

Our disabled Forum members vary so much in the severity of their impairments and also in the number and complexity of them. Some are confident enough to be unaccompanied when out and about, while others need one or two carers or personal assistants with them at all times. For social or leisure events clearly disabled people want to participate, but some disabled people would like to attend such events with friends who share the same or similar impairments.

Showcase de lux screens are very good regarding their management of viewings for disabled people but the wheelchair spaces are all at the front. Not all disabled people have sufficiently strong necks to watch a 2 hour film ! A married couple who both use wheelchairs cannot sit together in their local cinema, as there are only 2 single wheelchair spaces, one at the front and one at the back.

A visually and hearing impaired member, and his Guide dog, entered a new further education building on his own for the first time. The wide reception desk had four work stations, but he didn't know which one to approach. Our member felt anxious and uncomfortable as there was no switched on hearing loop for him to be able to communicate with the reception staff members.

A 14 year old quadriplegic, taking part in a birthday party trip to a new local leisure centre, requires his family to establish in advance that a suitable toilet exists, called a Changing Places room. If that same teenager wants to go poolside with his family or friends, he cannot as the leisure centre has no hoist and changing table for him to use.

Another member tells of a new hotel extension in York which he attended for a family wedding. He went to the new narrow disabled toilet on his own, used it but then could not rotate his wheelchair to exit the cubicle. By the time he opened the door by reaching behind chair, then moved his hands to propel the wheelchair in reverse the door closed, as the closing mechanism was too powerful.

Being unable to find a hotel that has a bedroom with a hoist, to transfer from wheelchair to toilet or bed, regularly prevents our members from finding overnight accommodation in the right location. New hotels are now advised to include at least one bedroom with a ceiling hoist and track. These cannot come soon enough, nationally as well as locally.

Finally a local restaurant and pub, on the first floor of a listed building, was extensively refurbished and extended making it one of the largest restaurants, pub and music venue in town. No means of avoiding the staircase at the entrance was installed, leaving several of our mobility impaired forum members unable to enter.

Hidden impairments are probably the most difficult issue for architects to take into account in a new development. For many in this group the consideration given to lighting, background noise and visual clutter determines if they can, or cannot use a building.

All of these examples are distressing to our members, who often find that they cannot participate in social events due to the built environment failing to meet their needs. Every time a disabled person experiences shortcomings in the built environment they lose confidence in leaving home, increasing their social isolation.