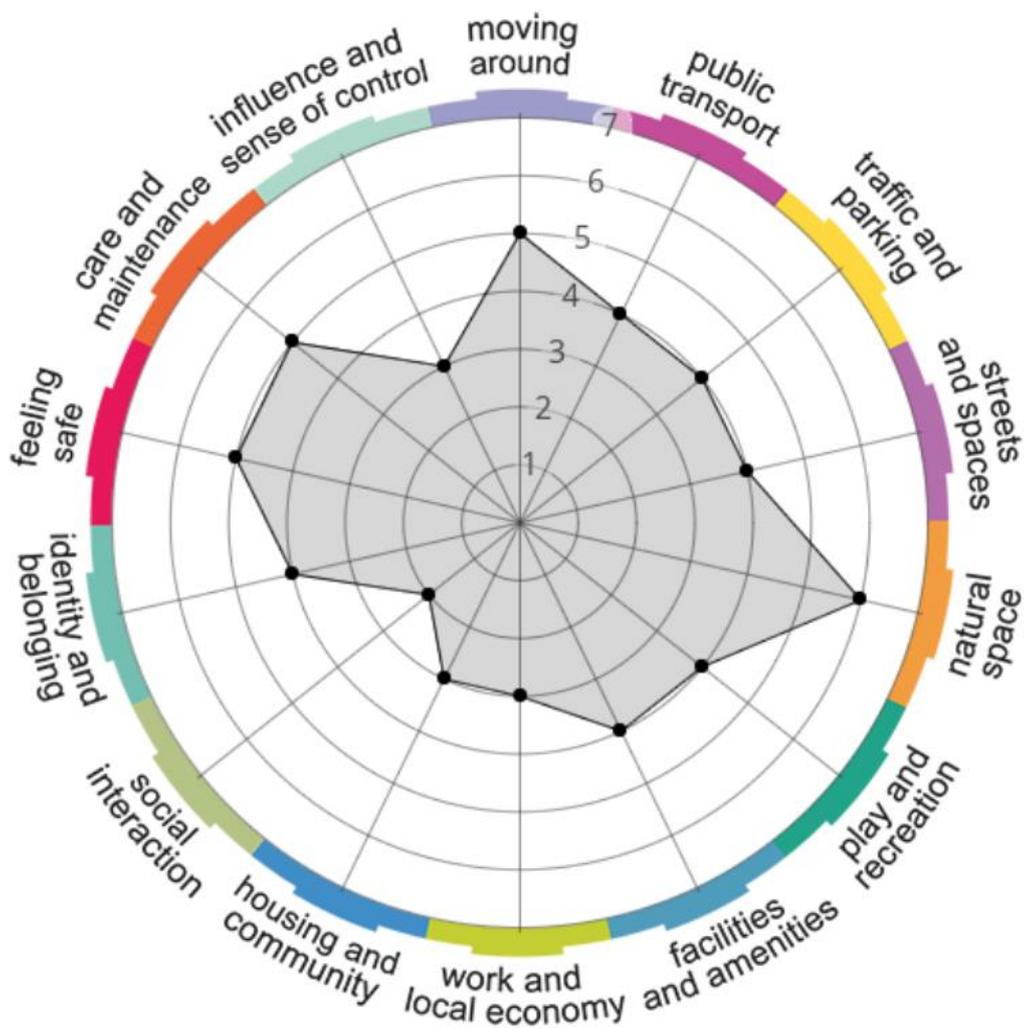


Perth and Kinross Offer Equalities Conversations Update



April 2021

Contents

Summary	4
What we have heard	4
What we have learned	6
Discussion.....	7
Next steps	8
Background	9
What we have done	9
Who took part.....	11
What we have heard.....	12
Social Contact.....	12
Is there a range of spaces and opportunities to meet people?	12
Identity and belonging.....	14
Does this place have a positive identity and do I feel I belong?	14
Feeling Safe	16
Do I feel safe here?	16
Influence and sense of control.....	17
Do I feel able to take part in decisions and help change things for the better?	17
Moving around.....	19
Can I easily walk and cycle around using good-quality routes?.....	19
Natural space, streets and spaces, care and maintenance	21
Can I regularly experience good-quality natural space?.....	21
Do buildings, streets and public spaces create an attractive place that is easy to get around? ..	21
Are buildings and spaces well cared for?.....	21
Public transport.....	22
Does public transport meet my needs?.....	22
Traffic and parking	24
Do traffic and parking arrangements allow people to move around safely and meet the community's needs?	24
Play and recreation	25
Can I access a range of spaces with opportunities for play and recreation?.....	25
Facilities and amenities.....	26
Do facilities and amenities meet my needs?	26
Work and local economy	27
Is there an active local economy and the opportunity to access good-quality work?	27

Housing	30
Do the homes in my area support the needs of the community?	30
Discussion	30
Next steps	31

Summary

The Perth and Kinross Offer Equalities Conversations aim to better understand the experiences of local equalities groups, identify priorities and develop ways for individuals, communities, public, private and third sectors to work together. This process was initiated by the Strategic Equalities Forum and we are using the Place Standard tool to structure the conversations in this exploratory stage.

From the conversations, we want to find out:

- the extent to which people feel heard and able to influence local decisions;
- the issues that are important to people;
- any barriers or disadvantage that people experience.

To date, we have had 16 conversations with 76 people from a range of groups. Those conversations have taken place in Perth, Crieff, Kinross and online. We have heard from people from the local South Asian, Chinese, Gypsy/ Traveller and LGBT+ communities and at the Perth Six Circle Project. We have spoken to young people, older people, disabled people, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) learners and people with learning disabilities.

Conversations started just before the first lockdown in 2020 and at the time of writing, we are still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this has limited the number of people and the different groups we have been able to talk to, the conversations to date have provided rich and useful information, insights and connections. Through this we have been able to answer the questions we set out to and to identify important issues to investigate further. We are very grateful to everyone who has taken part. We have already learned a lot from your experiences, knowledge and ideas. We have tried to share all that learning here and we look forward to future conversations with you and others.

We summarise what we have heard below before briefly discussing what we have understood from this. More detail can be found in the main report which follows where we also include participants' comments which more effectively communicate important points.

What we have heard

Social contact: A variety of social activities were mentioned but these were felt to be limited and barriers were highlighted. Space was a main issue. People did not have access to spaces they could use to organise activities, provide support or just hang out and relax. People could make plans for community walks when the weather was good but had limited access to spaces where they could socialise informally indoors. Cost, transport and toilet facilities were other barriers that limited people's social opportunities.

Identity and belonging: A sense of belonging depended on the context. People usually feel part of their own groups but did not always feel welcome in other situations. Many talked about feeling as if they belonged in their local neighbourhoods but negative experiences

around skin colour, people's names, the way people dressed, how they talked and where they lived affected people's sense of belonging and feelings of safety. Language is also a barrier to greater participation. Some young people talked about not feeling welcome at school.

Feeling safe: Many of the people we have talked to felt safe in Perth and Kinross but personal experiences or hearing about incidents that had happened had a negative impact. Some people felt unsafe because of neighbours. Lighting was important in this topic and people did not feel safe using dark routes, particularly with wheelchairs with no lights on them.

Influence and sense of control: While a few good examples were given, people do not feel that they have influence or control over decisions beyond their own groups. People regularly get asked for their opinion but do not feel as if that changes anything.

Moving around: There are good quality routes for walking, although some are not as pleasant because of broken bottles and dog mess. People talked about the importance of keeping pavements and dropped kerbs clear. Wires sticking out of buildings, overgrown bushes, vehicles blocking pavements and dropped kerbs are a problem for people with mobility issues. People would cycle more but do not feel it is safe and would welcome more off road or dedicated cycle paths. Big ditches at sides of newly surfaced rural roads are also a problem.

Natural space, streets and spaces, care and maintenance: There are plenty of beautiful natural spaces around Perth and Kinross. It would be good to have more places to sit in the parks and around the towns. There are a lot of buildings in bad condition.

Public transport: Public transport is important but often did not meet people's needs and it can be expensive. Young people in rural areas used buses regularly to get into Perth. Where people need to use public transport to get to work or other activities for specific times, it is not always convenient or available. Buses are very expensive for those who do not have bus passes and this means that they cannot always use public transport when they want to.

There is not enough room to manoeuvre wheelchairs on buses and trains and some bus stops are not accessible. There are limits to the number of people who can get on the same bus with a walker, a wheelchair or a pram so people sometimes have to wait for the next bus. Easier access to a minibus and qualified driver would get around some of these issues.

Traffic and parking: Traffic is not felt to be too bad but Perth can be busy at rush hour and young people were aware that Crieff has streets with very high pollution. Views on availability of parking and were mixed but it was felt to be expensive. Cost of parking limits the amount of time people spend in Perth. The 15-minute ticket is good but there were not enough car parks where you can pay on exit.

Play and recreation: Recreation activities are often used to catch up with others socially but are not suitable for everyone. Some would welcome women only activities. People often travel outside of the area for recreation. There is sometimes a stigma, or people can feel excluded, because of the way organised activities are targeted at particular groups. Cost of activities limits people's ability to take part. Costs can be even higher for disabled people who may also need to pay for a carer and the carer's costs.

Facilities and amenities: Access to disabled toilets and changing places is limited when public buildings are closed and means that some disabled people cannot socialise in the evenings or at weekends. Restricted access to medical professionals during lockdown was difficult and online consultations did not work for some people. Language barriers can also make it difficult. Women in the South Asian community could not attend women only exercise classes. More learning opportunities would be welcomed around English language, community languages, food hygiene and to support finding work.

Work and local economy: Better facilities, such as toilets, and access would mean more people would go out and spend money in local businesses. Disabled people make up a much larger proportion of the population than is usually realised. People would like better support for career progression including more employment opportunities and support for disabled people. Discrimination has been experienced by different groups. People feel that opportunities for good jobs locally are limited. Restrictions on late licences in Perth meant that people went elsewhere for a night out. The way taxi licences are assigned is not felt to be fair.

Housing: It can be difficult to get accessible housing. People with mobility issues have been told they are adequately housed and others have been on a waiting list for a long time. One person was told they were too young for sheltered housing.

What we have learned

From these discussions, we have learned that:

- People do not feel listened to or heard in many situations and do not feel able to influence local decisions.
- The issues that are most important to people are:
 - Social contact, support and activities
 - Better employment opportunities
 - Moving around and public transport
 - Facilities and toilets
- The additional barriers and disadvantage people experience relate to:
 - Access to and control of spaces
 - Language and communication

- Costs
- Effective support
- Transport and active travel options
- Blocked pavements and kerbs
- Stigma, difference and confidence
- Limited power and influence

Discussion

Space is emerging as an overarching theme from these conversations and raises questions of power around:

- who controls the spaces and people's access to them;
- who gets to be in which spaces, including online spaces;
- what influence people have over the spaces around them;
- what restricts people's travel and access to the places and spaces they would like to use.

Influence is the other important aspect which also relates to many of the topics discussed. This raises similar questions about power around who asks the questions, who gets to speak and be heard and about what. Why are the questions being asked? When, or at what stage, are they asked? Who acts on the answers? Who are the gatekeepers? What roles can people play beyond answering questions asked by others?

If we are to develop genuinely collaborative relationships where everyone is seen as having something to offer on their terms, these will be important questions to explore and address.

From what we have heard in the conversations, many of the issues could be addressed more easily if people had easier access to space, had a greater part in determining and setting agendas and more opportunities to use their knowledge, experience, ideas and energy.

In spaces where people can come together more easily, there are greater opportunities to make connections, find common ground and develop shared projects. People can organise their own activities and events. Community spaces can provide a welcoming place to relax and socialise without structured activities. People can support each other. Opportunities to come together with others are also very important for English language learning. New spaces can also provide more inclusive training and employment opportunities.

In working to address the barriers that people face around accessing social spaces, whether this be moving around, transport, cost, stigma, confidence or communication, more people will have the opportunities to participate more fully in ways that benefit us all.

Next steps

- Continue the conversations, hearing from more people and exploring issues more deeply.
- Share this P&K Offer Equalities Conversations update with the Strategic Equalities Forum and services, inviting comments.
- Return to participants to share what we have learned, explore emerging issues further, considering the impact of the pandemic, continue to build relationships.
- Work to connect people and groups with other work either in progress or planned where that would be useful and of interest.
- Work with equalities groups to improve access to community spaces.
- Develop better ways of working together so that power is shared more equally and so that people and communities have more actual control over actions and decisions.

Background

These conversations take place in the context of the Perth & Kinross Offer which is about changing the way we work together so that everyone in Perth and Kinross can live life well.

With these Equalities Conversations, the Perth and Kinross Strategic Equalities Forum want to understand the experiences of people from local equalities groups. Specifically, we want to better understand:

- the extent to which people feel heard and able to influence local decisions;
- the issues that are important to people;
- any barriers or disadvantage that people experience.

The conversations are structured using the Place Standard tool. This tool that has been developed by NHS Health Scotland, the Scottish Government and Architecture and Design Scotland. It provides a framework for conversations about people's experiences of both social and physical aspects of Perth and Kinross. It encourages people to recognise both what is good about a place and where improvements need to be made. It helps to identify priorities and to discuss possible actions we could take together.

What we have done

The conversations started at the end of February 2020 and stopped mid-March when the first lockdown was announced. When restrictions eased, we resumed conversations, making more use of online and outdoor spaces.

Using the Place Standard Tool as a framework we started with the topic of Social Contact before moving round the wheel through all 14 topics. Please see the front page of this update for the completed wheel diagram from the conversations to date. The topics cover both social and physical aspects and are:

- social contact
- identity and belonging
- feeling safe
- care and maintenance
- influence and sense of control
- moving around
- public transport
- traffic and parking
- streets and spaces
- natural space
- play and recreation
- facilities and amenities
- work and local economy
- housing and community

Concerns have been expressed about the relevance of a tool about place for conversations with communities of interest so we would like to clarify our approach here. Communities were not approached as communities of place. We did not, for example, talk to people because of where they lived. People were approached as members of equalities groups who, because of personal characteristics, are more likely to face discrimination or social exclusion. The Place Standard tool is designed to understand people's experiences and asks what it is like to be a person in places where people live, work and socialise. This approach allowed people to chose how they identified themselves in the conversations, to draw on different aspects of their identities and to move between them. People are more than a disability, a sexual orientation, an ethnic identity or an age group. It is important that everyone is included in discussions about place rather than only being consulted on issues thought to be relevant to them because of how they are usually seen by others.

For each topic, people were asked to consider the related questions, come to a consensus on how they would rate that aspect, and give reasons for their rating. This has been a very effective way to prompt rich and interesting conversations.

For each in-person conversation we used a blank Place Standard wheel diagram, either a large paper version or an even larger vinyl which has been particularly useful for socially distanced conversations between lockdowns. Having these colourful diagrams to accompany the conversations usually created a bit of a buzz and helped to create a good atmosphere.

Where conversations have been mediated by digital technology, different ways have been developed to suit the people taking part. For one group, individuals completed a survey created from the questions. We then met online to further explore the issues that had emerged as priorities for the group. For another group, we were able to create a link to the Place Standard tool online to allow us to access their responses. Following work to address digital exclusion of another group through facilitating access to digital devices and a number of learning sessions, we are starting the conversation over a series of online meetings.

Notes were taken by the facilitators during the conversations using, as far as possible, the words of the participants as they said them. This was to reduce the risk of ideas and insights being lost in translation to more official language which can hide intended meanings. We send a copy of the notes to the group to make sure they accurately reflect the conversation and to give people an opportunity to ask for something to be clarified, corrected or removed.

During this exploratory part of the process, we wanted to make space for people to talk about matters that were important for them. While the tool does not cover all aspects of a person's life, we did find that people took the opportunity to discuss very specific issues that were not explicitly mentioned in each of the topics.

We also wanted to make time for people to have their say and to hear what others in the group had to say. Conversations usually took between one and two hours. In every conversation, people were keen to keep talking after the agreed time passed and they said that they enjoyed it. A few expressed surprise that it had been an enjoyable experience.

Throughout, we have been very mindful of the risk of consultation fatigue as was highlighted in one of the early planning discussions at the Strategic Equalities Forum. Some groups had recently contributed to other consultation processes, and conversations about the impact of COVID-19 on communities and what we write here can be read alongside other findings.

We also became aware of digital fatigue and other pressures related to the ongoing crisis. Groups were no longer meeting online as they once did earlier in the pandemic or as they had been in person beforehand.

While we report here the product of the conversations we have had, we also believe that the process of making connections, building relationships, listening and being listened to as people who have something to contribute has been extremely valuable. We plan to continue this process having conversations, making connections and identifying meaningful actions.

Who took part

To date, we have had 16 conversations with 76 people from a range of groups. Those conversations have taken place in Crieff, Perth, Kinross and online.

We have heard from people from the local South Asian, Chinese, Gypsy/ Traveller and LGBT+ communities. We have spoken to young people, disabled people, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) learners, people with learning disabilities and to a group of people at the Perth Six Circle Project.

- 25 South Asian community members in Perth (5 conversations)
- 14 Chinese community members in Perth (2 conversations)
- 3 people with learning disabilities in Crieff
- 3 young people in Crieff
- 3 ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) Learners in Perth (2 conversations)
- 13 disabled people (CILPK) (Survey and Zoom Conversation)
- 4 young people in Crieff (Youth picnic in the park)
- 6 people at the Perth Six Circle project (socially distanced conversation outdoor)
- 3 members of local LGBT community (link to Place Standard tool online)
- 2 Gypsy/Travellers in Kinross (partial conversation)

We want to take the opportunity here to thank everyone who has taken part in the equalities conversations to date and for so warmly welcoming us to their groups, either online or in person. We have enjoyed meeting you, hearing about your experiences and learning from your perspectives and insights. These are all extremely useful to be able to identify priorities and to find ways that we can work together to bring about meaningful change. Some issues will take time to address. For others, as many of you have pointed out, sometimes just a very small change can make a big difference. These conversations are part of the process, not the end, and we look forward to future conversations, continuous learning and meaningful actions.

What we have heard

In this section, we bring together the conversations prompted by the questions in the Place Standard tool. We do this because the topics covered may be relevant to a wide range of people, services and organisations. We want to make sure that all points raised can be heard more widely and can influence and connect into work in progress or being planned so we have retained as much detail as possible.

Social Contact

Is there a range of spaces and opportunities to meet people?

Social contact was very important for all those who took part. A range of opportunities to get together with others were mentioned. For many, however, opportunities were felt to be too limited and many barriers to social interaction were highlighted.

The value of many local third sector organisations for social contact was clear. The Perth Six Circle project and Centre for Inclusive Living Perth & Kinross (CILPK), as a couple of examples, have been very important for people both before and during lockdown, maintaining opportunities for regular social contact.

'Since I came back to the Six Circle, I feel happiness.'

Some people talked about having a lot of opportunities for social activity. In conversations pre-lockdown, a group of people with learning disabilities in Crieff described a week full of activities. Another group thought there were lots of very interesting activities in Perth where you can learn things and meet different people.

Organised activities such as the Chinese Lunch Club once a month were valued but people wanted to be able to get together more often. Other opportunities for social contact mentioned included the Wellbeing Café once a week at the Salvation Army, Knit and Natter, the library, information events, various activities for people with learning disabilities, Riverside Café, Edna's craft group, New Horizons group, ESOL Perth, the Polish group, and

the Museum ESOL group. In talking about the need for more opportunities, some people touched on the importance of being better informed of what's available.

Many, however, expressed a desire for a space where they would be able to drop-in, use different languages, support each other, organise their own activities, get together with each other and connect with other communities, access information and support and just hang out. Such spaces were not felt to be available but would be welcome and would be particularly valuable for older people who are often isolated in their homes.

'Very little to no space for the LGBT community to meet. No physical noticeboard to find out about local initiatives. A community hub would remedy that.'

'We need a place to have discussions, to have a meal together and for community members to access support.'

'Little available for older people unless involved in a church.'

'Could be more places like bowling, crazy golf, etc.'

There was a feeling that communities needed more control over the spaces available to them because some had experienced losing access to places following changes outwith their control.

'there was no room big enough for us. They gave us a small one to use but not enough chairs. Then they told us we couldn't use that either. We were all outside, on the pavement, we had nowhere else to go.'

Space was important for community volunteers to be able to provide support as well.

'People want to know where our base is but we don't have one. We don't want to give our home addresses. If people can come to a place, they are more independent.'

Walking was something that people could organise themselves for social contact as their access to outdoor spaces is less restricted. When the weather is good, groups talked about organising community walking groups. One woman talked about the importance of an evening walk around her block with a friend in the summer during lockdown.

Issues around transport and facilities such as suitable toilets (disabled toilets and changing places) meant it was not possible for many to participate as they would like.

Costs were a barrier for many in getting to and taking part in social activities. It can be expensive travelling by bus without a bus pass.

'Buses add up in price.'

Costs of going out to meet others were significantly higher for disabled people. Alongside the cost that everyone pays for transport, admission and food, they might have to pay for a carer and the carer's cost.

Identity and belonging

Does this place have a positive identity and do I feel I belong?

Older members of the Chinese Community described how their families had grown up in the area and that they felt part of the community. Many know and feel comfortable with their neighbours and their customers. This was echoed by the South Asian Community and people in the ESOL group. Some were born here, some have lived here for over 30 years and some have arrived in the last few years. Many expressed feeling as if they belong in Perth and are part of their community. They talked about doing a lot for their neighbours, sharing food and exchanging presents at Christmas time and feeling well connected with their neighbours and community. Having children in local schools also gave a sense of belonging.

'We feel welcome in Perth and feel lucky to live here. People are friendly, smile and say hello.'

'We have good neighbours on either side and we know many people.'

This was not everyone's experience, however. Some felt it was difficult to get to know people around them and to get beyond superficial connections. They said it was hard to get to know neighbours and they hadn't met most in the other flats. Others were keen to point out that a sense of belonging depended on where they were. For example, people felt they belonged at Perth Six Circle but not where they lived because of significant problems with their neighbours.

Some of the Muslim women talked about struggling to fit in because of the way they dress. People talked about children of a South Asian background experiencing bullying for looking different. People also said they avoided public transport as they did not feel safe because of experiences of racist abuse.

In one of the groups there was discussion of ethnicity impacting on job applications. They gave an example of how the same application had been filled in using two different names – an English one and an Asian one. An interview was offered to the one with an English name.

The conversation with the women in the ESOL group touched on negative attitudes of some people towards them in public spaces. They were keen to emphasise that most people were nice and that it was just a minority who were rude or demonstrated xenophobic behaviour.

'When they don't smile, you know it's going to be difficult. You have to be the double of polite, the double of good.'

Language is a significant barrier to participation and involvement by some people. Community members in both the Chinese community and the South Asian Community depend heavily on one or two community members to access services and to understand information. They see English language learning as being important but say that it is not easy to access.

'Now have no place to meet this group. We really miss it. As well as seeing the group, we knew we could go there to find things out.'

'if born here, it's fine, but if coming in from another country, it is difficult to meet new people – there is nowhere to go.'

Some young people talked about family and familiar faces in the community creating a sense of belonging. Others felt that people in the community judged them more because they were teenagers.

'In the local Facebook group, there are lots of comments about young people.'

'We all get judged more because we're teenagers.'

One group of young people didn't feel as if they fit in at school, touching on actions they interpreted as emphasising how they weren't welcome. This was both from their peers and teachers.

'It doesn't really matter if you don't fit in at school. We're going to be gone soon.'

'Anytime I get in trouble at school, I get asked if I want a leaver's form. Are you trying to get rid of me?'

'At 12 or 13, you're either a bully or you're bullied. Or you're Switzerland [neutral]. Bullied people have better characters!'

Being seen as a member of a community does not necessarily mean that someone will feel as if they belong.

'The group identity seems to be ageing and conservative while I identify as young and progressive. I feel a bit of a misfit'

Feeling Safe

Do I feel safe here?

Most people talked about feeling safe most of the time. The people around them influenced their feelings of safety. Having friends and family close by was mentioned as being reassuring but it was also pointed out that one or two unpleasant neighbours could significantly affect how safe someone felt.

'You feel safe when you know everyone around you.'

'I have felt relatively safe here.'

'A couple of people can make it unbearable.'

The Chinese Community were all very clear about feeling safe in the area. There had been some break-ins during the Chinese New Year celebrations on year but they were very positive about the response and support from the police. Most of the South Asian community said they felt safe but in one discussion people talked about not feeling safe because of racist abuse and being victims of crime, personally or as business owners. In that group people described feeling vulnerable, especially in the evening when closing up and gave examples of lack of police help for taxi drivers.

For the Polish and Spanish people, feelings of not being safe arose from reports of people taking drugs and alcohol in the city centre and rumours of a sexual assault having happened locally rather than personal experiences.

Disabled people's feelings of safety related to the routes they can take to get places, lighting, other people and where people were housed. Some people felt okay but others didn't go out at night.

'I sometimes feel unsafe when there are characters around that make me feel uncomfortable.'

'Too many people doing drugs where I live.'

'I don't always feel safe in my home. I live in a flat and there has been some trouble. I don't feel safe out at night and prefer to get taxis but that can get expensive. It would be good if there were more befriending services available.'

'I don't feel safe in the city when it is dark.'

Influence and sense of control

Do I feel able to take part in decisions and help change things for the better?

Across all conversations there was a general feeling that people did not have any influence or control over decisions beyond the groups they were part of. Many were aware of consultations or opportunities to have their say but did not feel listened to as part of these processes.

There were some good examples given. One person, for example, talked about how someone's accommodation provided by their employer had not been fit to live in. After contacting an elected member, the council wrote a letter to the company informing them they had to upgrade the property. They felt listened to.

'They heard us.'

Members at the Centre for Inclusive Living (CILPK) talked about having developed a very good relationship with the PKC Roads department who regularly involve them in their work and, increasingly, will have already taken into account and thought about the needs of disabled people in what they are doing.

In some of the groups people were part of, they felt listened to and that they could influence the activities. At Perth Six Circle Project, for example.

'Within the group, we're really heard! We're always being asked what could be improved and changes happen because of it.'

The overwhelming experience was, however, that people regularly get asked for their opinions but that their opinion does not influence the decisions made.

'Sometimes I feel that we aren't being listened to. I feel that CILPK helps us to be involved in anything that we could potentially influence but we constantly have to fight to be listened to and some things never change. We have lots of meetings about the same things and feel like we don't get straight answers or that people don't want to listen to our issues.'

'Often it feels like the disabled community are an afterthought.'

'You're told you have a say but you don't actually.'

'We get asked for our opinions but then nothing happens.'

'[Other organisations] do ask. They hear your opinion. Then they do it their own way.'

Examples were given of communities being consulted about changes that affected them. Despite the majority of a community expressing an opinion for one option, the other option that was the one taken forward. In exploring this further with the group they recognised that it is not always possible to include everyone and that it will not always be possible to do what everyone wants. But it would make a big difference if reasons were given for the decision made, showing that people were heard, their views considered and explanations offered for why their preference was not feasible. It is important to show that people have been taken seriously and that consultations are not tokenistic and done simply to let people feel as if they have a voice when that is not actually the case.

Some people did not know of any opportunities to take part in making decisions. Others did not have much experience of trying to have an influence tending instead to rely on one or two volunteers to be the voice of the community. Others did not always respond to consultations.

'There are notices in the papers and on Facebook. It's up to you to get involved. But we don't always respond to these.'

'I find it hard to find out about local consultations without closely following PKC Facebook page.'

'There are no opportunities to give opinions but if we are asked we would get involved.'

'If they personally call, we will come.'

Many felt listened to as part of the conversations we had with them and it will be important to build on the conversations with the groups and take forward actions around issues that are important to people. People have expressed an interest in further involvement and would be interested in working together to identify and work towards solutions around finding spaces and funding to support community-led action. Others are interested in exploring solutions around transport and active travel and also general discussions about improvements to the local areas.

'This is good today, where we can meet and you are listening to us and what is important to us. You are interested in what we say and take our feedback.'

Taking part was a very positive experience for people. The conversations could take up to two hours and, rather than be a burden or boring, people talked about how enjoyable it was. If a group was asked if they would like to stop and continue another time, they always chose to keep going.

'It was fun! I enjoyed that!'

'He has a smile on his face – usually he's grumpy!'

'surprisingly enjoyable'

'really engaging'

'This is what we wanted!'

Moving around

Can I easily walk and cycle around using good-quality routes?

It was generally felt that there were good quality routes for walking around but that some areas were not as pleasant to walk in because of dog mess and broken bottles. The poor condition of the Lade, for example, was mentioned by a few groups. Obstacles on pavements and at dropped kerbs can make it very difficult for some disabled people to move around.

A lot of people expressed an interest in cycling but there were many reasons for not cycling. The main reason was that people did not feel safe on the roads and that there were not enough dedicated cycling lanes or cycle lanes were unsafe.

People were happy to use off-road paths. The routes from Crieff to Muthill and from North Muirton to Dunkeld were mentioned. But the roads were considered too dangerous.

New road surfacing on some roads had created big ditches at the sides of the roads which made it difficult for bikes if they need to move to the side when a vehicle is coming the other way or passing them.

'We don't have many paths for cycling.'

'I would like to go cycling with my children but I can't.'

'On the North Inch, separate paths for cyclists and pedestrians would help.'

'Very few cycle lanes in Perth City Centre. Most existing cycle lanes are unsafe to use because they are too narrow and encourage cars to overtake without appropriate gap. Cycle lanes should be 3m wide in line with Sustrans guidelines.'

'I used to cycle but I don't do it now because of the cars and hills.'

Some, however, felt that there was not a need for more cycle lanes because these took away the parking spaces in the town.

Hills in some areas, such as Crieff, also discouraged cycling, but groups such as Kinnoull Day Opportunities in Crieff, were able to use the grounds of the Strathearn Community Campus which is flat with their All-Ability Bikes.

More awareness of the need for maintenance and access to pavements was very important to participants, particularly for those who used wheelchairs and walkers. While a lot of places were good for moving around, things that hampered this included overgrown trees and bushes, wires sticking out of buildings, parking on pavements and in front of dropped kerbs, dropped kerbs being blocked by snow cleared from the road and poor lighting.

'I can't go out in the snow and when it's cleared it's still an issue as it blocks dropped kerbs. Other than that, it's fairly easy to get around if people or objects don't block access.'

'Gardens and bushes need to be maintained more. They get in the way a lot when they are overgrown on paths.'

'I find it difficult to navigate streets and pavements when it's dark.'

'Wheelchairs don't have lights.'

Pollution was mentioned by a couple of groups. Lockdown had made a difference to this.

'Fumes can be a bother on the way into town. It was super quiet and fresh during the pandemic lockdown.'

Natural space, streets and spaces, care and maintenance

Can I regularly experience good-quality natural space?

Do buildings, streets and public spaces create an attractive place that is easy to get around?

Are buildings and spaces well cared for?

Everyone, young and old, was very aware of the beautiful natural spaces around Perth & Kinross.

'This is amazing. There is so much beautiful nature. You are in the city and you can see the hills.'

'In Perth, there is no shortage of natural spaces.'

'Lucky to have so much greenspace close to the city centre.'

For some, however, it could be difficult to access where there are steps or when they need to take two buses to get somewhere.

Most people praised the parks and public spaces as being tidy and well kept, mentioning, for example, the North and South Inches but there is always room for improvements.

'Both the North and South Inch could have wildflower meadows to support biodiversity, as well as cultural significance signs and history board to generate interest.'

A few mentioned that it would be good to have more places to sit in the parks and around the towns.

'The parks are good. It would be nice to be able to walk through trees. There's a lot of open space. More seats are needed around the South Inch.'

'There aren't a lot of places to sit. Just under random trees and on random benches.'

Some talked about the city being very clean, comparing it favourably to other cities.

'My sister-in-law came to visit and said, "how is it possible to be a city. It's so calm".'

Some commented on buildings that were in a poor state of repair, abandoned buildings with trees growing out of gutters, vines and moss growing on them and paint falling off. One young person said of one building in Crieff,

'The building is impressively bad. The stairs are 60% oxygen.'

'The empty buildings are an eyesore and dull and grey.'

Public transport

Does public transport meet my needs?

The importance and value of public transport was recognised.

'Public transport is one of my favourite things. You are a country that has beautiful nature and ecology. You have to protect it. The more cars, the more traffic, the more noise and more damage to nature.'

Some people talked about using buses regularly without too many problems. It was sometimes difficult if buses didn't stop at all the stops as it meant going further to get on the bus – the Edinburgh bus to Kinross, for example. Young people in rural areas felt that the bus to Perth met their needs and used it regularly. Getting between rural areas close to each other was difficult or even impossible.

'Public transport is pretty decent.'

'In Lockdown, there were no buses in or out of Auchterarder so you were stuck. Food in Auchterarder is very expensive'

Public transport is not, however, suitable for a lot of different groups. Buses did not go where people needed to go or it took considerable time to get there when connections had to be made.

'Where I work, I can't use public transport to get to it. I have to go outside Perth and outside smaller towns.'

'The number 27 bus used to have buses at 6:30, 7:00, 8:00, 9:00, 10:00 in the morning. They cancelled the ones at 7 and 8. This means that people have to be late to work or that they have to leave very early in the morning and be too early. It's very difficult for people going to work or college without a car.'

'Journey times can be extremely long for relatively short distances and the fares are high.'

'They push you to get a car!'

People miss social and support sessions because of bus times. This can be because the bus times don't allow them to get there and back conveniently or because the times keep changing which they find stressful. Some people can't attend evening groups because there will be no buses for them to get home.

People who had bus passes appreciated them but buses can be very expensive for those who do not have a bus pass. This can make it too expensive to plan group outings. People can find themselves isolated from friends because the bus fare is too expensive and the routes are not convenient. For example, for one person, a trip to Pitlochry to meet friends for a walk would take two and a half hours to get there and the same to return home.

'Five hours of travel and £10 to spend half an hour with friends!'

There is not enough room to manoeuvre with wheelchairs on buses and trains.

'Trains and buses don't work for me. The wheelchair spaces aren't big enough or there are things in the way. The way to get to the wheelchair space can be difficult with narrow aisles and turning circles. I tend to use taxis as they are the easiest method of transport for me.'

It can be difficult to get on and off buses for a couple of reasons. One is that the driver does not always put down the bus so that people can get on with a walking frame. The other relates to the location of the bus stops. If the pavement is not wide enough at a particular stop, it is difficult or even impossible to get on and off and people avoid certain stops because of this.

We also heard that there are limits to the number of people who can get on one bus with a walker, a wheelchair or a pram at the same time. If there are more than one of these for a particular bus, one will be allowed and the others will have to wait for the next bus.

Because public transport does not work for most people, they use taxis or access cars most of the time. This can get very expensive and limits their access to activities.

People recognised that public transport was difficult to fix because it was not controlled by any one organisation but suggested other solutions.

It would be really useful to be able to access a PKC minibus and Midas driver regularly to take people to activities. People would be willing to pay a small fare for this because of the convenience and the security that this option would provide.

Access to a minibus was also mentioned by other groups who could use it for group outings. For example, older members of the Chinese community talked about going to the Chinese supermarkets and visiting cultural places such as Holyrood or a museum.

We heard that a local group of people with learning disabilities and their parents and carers, Building Bridges, applied for funding to put volunteers through minibus training. They now have a bank of minibus drivers.

Traffic and parking

Do traffic and parking arrangements allow people to move around safely and meet the community's needs?

Traffic was not thought to be too bad. Perth could be busy at rush hour and this was linked back to public transport.

'If the buses work properly and connect properly, it would be better.'

'Traffic could be reduced by introducing free Park and Ride outside of the city centre.'

Views on parking were mixed. Some felt there was plenty of parking. Others felt there was not enough parking. Some felt there were too many disabled parking spaces because they could not find spaces to park in the town for themselves, while others felt that the spaces were not always suitable for disabled people, highlighting that it can be difficult to find a parking spot where access to the back of the vehicle is still possible. It's important to have access to streets so that people can be dropped off close to places they need to go to, such as the bank.

Parking was felt to be expensive, with parking charges felt to be higher than in other places. The free 15-minute ticket is good. It was good to have free parking during lockdown and free parking at Christmas time is also appreciated. But people felt that there are not enough car parks where you can pay on exit. People will often limit their parking and, consequently, their time in town, to one hour rather than risk paying for a second hour that they might not need.

One group of young people talked about how a street in Crieff had been named the most polluted street in Scotland and that they found it quite upsetting that Crieff had been named in this way.

Play and recreation

Can I access a range of spaces with opportunities for play and recreation?

Children's play parks were generally felt to be good and well-kept although some need to be refurbished. Parks were not a good place for older teenagers. People felt there was a lot more for children and young people to do in Perth in comparison to the rural areas. Adults in one conversation talked about young people in the Carse feeling isolated. With nothing to do and no opportunities to meet others, they stay at home all the time.

Older members of the Chinese and South Asian communities talked about going for community walks in the summer which they enjoyed. The Chinese community members used to go for a swim in the mornings, followed by the sauna and then lunch, using this as a time to catch up socially. Women in the South Asian community would welcome more opportunities for women-only swimming sessions, saunas and other wellbeing activities.

Some felt that there were not many opportunities for older people to play sport. One man in the Chinese community would be interested in offering more Tai Chi classes, ideally using space in a Council building.

Some younger people thought that there were a lot of sports activities but not as many opportunities that were just about socialising. People would welcome more places indoors for socialising.

'More places inside when the weather is bad where we can play games or do things would be good.'

'It was better when we had our own space.'

'There is nowhere to go and relax.'

Some felt that there was a lot to do with Noah's Ark, a swimming pool and cinema, while others felt that this was not enough.

'There is a lot to do. There is Noah's Ark, a swimming pool, the cinema.'

'We only have a cinema or Noah's Ark. There's nothing else apart from going for coffee.'

In a few of the conversations people talked about travelling to other areas, such as Dunfermline and Glasgow, for recreation.

People felt that there can often be a stigma attached to some activities because of the way that they are targeted, seen as being only for poor people, or only for particular categories

of people, so there are not many opportunities for people of different backgrounds or circumstances to come together.

The cost of organised activities was seen as an important factor in whether or how often some people were able to take part.

'If you're rich the options are there, but if you're poor there's not.'

'It's too expensive to do a lot of activities more than once a week. The gym costs £3.60. That gets expensive!'

A group of young people talked about how opportunities were limited for many people because of cost. They talked about being able to learn an instrument. One used to learn piano but had stopped because it was too expensive. Similarly, dance classes are expensive although one of the young people was running a dance club at school which was free.

As mentioned above, costs for disabled people can be even higher where they also have to pay for a carer and carer's costs.

Facilities and amenities

Do facilities and amenities meet my needs?

Some people talked about being happy with the health services and felt that there were lots of courses available at Perth College. Learning opportunities were highlighted as a priority in conversations with the South Asian community. Community languages of Urdu or Hindi for children and young people, Food and Hygiene courses, and English language were mentioned. These opportunities were not felt to be easily accessible. People would be interested in classes to learn skills to help with finding work.

Women in the South Asian community felt that they get no exercise because they don't feel that they can attend gym classes with men present. They were aware of Curves for women only but they were not looking for machines. They suggested a yoga class or chair-based exercise. They would also be interested in a group that is social while at the same time doing things around health, cooking or crafts.

Community spaces were felt to be lacking.

'Not any community space due to high rents and lack of support to create these spaces.'

In the conversation with the Kinnoull Day Opportunities group in Crieff, people talked about enjoying going shopping with their families, both locally and further afield. One man who is

very interested in cars, particularly enjoys a trip to Halfords in Perth followed by a café on the way home for cake.

Supermarkets in rural areas are expensive. This was particularly a problem during lockdown when there was very limited transport to be able to get to a cheaper supermarket.

Language barriers can make accessing medical appointments difficult for some and people rely heavily on one or two volunteers from their communities for help attending and understanding information.

In one conversation, we heard that during lockdown, people were struggling without in-person appointments with medical professionals such as GPs and psychologists. There were different reasons given for why this is difficult.

- Anxiety - People can be very anxious about talking to people on the phone and in online meetings.
- Privacy and confidentiality – It's not possible to have a private conversation when there are other people in your home.
- Access and skills – People needed more support to be able to use the online meeting platforms.

This was an issue that was particularly stressful and upsetting for some people.

'I'm lost without getting to the doctor.'

Access to toilets and changing places is very limited and when public buildings are closed, this is even worse. A Comfort Scheme would work better for disabled people and a Toilet Pass to use in businesses was suggested so that people don't have to buy a coffee to use the toilet. People can't go out if there are no accessible toilets so they often cannot go out at night. People can't meet friends in pubs or go out for a meal because there will be no toilets available after 5pm or at the weekends.

Work and local economy

Is there an active local economy and the opportunity to access good-quality work?

Because of reasons mentioned above, people highlighted that businesses are probably missing out on disabled people's custom. Better facilities and access would mean that people would be more likely to go out and spend money in businesses. One in five people are thought to be disabled but people in the conversation at the CILPK talked about frequently encountering surprise if more than one disabled person is present at the one time with people saying things like 'Oh, there's another one?'

'We're not that rare!'

It was felt that there needed to be more support for career progression and for getting better jobs. People who are in work are interested in getting better paid or more interesting jobs. They would welcome the opportunities for work experience placements to help with this.

'People want to do work experience, find a job, find a better job, be more confident, to make progress.'

'My children are still young. My cleaning business lets me be flexible. But I want to stop that. I did a course at Perth College but I can't find a job.'

'Once I went to a place to get help finding a job but really I didn't get any help. Just you can look at folders. That was the help. No suggestions or support.'

'Work is hard to get and there is not a lot of support to get it. The people at the Hub are very nice.'

'To get a better job you need to know people. People hire who they know.'

As mentioned earlier, some discrimination had been experienced around job seeking in the past with the example given of how very similar applications were submitted to an organisation, one using an English name, the other and Asian name. Only the applicant with the English name was invited to interview.

In the conversations with members of the CILPK, one said they were happy with their volunteering role at CILPK. Others, however, said that more employment opportunities were needed in Perth and more information made available on equal opportunities for employees and the schemes in place to support disabled employees.

There are a lot of volunteering opportunities in and around Perth City Centre and the Perth Six Circle project support people to access these very effectively through contacts and referrals. Volunteering was felt to support feelings of belonging.

It was not felt that there was a good range of employment opportunities available.

'There's shops, pubs, hairdressers and care work.'

'The only jobs are in care homes, shops or cleaning.'

Some people talked about their children not being able to find jobs locally following higher education and people said they had to travel long distances for work in particular fields, such as climate change and sustainability.

In conversations with the Chinese community members, we heard that there is often work for the community in businesses run by the community but that it was not always easy to find people to work in them. In the past, individuals and family members would take over restaurants but as the economy in Hong Kong has improved, people don't come over as often and so there are challenges about who will take over the businesses.

In several conversations, people talked about the empty shops in town centres, the need to attract more businesses to the area so that there is more for people to do and also so that people do not go elsewhere for recreation and shopping. There was, however, the recognition that when places did open, they did not always get the custom and that was the reason for them closing.

'There are too many empty shops.'

'Nothing to do in the town.'

'We are often wanting new places to open up but we are not using them so they close.'

'Shops come and go because there is not enough footfall.'

One of the issues highlighted was that of late licences. A couple of night clubs are allowed to open after 1am but most streets are not allowed to open after 11pm.

'You cannot get something to eat after a night out. Other towns allow places to open late. Much smaller places have licences to 4am.'

'People go to other places for a night out.'

'Why is Perth called a city? Only a few streets are allowed to open late.'

Another issue that was important to people in the South Asian community was taxi plates.

'There are only four companies (really actually two individuals) allowed to operate so if you want to work as a taxi driver, you can only join their business on a 50/50 basis. That means you have to work 14 hours a day to make a living.'

'We understand that it's important to have tests and regulations. Tests are good. But it should be fair.'

Housing

Do the homes in my area support the needs of the community?

Some groups did not have much to say about housing, not having any issues with it. Where concerns were expressed, they were about it being expensive to rent and buy locally, about accessibility of housing, long waiting lists, about feeling safe in their homes and about energy efficiency.

'They are affordable but critically need investment in home energy efficiency.'

One group talked about difficulties getting accessible housing. One older woman with mobility issues lived in private rented accommodation up a flight of stairs. They said they had been told that they were adequately housed. Others talked about elderly parents being on a waiting list for a long time.

'There is a good range of housing – flats, houses, private and council but my elderly mum and dad have been on a waiting list for a long time. They need something that is more accessible.'

'I would like to live somewhere where I felt safer that is still in the town centre as I struggle with public transport or new routes. Ideally, I would like to live in sheltered housing but was told I was too young when I asked about it before. My house is accessible but I would like more help to organise it and to decorate it. My housing association have been good at listening to my issues but I still don't feel safe.'

Discussion

Space is emerging as an overarching theme from these conversations and raises questions of power around:

- who controls the spaces and people's access to them;
- who gets to be in which spaces, including online spaces;
- what influence people have over the spaces around them;
- what limits people's travel and access to and presence in the places and spaces they would like to use.

Influence is the other important aspect which also relates to many of the topics discussed. This raises similar questions about power around who asks the questions, who gets to speak and be heard and about what. Why are the questions being asked? When are they asked?

Who interprets the answers? Who are the gatekeepers? What roles can people play beyond answering questions asked by others?

If we are to develop genuinely collaborative relationships where everyone is seen as having something to offer, these will be important issues to explore and address.

From what we have heard in the conversations, many of the issues could be addressed more easily if people had easier access to space, had a greater part in determining and setting agendas and more opportunities to use their knowledge, experience, ideas and energy.

In spaces where people can come together more easily, there are greater opportunities to make connections, find common ground and develop shared projects. People can organise their own activities such as community language learning, Tai Chi and women-only exercise activities. Community spaces can provide a welcoming place to relax and socialise without structured activities, a place where people can access and provide support to each other.

Opportunities to come together with others are also very important for English language development. New spaces could also provide training and employment opportunities. Spaces where more people were welcome more often would provide opportunities to learn about, with and from each other.

‘Promote diversity and inclusion, create sustainable communities, with rent free community hubs and efficient and affordable public transport.’

In working to address the barriers that people face around accessing social spaces, whether this be moving around, transport, cost, stigma, confidence, communication or power, more people will have the opportunities to participate more fully in ways that benefit us all.

Next steps

- Continue the conversations, hearing from more people and exploring issues more deeply.
- Share this P&K Offer Equalities Conversations update with the Strategic Equalities Forum and services, inviting comments.
- Return to participants to share what we have learned, explore emerging issues further, considering the impact of the pandemic, continue to build relationships.
- Work to connect people and groups with other work either in progress or planned where that would be useful and of interest.
- Work with equalities groups to improve access to community spaces.
- Develop better ways of working together so that power is shared more equally and so that people and communities have more actual control over actions and decisions.