is one local garage with staff who will come out to serve them and there is a garage in Camden which is still not self-service. When away from home, the only way to get petrol is to ask a friendly motorist who is filling his or her own car. Staff at petrol stations are generally not happy about coming out of their kiosks to serve petrol.

One of the things she find difficult when wheeling around locally is kerbs. Uneven paving stones are also a great hazard particularly for people who are being pushed in a wheelchair.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Nancy Robertson for her presentation.

The Chairman introduced Mr John Dobinson, Access Director, Access Committee for England.

John Dobinson began by saying that disability can be very misleading. Although it appears that he can walk around, he cannot get up a step which is higher than two inches. His personal problems are the result of polio when he was four years-old. He has virtually had a lifetime's experience of disability. He was confined to a wheelchair from the ages of seven to eleven on the orders of a doctor; however, his mother pressed to make him as independent as possible. He attended an ordinary school until the age of eleven when we went to a school for physical handicapped children on the dubious grounds that he required physiotherapy. After school he fortunately found employment and now is married with an interesting job and a new car which he enjoys. At the other extreme he might have spent his life in a local authority day centre, dependent on the dial-a-rides and living in a hostel for physically handicapped people. These are the two polarities which society seems to offer a disabled person.

John Dobinson walks because if he sits in a wheelchair he immediately requires someone to push him and he therefore loses his independence. He walks at about one third of the pace of an able-bodied person and depending on the road surface he can walk for about 46 yards or one minute. He therefore qualifies for an orange badge.

He then gave an outline of the problems he experiences in the external environment. Distances, terrain and climate (in wet weather it is more difficult to walk about and can be dangerous) are problems he must overcome. Crowds are also a problem.

John Dobinson showed some slides of a typical week in his life. The first slide showed his home - an adapted ground-floor flat. The next slide showed the post office in Hayes, his local town. There is a dropped kerb and a step to the entrance which makes it inaccessible. The steep road also makes it extremely difficult to negotiate.

Another slide showed the local shopping parade at which he does most of his local shopping. It is a one-way service road with parking on one side. The kerb is impossible to get up and he must abuse the parking regulations and park on the pavement of the wrong side of the road in order to get out of his car easily.

He then showed a slide of the Tesco supermarket at Brent Park. This is a huge supermarket with 47 checkouts and a massive amount of parking including ample space for orange badge holders.

Mr Dobinson gave an account of the local facilities he uses. He tends to go to the local newsagents and this is accessible. He makes a supermarket trip once a week to stock up. Generally he goes to Waitrose or Sainsbury's at Uxbridge

which is pedestrianised. He tends to do his Christmas shopping at Brent Cross, Slough or Ealing Broadway. This depends on where he can park in relation to the shops he wants to go to and the availability of parking.

There are a number of large shopping developments going on all over the country. The potential for good venues to shop is increasing all the time, but this should be combined with the provision of adequate facilities such as resting places and car parking in close proximity to the shopping centres.

The Chairman thanked Mr John Dobinson for his interesting, stimulating and provocative discussion.

DISCUSSION

The Chairman began the discussion period by asking the audience for their views about the conflicts that exist between the needs of those who are disabled and those who are able bodied, and between people with different kinds of disability - with visual and hearing difficulties. He invited people with experience to comment on the problems we have to face in putting forward a balanced or majority view which would be the best way of utilising the available resources.

Councillor Walker from Blaenau Gwent said local authorities and other agencies must do a great deal of work. This does not necessarily mean more expenditure, but more thought and care. The Chairman said this is correct, but there are about 800,000 orange badges according to Department of Transport statistics and only a certain amount of parking space available. We need to look for a middle way.

A delegate said he was not sure that a conflict existed between disabled and able-bodied people because the vast majority of improvements which are necessary would be to the benefit of able-bodied people too.

Mrs Crooke suggested a ban on traffic in London. The Chairman said this was difficult because there is no practical way of implementing the ban.

One delegate said he has an orange badge on his car and in his experience Westminster and Camden are not no-go areas. He regularly uses his car in these areas, but first he tries to find a traffic warden in order to inform someone where he intends to park. Until 1986 he had never received a parking ticket, but this year he has been given three. On each occasion he wrote a letter to the authority and received one back admonishing him for his offence. Mr Goldsmith asked if

anyone in the audience had been fined for abusing their orange badge. No-one said they had been fined.

Mr Frank Florin, Mansfield DC, said his experiences have revealed that if good facilities are provided the demand for them will be greater. In Mansfield there is insufficient space for parking near pedestrianised areas for orange badge holders. In response to this problem the council have tried to create two types of spaces in car parks for orange badge holders, for those who are in wheelchairs and those disabled people who do not need a wheelchair. The council has tried to make it an offence for an orange badge holder who is not in a wheelchair to use a space designated wide enough for a wheelchair, and so far this system has not been abused.

John Dobinson commented on the width of parking bays. He said he understood the rationale of the Mansfield scheme, but he has found that an ordinary parking space is not wide enough for him to get out of his car with ease, and so he would need to use one of the spaces designated for wheelchair users only, although he himself does not need a wheelchair. He hoped people would not be prosecuted on this basis. Mr Dobinson added that these kind of problems are a symptom of Mansfield's success as a shopping centre.

Mr Martin Smith, LB Hillingdon, said disabled people should be involved with the planning of projects from the very beginning. Dr Patricia Pay said in these instances the role of the access officer is vital. Mr Tim Shapley of the Joint Committee on Mobility for the Disabled hoped that one day there would be an Association of Access officers, and they would have annual meetings to discuss problems and exchange ideas. The Chairman said this was a very good idea because it can be very expensive to learn from one's own mistakes, and it was much better to have some kind of forum at which to share experiences and learn from other people's mistakes.

John Dobinson commented on the potential conflict between the needs of disabled people in terms of flush thresholds and dropped kerbs at crossing points and the needs of blind people for upstands, and other potential conflicts within the built environment. He asked if there really was a conflict and asked if practical attempts at resolving these conflicts were successful.

Mrs Nancy Robertson said this had been discussed within her borough. She said people who were visually handicapped and used guide dogs conceded that people in wheelchairs needed dropped pavements. It was generally felt that the needs of the latter group were greater. However, a compromise has been reached which means that the slope in the kerb is off the corner so the wheelchair can get down, but a blind person can still use the kerb as a guide.

Tim Shapley said the provision of textured surfaces at pedestrian crossings which was recommended in a recent Department of Transport circular was a good way of resolving this conflict. He was alarmed that the Department clearly stated textured surfaces should not be used at other areas. Mr Shapley said in some dangerous places, road junctions for example, textured surfaces should be provided. He said that the lowered kerb was one way of making the environment less hostile for people in wheelchairs and those who are visually impaired. The Chairman said we needed national standards in this area otherwise people may be confused when they visit an unfamiliar town or city.

Mr. Maylin, Wandsworth BC, said his authority had been one of those who experimented with textured surfaces at pedestrian crossings. Bumpy or blistered road surfaces were put down in several parts of the Wandsworth area. While they were down the council received many complaints about them from the public: people claimed that the bumps hurt their feet. Elderly people were not very happy with them. Others said the bumps vibrated their pushchairs and shopping trolleys. As a result of this barrage of complaints Wandsworth BC terminated the experiment and removed the textured surfaces.

Tim Shapley said although textured surfaces are difficult for people in wheelchairs to push over, they are perfectly happy to put up with the discomfort in order to help visually impaired people walk around safely. The able-bodied should also be prepared to accept this.

The Chairman brought the discussion period to a close. He thanked everyone for an interesting day and said he looked forward to seeing delegates again at the other seminars. He thanked the speakers for ensuring that the day was interesting and helpful.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

CHAIRMAN

Sir Peter Lazarus KCB
Permanent Secretary
Department of Transport 1982-8'

SPEAKERS

Mr Mike Brace
Social Services Team Leader
LB Islington

Mrs Crooke
Publicity Officer
National Federation of Old Age
Pensions Association

Mrs Anne Davies
Member
Prince of Wales Advisory Group
on Disability

Mr John Dobinson
Access Director
Access Committee for England

Mr Selwyn Goldsmith
Department of the Environment

Dr Patricia Pay
Vice Chairman
Spinal Injuries Association

Mrs Nancy Robertson
Director
Prince of Wales Advisory Group
on Disability

Mr David Sindall
Employment Policy Officer
RADAR

PARTICIPANTS

Councillor S Bartlett
Vice-Chairman, Environmental He
Blaenau Gwent BC

Mr John Bell
OUTSET

Mr Dennis Bradley	Group Planner LB Newham
Mrs A Brown	Technical Services Dept Wolverhampton BC
Mr Sean Burke	London Strategic Policy Unit
Ms Michelle Cameron	Department of Transport
Ms Marian Daghish	Services Manager LB Ealing
Mr J Devonport	Access Liaison Officer Derby City Council
Mr A Eaton	Environmental Officer Automobile Association
Mrs E England	Bolton MBC
Mr J P Evans	Director of Social Services Powys CC
Mr Florin	Director of Technical Services Mansfield DC
Mr H Gunnel	Department of the Environment
Mr G Hainsworth	Principal BCO Canterbury City Council
Mrs Judy Harris	Planning Assistant LB Ealing
Mr D D Heading	Princ Development Control Offr Cambridge City Council
Mr Peter Heath	Principal Architect - Planner LB Westminster
Mr Neil Kirk	Officer Reading BC

A Kotnis	Section Head Urban Design Unit Northampton BC
Mr Peter Large	Chairman JCMD
Ms Joanna Lloyd	Planner Southwark Development
Mr Barry Louth	Principal Transport Planner LB Camden
Mrs Ann Magrath	Instructor/Surveyor Hampshire CC
Mr A Martin	Dept of Development LB Waltham Forest
Mr R A Maylin	Principal Assistant Engineer Wandsworth BC
Mr John Morgan	Architectural Technician LB Hillingdon
Mr A M Lewis	Technical Services Dept Wolverhampton MBC
Mr J Read	Dept of Development LB Waltham Forest
Councillor J Roden	Chairman, Env Hlth Committee Blaenau Gwent BC
Mr Martin Smith	Team Manager LB Hillingdon
Miss Mary Samuel	London Strategic Policy Unit
Miss Melony Samuels	London Strategic Policy Unit
Sandwell MBC Representative	
Mr Tim Shapley	Secretary JCMD

Mr D Short	Asst Chief Planning Officer Macclesfield BC
Mr Ian Stanton	Disability Action Group Oldham MBC
Ms Beverley Taylor	Team Co-ordinator London Strategic Policy Unit
Mr D Thomas	Principal Engineer Plymouth City Council
Mr Welch	Engineer LB Hammersmith and Fulham
Ms W Young	Equal Opportunities Officer Nottingham City Council
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Ms Eileen Brannon	Seminar Secretary
Ms Sally Davies	Administrative Officer
Mr Andrew Lacey	Information Officer
Miss Sarah Langton-Lockton	Director
Ms Alice Noon	Seminar Officer