

Betty's Blue Badge Project

A look into accessibility for Blue Badge users who use supermarket parking in Thurrock

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About Healthwatch Thurrock

Healthwatch Thurrock is the independent champion for people who use Health and Social care services in Thurrock. Our sole purpose is to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use Health and Social Care services and to speak out on their behalf.

We work to get services right for the future. We are here to listen to what you like about services and what you think could be improved. No matter how big or small the issue, we want to hear about it. You can speak to us to find information about Health and Social Care services available locally.

About the survey: Betty's Blue Badge Project

Healthwatch Thurrock had received a number of complaints and concerns regarding accessibility for Blue Badge users regarding supermarket parking. Healthwatch Thurrock decided to explore this further and gather lived experience of Blue Badge users within Thurrock who use local supermarket parking.

The project was named 'Betty's Blue Badge Project' – overseen and run by one of our volunteers, Betty. Betty alongside Healthwatch Thurrock were interested in understanding how accessible Blue Badge Parking within supermarkets across Thurrock really were. Residents did have the option to remain anonymous when completing the survey.

What did we do?

For this project we decided the best way to gather people's lived experience was via a survey. Healthwatch Thurrock staff supported and guided Betty in creating this. The survey was distributed digitally via social media and Thurrock CVS' newsletter. Within the community we distributed physical copies at engagement events put on or attended by Healthwatch Thurrock, alongside a QR code link to the survey if people wanted to do this in their own time. In addition, other services such as Thurrock Carer's service supported us with this piece of work by distributing copies to their service users.

The Survey

Healthwatch Thurrock received 118 responses to this survey:

- 100 were completed by Blue Badge user's themselves
- 18 were completed on behalf of the Blue Badge user

Who shops where?

We asked residents which supermarkets in Thurrock they use the most frequently – We had 6 non responses to this question.

Supermarket	Responses
Aldi	6
Asda Tilbury	28
Costco West Thurrock	2
Lidl South Ockendon	4
M and S	1
Morrison's Grays	22
Morrison's Corringham	10
Sainsbury's Chafford Hundred	10
Tesco Lakeside	31

The Survey

Policy: We asked residents if the Blue Badge policy of the supermarket they frequent the most works for them, below are some of the responses



Healthwatch Thurrock found that most residents said yes to this question. The respondents who said no, referred to policies where the blue badge holder had to go into store to register their badge before being able to do their shopping.

It's inconvenient to have to go in-store to register your car details, even getting asked to show the blue badge, which is in the car on display every time

Healthwatch Thurrock approached some of the supermarkets for their policy to cross reference our findings . On the whole, the supermarket car parks are privately owned, meaning the supermarket itself has no provisions over the policy, policing or maintenance of the car park as it is not owned by them.

One worker explained that their employee who sorts the trolleys in the car park had tried to challenge a customer before who was parked in a blue badge bay but did not own a blue badge. This was met with threatening behaviour, and therefore made staff feel unsafe to challenge these attitudes further. The lack of ownership over the car parks not only creates an issue for the blue badge holder in terms of accessibility and availability but also the supermarket staff themselves who can also be on the receiving end of abusive behaviour.

The Survey

Bays: We asked resident's if supermarkets provide an adequate amount of Blue Badge Bays



**39 said Yes
75 said No**



"They do provide enough, but due to misuse and no enforcement, there frequently are not enough."



"Child spaces are provided more than disabled when I went last week a post van, builder van and a non-blue badge holder was parked in our bays!"



"I usually find there are only 3 or 4 Blue Badge parking spaces, when there are 30 odd for child carriers."



"Some supermarkets do but people without badges abuse them and there is no enforcement to give them tickets or move them along."



The Survey

Location: We asked resident's if Blue Badge Bays were situated in areas that provide easy access to the store entrance



**87 said Yes
29 said No**



I am keener to park where I can get hold of a suitable trolley.



Yes they are situated outside the store and close enough. However, the path ways, curbs and slopes are annoying and don't help at all. The path tilts towards the road, and if I park outside the store, there's limited trolleys, so I still end up having to cross over the road to get one.



They are quite near the store. People without a badge usually want the one nearest the door!



Child bays are nearer, why?
When I had young children we had nothing now I'm older and disabled it seems the same.



I am constantly seeing vehicles blocking blue badge parking spaces. Often, work vehicles are parked in blue badge bays due to their attractive location, blocking these spaces for people who really need it.



The Survey

One of our biggest findings of this survey was that **63%** of residents had to abandon their shopping trip due to non-availability of disabled parking spaces in the last year

Lived Experience

“Only prejudice from elderly blue badge holders as I am young” – highlights that disability is not confined to the elder population, it effects all age groups. Also demonstrates that prejudice can occur within the community itself.

“I have been threatened when I have confronted the people that have no badge. Twice”

“My supermarket of choice discriminates against blue badge holders, by making them enter their registration numbers at a counter which also sells lottery tickets, cigarettes and newspapers. There is invariably a lengthy queue, you then have to return to your vehicle to display your blue badge unless you have a camera and have had the foresight to photograph your registration plate. As above – profesting with staff who really don't care.”

“The blue badge scheme is outdated and it's time it was changed, with modern technology it should be added onto your driving licence and scanned for parking to stop abuse of the current system.”

In Summary

Healthwatch Thurrock concluded from this piece of work that whilst blue badge parking is accessible, it is not always available.

Healthwatch Thurrock made several attempts to obtain copies of supermarket policies of blue badge parking. Healthwatch received 2/3 responses however a clear picture could not be defined with regards to ownership of the car parks, or with who the responsibility lay for monitoring the misuse of disabled bays, as described by our survey respondents.

We found through this work that residents largely feel supermarkets within Thurrock do not have an adequate amount of blue badge bays for people to use. This point was highlighted further by respondents informing us the ratio for mother and toddler bays were significantly higher than those allocated for blue badge holders.

More than 60% of residents felt that bays were situated in an appropriate place within the car park, however this doesn't solve the issue of misuse of the bays. It was noted that as the bays are by the entrance to the stores – people who do not hold a blue badge park here due to their attractive location as do work vehicles, blocking these spaces for those who need it.

Our biggest finding from this survey was that 63% of residents had to abandon their shopping trip due to non-availability of disabled parking spaces. This highlights a huge gap and struggle for those who need these provisions. We believe that our report highlights that disability comes in many forms, each with its own challenges – and are not always visible.

Recommendations

Based on the above, Healthwatch Thurrock recommend that there is a simplified policy across the supermarket industry that would eliminate customers having to wait in lengthy queue which in our survey has been described as discrimination against blue badge users – also as “shocking, disrespectful treatment”

To have the opportunity to meet and speak to supermarket/car park management, to find a way forward in resolving the issues this survey has highlighted. This would be with the intention to make shopping a pleasant experience for able bodied and disabled clients.

A consistent format across all supermarkets in their monitoring and provision of blue badge bays.



healthwatch

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