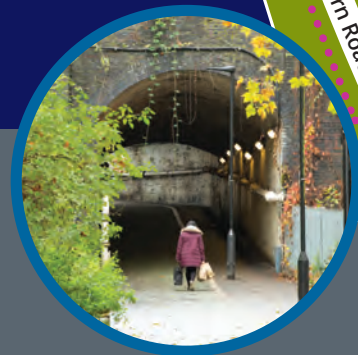


# Wood Green Places

Accessible and  
multi-sensory guided tours



## Introduction

To understand how Wood Green can become a better place for people with disabilities to live, work and visit, Haringey Council's Regeneration team asked Public Voice to run a small number of guided tours of the area.

The purpose of these tours was to identify places and spaces in Wood Green that are currently less accessible and to gather ideas for specific projects that could make the area more pleasant and welcoming now and in the future for people with a diverse range of disabilities.

Three tours took place with 19 participants in total:

Guided tours			
Date	Time	Who was the tour for	Number of people who attended
Wednesday 5th September 2018	10.30am-12.30pm	People with a learning disability	13
Friday 7th September 2018	2.30pm-4.30pm	People with a physical/ mobility disability	5
Friday 7th December 2018	10.30am-12.30pm	People with a sensory impairment	1

This report summarises the comments made during the three tours. All comments have also been recorded on the 'Wood Green Places' heatmap and clearly labelled as feedback from a Public Voice guided tour.



## About the tours

Accessible and  
multi-sensory  
Wood Green  
guided tour route



The tours started in Blue House Yard on Station Road and followed a circular route from the High Road to the Cultural Quarter in the west, taking in the Penstock foot tunnel, before returning to Blue House Yard along Station Road.

The route chosen was similar to the 'Find Wood Green' treasure hunt route from the London Festival of Architecture Weekend in 2018, and was designed to allow people joining us on the tours to explore a route that will eventually become a more popular walking route as the Cultural Quarter, new housing on the Clarendon Gasworks site and links with Alexandra Park and Palace develop.

The tours were led by a member of Public Voice staff, with support on some tours from other staff, including those with specialist skills supporting people with learning disabilities.

During the tours, the 'tour guide' asked people to point out places and spaces that are difficult to navigate and feel uncomfortable or unfriendly, and ones that are easy to navigate and enjoyable to be in.

In addition, the tour stopped off at some key points to prompt feedback on these spaces. The main stopping points were:

- Blue House Yard
- The crossing outside Wood Green tube station
- Outside Wood Green Library (for feedback on the High Road)
- The junction of Caxton Road and Parkland Road
- Karamel (for feedback on the Cultural Quarter)
- Penstock Foot Tunnel
- Barratt Gardens/Wood Green Common

## Challenges

Although running tours rather than focus groups or meetings allowed people with disabilities to explore Wood Green and comment on the space while they were physically in it, it did also present some challenges. People with a visual impairment found it difficult to locate the tour group at the meeting point in Blue House Yard, resulting in the final tour for people with a sensory impairment having to be reorganised after no tour group members were able to find the Public Voice staff member. The tours were also quite weather-dependent, with cold or wet weather deterring some people. Finally, we heard from some tour members that others who had been invited had decided not to come because they did not like spending time in Wood Green.



The crossing outside Wood Green tube station



## Project advisory group

The planning of the tours and drafting of the final report was supported by a project advisory group, including representatives from the following groups and organisations<sup>1</sup>:

- We Are The 14 Percent
- Personal Budget Users Forum
- Haringey Association for Independent Living (HAIL)
- Learning Disability Reference Group
- Area 51
- North London Vision

The group were responsible for commenting on the proposed route and format for the tours, helping to promote the tours and recruit participants, reviewing and signing off the final report.

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<sup>1</sup> Also invited: Haringey Deaf Services and Haringey Phoenix Group

## How do people with disabilities feel about Wood Green? A summary

There were a tiny handful of positive comments – Karamel is a welcoming and friendly environment for people with learning disabilities, and shop staff can be helpful to people with a visual impairment – but Wood Green still has a long way to go to be a truly accessible place, where people with disabilities are able to move around the town centre with the same ease as able-bodied people.

Access to shops and buildings is very varied with access to some of the more attractive destinations in Wood Green – including the Green Rooms Hotel, Blue House Yard and Vue Cinema – extremely limited.

Efforts to improve accessibility, such as ramped entrances, lifts, dropped kerbs and tactile pavements, are not always successful and sometimes create problems of their own (such as ramped entrances that become slippery in rain or snow, lifts from street level that need a member of staff to come and unlock them and dropped kerbs that are too steep and that some wheelchair users feel more comfortable backing down and then turning in the road). Road crossings currently favour vehicles over pedestrians and this is even more difficult for people with a disability who may need a little more time to cross the road. Some traffic islands are not wide enough for a wheelchair to fit, leaving wheelchair users and carers or assistants sticking out into oncoming traffic.

Many road crossings do not work for people who are blind or sight impaired, resulting in people taking much longer routes – or getting buses, or shopping in completely different areas – to avoid them.

Some of the issues highlighted during the tours – including issues around crime and safety, litter, signposting and the need to improve the general appearance of Wood Green – are not unique to people with a disability, and echo comments made by other visitors to the 'Wood Green Places' heatmap.

The sections below present the comments and feedback that people shared during the tours. This revealed some key aspects of the town centre as a whole that could be improved, as well as some specific areas – or 'hotspots' – that are particularly problematic for people with a disability.

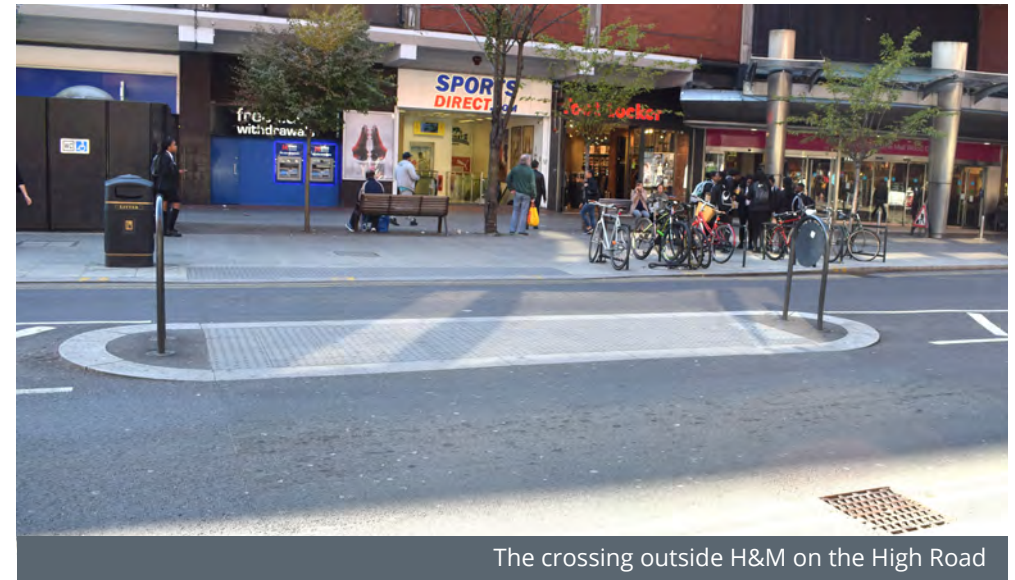
## Which aspects of Wood Green do people with disabilities feel need to be improved?

Tour members identified six key aspects of Wood Green that need attention in order to improve the area for people with a disability:

1. Road crossings
2. Access to shops and buildings
3. Pavements and surfaces
4. Safety
5. Appearance
6. Signposting

### Road crossings

- **Traffic lights do not allow enough time for people to cross the road.** This was particularly true of the pelican crossing on Mayes Road in between Caxton and Coburg Road, where people only have 5 seconds to cross the road, which was not enough time for slower walkers to cross. However, it was also a problem with some of the individual crossings outside Wood Green tube and elsewhere. Suggestions that were made for remedying this included giving pedestrians more time to cross the road, having a separate button to press that gives you extra time to cross or a subway crossing outside Wood Green tube similar to the one at Turnpike Lane (except with ramps), so that people can go under the road rather than over it.



The crossing outside H&M on the High Road

- **Some traffic islands are not wide enough for a wheelchair user to fit.** This applies to both bigger electric wheelchairs and smaller manual wheelchairs with another person stood behind, and can leave wheelchair users with their heads or feet sticking out into traffic. This was mentioned at the Wood Green tube crossing, but applies to traffic islands further down the High Road as well. One person with a visual impairment said that she is not comfortable crossing at traffic islands, as she has heard of people being hit while standing on these.

It would be better if some crossings with traffic islands were replaced by pelican crossings at locations that are especially dangerous for people with a sight impairment.

- **Wheelchair users are currently using driveways and car park entrances as crossing points away from the town centre.** These are often the only places where there are dropped kerbs between the pavement and the road, but as these are primarily for cars and other vehicles, there is still a bump between the pavement and the road. These entranceways are often not directly opposite each other, meaning that wheelchair users are forced to cross diagonally.



The crossing outside River Park House

- **Most dropped kerbs are not well-designed.** Some are very steep and dropped kerbs on corners are often also on a two-way slant, which can be tricky for wheelchair users to approach. Many dropped kerbs are not completely flush with the road, so there is still a lip to get over – in some cases, a substantial one – and puddles can form at the edge of the road as an added obstacle. It was suggested that some major crossings (such as the one outside of Wood Green tube) could become speed tables with raised crossings that are flush with the pavement, so that cars and vehicles change level rather than wheelchair users and other pedestrians.
- **Pelican crossings could be improved for people who are visually impaired.** The crossing sounds need to be louder and lights need to be brighter so that they are easier to see. This was commented on at crossings on Mayes Road (near Coburg Road), near Spouters Corner on the High Road and Station Road (next to Green Side House). One person with a visual impairment said that where there are double crossings (e.g. crossing Westbury Road at Turnpike Lane), she prefers these to be straight rather than having to cross one lane then walk along a bit to cross the next.





Vehicle entrance/exit to The Mall

- **Some other road crossings rely on pedestrians to look out for cars before crossing** – this does not work for somebody with a visual impairment. This was particularly true at T-junctions where there are no lights and traffic is coming from three different directions. Specific examples included the junction of Gladstone Avenue and the High Road, Parkland Road and Station Road and Cumberland Road and Station Road. This last one is particularly dangerous as to avoid the steps down from the pavement, people end up crossing on a blind corner.
- **The material used for tactile pavements at road crossings is not suitable.** It needs to be a lighter colour that contrasts with the colour of the pavement so that it is more visible to people who are partially sighted. The concrete can also become slippery for wheelchairs when



The corner between Caxton Road and Mayes Road

wet – it was noted that in the Netherlands, a slip-resistant rubber surface is used instead, which provides more grip for wheelchairs.

- **There are a lot of vehicle entrances onto pavements away from the High Road.** This is particularly the case on Caxton Road, where vehicles are entering and exiting both the Mall car park and the delivery entrance to the Mall. These entrances currently do not have proper zebra crossings or anything to warn pedestrians that they are there or to prompt drivers to slow down. One person suggested having curved mirrors at these entrances so that drivers can see pedestrians more easily. One person with a visual impairment said that she would not come here unless there was a proper road crossing.

- **There is no crossing point to get across Station Road to the Blue House Yard.** If people want to cross the road to Blue House Yard, they have to walk all the way down to the tube station or all the way up to Barratt Gardens and then back again. Other access points to Blue House Yard (e.g. Cumberland Road) also have difficult crossings.
- **The traffic lights on Mayes Road in between Coburg and Caxton Roads have a gap between the green and red man.** This gap means there are several seconds when it is not clear to pedestrians whether or not they should cross the road.
- **It is difficult to see round the corner between Caxton Road and Mayes Road.** The blue hoarding around the empty land on Caxton Road blocks sight lines, making it more dangerous to cross as cars and pedestrians cannot see each other coming.
- **There are too many road crossings around Barratt Gardens.** To get from Western Road back to Station Road involves three road crossings – two with narrow traffic islands in the middle. One wheelchair user on the physical disability tour cut back to the town centre along Mayes Road to avoid these crossings. Another person with a visual impairment said that she would normally walk down Mayes Road to use the pelican crossing rather than the crossings here – particularly the two with traffic islands at the roundabout where Mayes Road joins Station Road. She said that crossing here involved too much turning to look for cars coming from different directions.



Good example of a crossing, this one on Western Road



## Access to shops and buildings

- A lot of shops and restaurants on the High Road have a step up to get into them. This seemed to be worst on the stretch of shops between Morrison's and the library, but better on the opposite side of the road. Independent businesses were particularly bad. It was suggested on the physical disability tour that as condition of being granted a new license, all businesses should make their buildings wheelchair accessible to customers.



Shop entrances on the High Road

- **Wheelchair users need to attract staff attention to access some buildings.** The Green Rooms Hotel has a side door with step-free access, but a member of staff needs to come and unlock it and move tables and chairs aside to allow a wheelchair user through. The Vue Cinema has a lift from street level but again, this needs a member of staff to unlock it – there used to be a bell for people to ring but this has been disconnected. One wheelchair user said that in the past she has had to ask strangers to go upstairs and find a member of staff to come down and unlock the lift. Another person says that she does not go to the Vue any more, partly for this reason.



The entrance to Wood Green Library

- **Some ramped entrances to buildings are too steep and can become slippery in rain or snow.** The back entrance to Morrisons was mentioned – the sloped entrance to Blue House Yard from Station Road is also extremely difficult to use, see comments under 'hotspots' below.
- **Some improvements could be made to the facilities at Wood Green Library.** Access to the library building is generally good, but some people felt that the lift may be too small for a larger wheelchair, the main toilets are upstairs and the downstairs one is often quite messy, and all of the tables and computers are too high for a wheelchair user.

- **Karamel feels very welcoming, but could be more accessible.** People with a learning disability commented that Karamel felt very friendly and welcoming, but there are steps to the ladies and gents toilets and no sign to point people in the direction of the accessible toilet, which is in a different place. Wheelchair users can only get in through the front door when staff place a folding ramp down. Without the ramp down, the slight step up at the front door is a trip hazard for people with a visual impairment.
- **The Community Hub is completely inaccessible to wheelchair users and others.** A wheelchair can get in the front door, but no further as there is no lift and the ground floor doors are not wide enough to allow a wheelchair through. The stairs to the upper floor are very steep and people may struggle to climb these – particularly elderly people. This means that the classes and activities on offer through the Hub are off-limits to many people with a physical disability.
- **There is currently (September 2018) no ramped access to Wood Green Jobcentre.** This means that wheelchair users currently have to speak to an advisor at the side door, with no privacy.
- **Staff in shops in the town centre can be helpful.** One person with a visual impairment said that when she shows her registered blind card, staff show her where to find things.

## Pavements and surfaces

- **A lot of ironworks are not flush with the pavement.** They are either raised or set into the pavement. This creates an uneven surface for wheelchair users.
- **There are some sections of tactile pavement that do not need to be there.** This was spotted at either end of Caxton Road, but there are other examples along the High Road. This could potentially give the wrong message to a blind or partially sighted person.
- **Some pavements are very narrow.** The left hand side of Western Road between the Penstock tunnel and the recycling centre was highlighted, as this is currently too narrow for a wheelchair. However many areas of pavement away from the High Road are too narrow for two wheelchair users or a wheelchair user and someone who is ambulant to fit side-by-side – including on Western Road, Coburg Road and Caxton Road. One person with a visual impairment said that she avoid narrow pavements as other people bump into you when you are walking past them – if she can hear that there is no traffic on a quiet road, she will walk in the road instead.





- **There are bollards in the road in some places that are not very visible to people who are partially sighted.** These include black bollards next to the front entrance to Morrison's on the High Road and silver bollards to mark the cycle lane on Mayes Road. Painting the tops of these white in the case of the more traditional black bollards or red for the silver bollards could help make them more visible – particularly in low light. Some of these bollards appeared to have been painted previously but had not been maintained.
- **There is currently (September 2018) some scaffolding outside one of the shops on the High Road.** This sticks out into the pavement, but does not have flashing lights on it to make it more visible to someone who is partially sighted. One person commented that pedestrian



Cobbled section of pavement on Coburg Road

routes around building works can be very confusing for someone with a visual impairment.

- **There is a cobbled section of pavement on Coburg Road next to the Duke of Edinburgh pub.** This has a large step down to it from the pavement on either side and is extremely difficult for wheelchair users to cross.
- **There are some sections of pavement that are broken or uneven.** This was noted around Barratt Gardens on Station Road and Mayes Road. This is another area where upkeep and maintenance would ensure that streets remain accessible for people with physical and sensory disabilities.



## Safety

- **Many people with disabilities do not come to Wood Green at all.** On both the learning disability and physical disability tours, we heard of several people who had been invited to attend, but said that they avoided coming to Wood Green altogether because it does not feel safe and is not a nice place to be. People with a learning disability, in particular, can feel isolated, at risk and scared of getting verbal abuse. On the sensory impairment tour, one person who was partially sighted said that she travelled to Iceland in Edmonton rather than shopping at the one in Wood Green because she was scared to cross the road using the traffic islands on Mayes Road.
- **Most people would not come to the Cultural Quarter at night.** Although people were happy to come here during the day when it was light, people said that at night this area is too quiet, poorly lit and feels very industrial. There are quite a lot of overgrown hedges and hidden doorways (particularly next to the old Mountview Theatre School), which can make people feel quite intimidated when they are walking alone, as it is more difficult to see who else is around. It was suggested that places like Karamel could become 'safe places' under the national Safe Places scheme. One person with a visual impairment said that she also does not tend to go out after dark due to low visibility. This means that people with disabilities are less likely to benefit from any future improvements to the 'evening economy' in Wood Green.
- **There are problems with crime and people 'hanging around' in some parts of the town centre** – in particular, the passage next to the library (see hotspots below).

## Appearance

- **The town centre looks quite run down. It needs more 'scenery', such as plants and sculptures.** The High Road could also be part-pedestrianised (only accessible to buses) to make it a nicer space.
- **There are no bins once you get away from the High Road.** As a result there is more rubbish on pavements.
- **Wood Green Library looks very uninviting.** At the time of the tours (September 2018), one of the front windows was boarded up and the library sign was obscured by plants, making it difficult to read. People commented that the library sign is over the shopping arcade rather than the library part of the building and that the signs for the Co-op bank and the shopping arcade stand out more than the library sign does. If the library looked more inviting with its own entrance and a picture of a book, people with a learning disability would be more likely to go in and use it.



The entrance to Wood Green Library with signage

## Signposting

- **There are no signs to the Cultural Quarter from the town centre.**  
Most people on the tours had never been to this area of Wood Green before and said that they would never have found it if they had not been following someone else. Similarly, most people were not aware of what was in the Cultural Quarter for people to visit, including Karamel and the Chocolate Factory. One person on the learning disability tour suggested holding an 'Edinburgh Fringe'-style festival in the Cultural Quarter with stalls and street performances, which would give people a reason to come and explore the area.
- **The route to Alexandra Park through the Penstock foot tunnel is also not well signed.** Several people asked where the tunnel came out on the other side of the railway and there was a feeling that the area on the far side of the tunnel could be made into more of a destination (see further comments under the Penstock foot tunnel 'hotspot' on page 17).



## What were the 'hotspots'?

There were some specific areas visited during the tours that received a lot of comments ('hotspots') and which could be a priority focus for improving the overall accessibility of Wood Green. These were: the Blue House Yard, the crossing outside Wood Green tube, the passage next to the library and the Penstock foot tunnel.



### Blue House Yard

- **The sloped entrance to Blue House Yard from Station Road is too steep and very awkward and dangerous for a wheelchair user.** People on the physical disability tour expressed serious concerns about this ramp and queried whether it was compliant with the maximum gradient for a wheelchair ramp. There is also only a small space behind the bus café for a wheelchair to fit through. Members of the physical disability tour found this ramp too difficult to use when leaving Blue House Yard at the beginning of the tour and chose to exit onto River Park Road and through the River Park House car park instead.
- **Only one of the shops in Blue House Yard has a permanent ramp.** The other shops have a step to get into them. Although the bus café has a serving hatch, a wheelchair user or anyone else who struggles with stairs would not be able to sit inside to eat, drink or play a board game.



Blue House Yard



- **The ground surface in Blue House Yard is very uneven.** There are lots of potholes and a gravel area in front of the Blue House itself that is difficult to cross in a wheelchair.

### The crossing outside Wood Green tube

As well as all of the general feedback about road crossings above, there was some additional feedback that was specific to this major crossing.



The crossing outside Wood Green tube station

- **There are too many separate crossings.** This makes it confusing for people to know which set of lights they should be looking at when they cross the road. This issue was raised on the tour for people with a learning disability – one person suggested having some simple arrows pointing in the direction you need to cross.
- **There are no sounds to tell you when to cross.** None of the crossings at this junction beep when the lights are green for pedestrians, which makes it more difficult for people who are blind or partially sighted to know when to cross the road – and can also mean that people who need longer to cross the road are caught unawares and have less time to cross.
- **The diagonal crossing is particularly difficult.** People on both the physical and learning disability tours said that they never used this crossing as there is not enough time to get across the road. However, one person with a visual impairment had a different experience and said that she found the diagonal crossing easier to use because when this crossing is green all the traffic is stopped at the same time.

### The passage next to the library

- **There is no separate cycle lane.** This means that cyclists and pedestrians are getting in each other's way – particularly where the passage opens onto Caxton Road, as this end is very narrow.
- **It needs better lighting.** One person with a visual impairment said that she would not come here on her own after dark – both for reasons of safety and low visibility.
- **There are problems with crime in this area.** People on the physical disability tour mentioned drug activity and prostitution.
- **It is not a pleasant place.** People commented that it smelled bad and one person described it as 'murky and nasty'.
- **Any murals or wall decorations need to be in colours that are highly visible to people who are sight impaired.** For one person with a sight impairment, this would mean a very bright white – but all visual impairments are different, so for someone else a different colour might be better.



### Penstock foot tunnel route

Note that 'Penstock foot tunnel' here is used to refer to the whole tunnel area including the approach to the tunnel on Western Road and the path on the far (west) side of the tunnel.

- **The foot tunnel is very steep.** Although it was recognised that it is difficult to change this, it was suggested that there could be stopping points (flat areas at intervals) or seating at the top of the tunnel where people – including wheelchair users – could stop and rest.
- **The tunnel is currently dominated by a cycle lane.** The cycle lane is twice as wide as the pedestrian lane, and once you are in the tunnel the green colour of the cycle lane is not very obvious, nor is it clear where the cycle lane ends at the top of the tunnel and the path narrows and becomes shared use again. There need to be large curved mirrors at the top of the tunnel so that cyclists and pedestrians can see each other around the corner. The bike symbol painted on the ground at the bottom entrance to the tunnel is also not very clear to someone with a visual impairment.
- **Wheelchair users are forced to use the T junction at the end of Coburg Road as a crossing point to reach the tunnel.** The only dropped kerb to approach the Penstock foot tunnel from Coburg Road is on the T junction itself. This also applies to people with a visual impairment – or other mobility difficulty – who may prefer to cross where there are dropped kerbs to avoid tripping.

- **The tunnel entrance is not very inviting.** There are currently no maps or signs to help you find the tunnel or show you where it comes out on the other side, and it is poorly lit. One person on the sensory impairment tour suggested opening out the flowerbed on the left-hand side as you approach the bottom of the tunnel and making this into a seating area.
- **The New River Path (on the far side of the tunnel) could be a lovely place to visit.** Suggestions for this area included removing the fence so that the grassy area next to the river could accommodate a small café or coffee stand, a seating area and children's play area. A nature trail or signs with information about the area and its wildlife could also be added – these would need to be large print or with a button to press for audio information to make them accessible to people with a sight impairment.



The junction at Penstock foot tunnel

## Summary of suggestions for improving Wood Green

The following ideas for making Wood Green a more accessible town centre were suggested by people with disabilities during the tours. These do not cover all of the issues raised in the feedback above, and there will be other points that Haringey Council will need to consider how it addresses.

- 1 Redesign all road crossings (especially the crossing outside of Wood Green tube) to use speed tables with raised crossings – this would slow down traffic while providing a flat crossing for wheelchair users and other pedestrians.
- 2 Make sure that all traffic lights allow as much time as possible for pedestrians to cross, that there are no gaps between crossing signals when no signal is showing, that lights indicating when pedestrians should cross are bright enough and that all crossings make an audible sound.
- 3 Avoid use of road crossings that rely on pedestrians looking out for cars wherever possible – including traffic islands and crossings with no lights e.g. at T-junctions.
- 4 Introduce more dedicated crossing points on key walking routes – particularly on Caxton Road, Coburg Road and at the Penstock foot tunnel entrance, as well as a crossing on Station Road for easier access to Blue House Yard.
- 5 Make a high standard of accessibility a requirement for any new business license issued in the town centre.
- 6 Have more visual signage throughout the town centre (e.g. a picture of a book outside the library) to help people who are less literate to navigate.
- 7 Improve the visibility of bollards and other street furniture – or remove them if they are not needed.
- 8 Improvements to the Penstock foot tunnel to make it easier to stop and rest while walking up the tunnel, safer and more welcoming – including better lighting and curved mirrors to see around the corner at the top of the tunnel.
- 9 Haringey Council should sign up to the Safe Places scheme<sup>1</sup> to provide places of sanctuary to vulnerable people when they feel lost or unsafe in areas such as Wood Green. Dementia Friends training for staff in some shops and businesses could also be helpful.
- 10 Involve people with disabilities in an audit of all existing pavements and dropped kerbs within Wood Green.
- 11 Establish an Access Group to continue to engage with and hold the Council to account on issues of design and accessibility.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.safeplaces.org.uk>



December 2018

