

Glastonbury Access Feedback and Suggestions

I have been attending Glastonbury since 1995 and using the disabled facilities since 2002. I have written a guide for other disabled festival goers, which is at <http://www.gorge.org/glastonbury/onastick.shtml>

As you can see from my guide, Glastonbury gets a lot of things right in providing facilities for those with various disabilities. The campsite and mobility bus in particular are an absolute godsend – *thank you!* However of course there are always some things which could be suggested or improved.

Here are some ideas which would really make a difference for this year!



TOILETS

In past years there have been a handful of these dotted about the site. For example, backstage at Jazzworld, in the Medical Compound near Other, and next to the main loos by Leftfield. There are various issues:

- There aren't enough, so it can be an hour before a disabled person can get to the toilet, particularly as we can take longer to get across site than other people and some people's disabilities can mean they have urgent toilet needs.
- The stewards and staff aren't always aware of them, for example I had to point out the one in the Medical compound to the staff who said "oh I wondered what that was for!" Also the medical staff had put their tents around it and so there were guy ropes all around, you couldn't get near it in a wheelchair! So please make people aware that they are there! So far I have completely failed to find the loo backstage at Pyramid, despite asking several nearby stewards.
- There often aren't sinks nearby, for example the ones in Jazzworld backstage, and the medical compound, which I used most often. The Jazzworld loo had a sink some way away which was not easily accessible to a wheelchair, and there wasn't a sink in the medical compound. We need to wash our hands! Some disabled people are using toilets to inject medicine or to catheterise... and it's a matter of general hygiene that we *must* be able to wash before and after.
- Some toilets were open to the public. The one near Leftfield / Acoustic was used by anyone and everyone (despite being next to a block of regular long drops) until it was full. By full, I mean paper and faeces piled high in a mountain above the seat. This made it quite impossible for a disabled person to use, particularly as we cannot "stand and hover" - and there were so few accessible toilets that this was a real problem. It took me ages to trek to that toilet, then I found it was unusable and it took me a further hour to reach a toilet in a secure area that I could actually use. I should be able to go to the loo more or less when I need.

There are lots of people from Water Aid on site saying that a clean toilet should be a human right, so it is a real kick in the teeth that a disabled person can't go when they need to...

Generally disabled people will leave a toilet clean, knowing how important the facility is to others. I find accessible toilets are far cleaner than regular ones, at Glastonbury and in public generally. But where they are open to the public they are abused and disabled people often cannot use them at all.

The solution is to RADAR lock toilets or to put them in private areas (or even to have a steward watching over them). RADAR keys are used by disabled people to access toilets both in public places and also in places like pubs. Most disabled people will have a key, and if they were also available from the disabled campsite (and possibly Info points) this would mean anyone who needs to can use a clean accessible toilet.

We are used to carrying keys or swallowing our pride to ask for one, it's far better than finding an unlocked and unusable toilet.

- Despite what 2005's access guide stated, there were no toilets by viewing platforms, which meant you could not settle in for the day to watch your favourite bands. To give you an example, at the Other Stage platform, you look at the map and there's a loo nearby in the medical compound. However it is only close as the crow flies. In practise it's the other side of the railway which means insurmountable slopes. So a wheelchair user has to go out and into another field, then across the railway, then back along the next field and finally over to the loo, it can be a 45 minute round trip when an able bodied person would just go directly and be there in 5 minutes! Also at the end of the evening you may be bursting for the loo but cannot safely leave for half an hour or so until the crowds have dispersed, and then you are still some way from a toilet. At Reading and all other outdoor gigs that I've been to recently, without exception, they have at least one accessible toilet next to every viewing platform. In 2005 the Glastonbury disability co-ordinator Jody promised me there would be toilets by each platform, but they didn't emerge! Please can we have a toilet by each platform this year?



Viewing Platforms

Many of my comments on the viewing platforms would take Reading Festival as an example of best practise (but many smaller festivals also achieve the same thing). That is, every single stage that is big enough to have a mixing desk had a viewing platform, attached to the scaffold of the mixing desk. It was stewarded throughout all times that live entertainment was on, and it had an accessible toilet next to it which was also policed to avoid use by able-bodied people. This applies equally to the main stage as it does to a small stage in a tent. In short, if Glastonbury could also do this it would make an absolutely huge difference – the current viewing platforms are too far back for any enjoyment after dark, and as many stages have no viewing platform it is often not safe for me to be there at all, thus denying access to much of the entertainment!

If you could only make one improvement this year, having stewarded platforms by the mixing desk of every stage and an accessible toilet next to each one would be the most significant thing you could do.

- Number and location – in 2005 there were viewing platforms at three stages, Pyramid, Other and Jazzworld. The position of that at Pyramid has moved from year to year and was improved in 2005, but was still so far away that the sound you were hearing was not synched with the movement on the screens, it was very much a last resort. At Other, the platform is right at the back, and this means that the stage lights are seen as pinpricks, you cannot see the performers and you cannot hear the music for the chatting of people around you. To give you an idea, the view is provided below. Really the Other platform is redundant unless it is moved forward, and preferably screens provided as well so there is something to see. I have given up watching anything on the Other stage unless it is daylight and I can get further forward, the viewing platform there is unfortunately next to useless. The Jazzworld viewing platform was in a good position and at a good height in 2005, there was no need to use it in general because that arena is very chilled out and people are usually sitting down, but it was very useful when the Levellers came on and the arena filled up!

Three viewing platforms at a festival which has more than 25 stages is really not adequate – and two of those which you have are badly positioned. Please bear in mind that platforms are not a luxury, sometimes they are the only way that disabled people can see the performance, particularly when the arena is dark or crowded.



View from the Other Stage viewing platform at night, stage in distance.

PLEASE could you seriously consider positioning the viewing platforms next to the mixing desks – it is usually safe and easy to approach them from behind, even in crowds, as people cannot see the stage through the mixing desk so they don't gather there in numbers. Also in my experience people are willing to move for a wheelchair because they realise you are not trying to steal their space! Next to a mixing desk, the sound will be good and the view is usually acceptable. If more "manic" festivals like Reading can do this, why not Glastonbury?

- Without viewing platforms it often *is not safe* for disabled people to attempt to access many of the stages. For example at both Acoustic and Leftfield I took a position quite a way back, at the side, to watch some performances in the afternoon or early evening but as the crowd arrived I was pushed back, people could not see my wheelchair in the crowd, and so people fell over me and I was also at risk of getting badly hurt, so I had to leave. Even getting out through the crowd was scary. Before I went into either tent – which can be almost completely empty at quiet times – I had made myself known to stewards, and asked if it was ok, where it was safest for me to be, etc. The stewards said it was fine and this was the right place for me to go, but then did not look out for me as the crowd grew around me. As a result I would say it is often not safe for a wheelchair user to be in any of these tented stages, and it can be stressful for ambulant people with other disabilities. However at Reading I am able to go to tented stages happily because they have a small viewing platform annexed to the mixing desk at every single stage. The Leftfield, Acoustic and Dance stages are significant stages at Glastonbury, please can you provide platforms at these places as a minimum so we can access them and feel safe?

Also, in the past I've seen the Cabaret tent have a sign saying "no chairs". Now I understand this is to prevent people bringing camping chairs to an area where people generally sit on the floor, but when I am negotiating the Festival on crutches my husband brings a camp chair for me so I can sit down to rest often, and I need to use it when watching the entertainment. If camp chairs are excluded from certain areas, this will exclude disabled people – unless of course a small viewing platform is provided for them, which is what I'd like to see! Not everyone with mobility or access needs are in wheelchairs, especially in muddy years when crutches can become the only way to get around.

- Toilets – As already stated, it would make a huge difference if there was an accessible toilet by each viewing platform. Otherwise, you cannot settle in at the viewing platform but have to feel you are always on the move, since you cannot stay for more than an hour or two and a round trip to a toilet from the viewing platform can take so long you will lose your place (as well as missing a whole act if you time it wrongly!)
- Availability – In 2005, the few viewing platforms that there were did not get completed until Saturday afternoon – they were built but the ramps had not been added. The reason given when I complained was that the Friday storms had caused the necessary tractors to be needed elsewhere, but why were the platforms not in place before Wednesday when the public entered? They should be ready for the start of the entertainment, but as it was in 2005 they could not be used until half way through the weekend! I realise that the storms in 2005 were a very unusual event but the platforms should be ready for the start of public entry, not for Friday morning! Jazzworld for example has music on Thursday.



An unstewarded viewing platform – unusable by disabled people.

- Stewarding – The viewing platform stewarding has always been somewhat patchy. Perhaps this is due to the “Glastonbury Vibe” – I’ve always felt the stewards were quite laid back, when they were present at all – but unfortunately this manifested itself in negative ways. For example, not moving able-bodied people from the platform when the space was needed by disabled people, and not taking a firm enough hand in organising the Pyramid platform in the evening. Allocation on the platform should be first come first served, but due to lazy stewarding, people who arrived late were put in front of people who had been there all day; Personal Assistants who stood up in front of disabled users were not asked to sit down; people who needed legroom were suddenly forced to squeeze forward to make room for latecomers behind them when the platform was already full; everything got quite fraught and unpleasant at times. I was not the only person to get stressed by the crush and lack of control on the platform and as a result I now avoid the viewing platforms at busy times even when there is a band I’d really like to see.

During the day there were other problems as no stewards were present and (especially when muddy) the platform had been taken over by able bodied people who refused to move when I asked them.

Viewing platforms really do need to be stewarded effectively – and for there to be a steward present at ALL times that the relevant stage is operating. It’s simple – the first mobility impaired users to arrive make a row at the front, with their carer taking a chair directly behind them. Subsequent rows are made behind, leaving room between rows for a wheelchair to be manoeuvred, as well as an aisle down the side. When the platform is full, no more people should be allowed on.

I would suggest that the platform in the Pyramid arena should be at least twice the previous size, to accommodate demand in the evenings and to allow room for wheelchairs to get in and out safely, with space between rows.



An example of excellent stewarding and viewing platform layout, Milton Keynes Bowl, 2006.

Camping

The fact that there is an accessible campsite is the key to enabling disabled people to attend Glastonbury; it cannot be over estimated in its importance, so *thank you to everyone who manages the campsite*. It is critical that we have a safe space to camp with well marked out aisles so we can get in and out of our tents safely, and that always works very well. However, inevitably there are a few minor issues which have arisen:

- Because we are told where to pitch according to need, there is no choice on who our tent neighbours might be, whereas in general camping areas we would be more able to choose. Therefore, I would suggest that you have one predominantly “family” area of the campsite, and that other people have the option of being away from noisy families if necessary. This is because some disabled people need to rest in the daytime – in previous years I have come back to my tent to rest only to be disturbed by children repeatedly kicking a ball into the side of my tent. I realise that of course disabled camping is a shared area, but it would be very helpful if there was a distinction between more family-centric and more quiet, adult areas.
- Fires – there is a big campfire by the entrance which anyone can join, but sometimes camp fires have not been allowed elsewhere in disabled camping, one family even complained that they had been asked to put their barbecue out, however this was not publicised anywhere. It would be good if the rules on camp fires were clarified before we arrive at site. If general fires are not permitted for whatever reason, I hope that individual fire logs will continue to be allowed so that disabled people can keep warm by their tent without having to join the main group, if they wish.
- The rules on tent sizes are well publicised and quite understandable so that you can plan for the space needed, however in practise it is often abused. In past years I have seen a family of 6 (1 disabled person) using a giant dome structure which took about the same space as if you’d parked four cars in an X shape. Also, in 2005 there were several Scope staff on site who had a 6 man tent each, which I understand was later reduced to one between 2. Nonetheless, these tents were vast (probably 6ft high and 8ft long at least) and as the occupants were staff, they were there before anyone else arrived and already occupied a large section of disabled camping! As you can appreciate, while nobody begrudges Scope’s presence on site, these tents were pitched before regular festival goers arrived, exceeded the rules for tent size, and significantly affected the available space in Disabled Camping. I trust that in 2007, this will not happen and that all disabled people – exhibitors, families or otherwise – will have to abide by the same rules regarding tent sizes and pitches, so we can all get along together as tent neighbours.

Bars

Brian, an experienced WBC bar manager, tells me that they expect to implement a barrier system at the WBC festival bars this year. Having recently been to events where this caused a problem, I passed on a few thoughts to him to improve access at the bars in general. I hope this has already been passed back to the WBC committee, but here they are for your reference and information – it would help if you could also reinforce the message!

- If there is a queuing / barrier system, then please provide a separate entrance for disabled people, which is clearly labelled (partly for us, partly so people don't think we are queue jumping!) Disabled people and their carer will have wristbands so they are easy to verify.
- Bear in mind that disabled people may not be able to stand long to queue, and might find barriers hard to negotiate. Also, a carer may not be able to leave their disabled charge for very long, so I would suggest that anyone with a disabled access wristband should be allowed to use the accessible entrance, whether they "look disabled" or not – apart from which, many conditions which severely limit ability are “invisible”.
- There should be a low-height area of the bar, with no obstructions such as steps or platforms near it. In the past this has not been a problem at Glastonbury - the bar is low enough - but at other festivals there have been wooden platforms in front of the bar, effectively a step which meant a wheelchair could not get within arm's length of the serving area.
- Solid flooring in the bar area would be useful for wheelchair access, but I imagine this would be impractical to install and hard to keep clean.
- Disabled awareness training would be good, for example staff being willing to pour a half pint into a pint cup once dispensed if requested (so it won't spill). Also, people to ask "do you need any help" rather than to try steering you to what might be the wrong place! Sometimes we are just browsing or relaxing, not stuck or confused!
- Information made available, such as a map which shows where the bars are, what facilities are available for disabled customers, and if appropriate, which ones are simply in-and-out bars and which have space in the bar tent to rest. This map could be available at the Disabled campsite, and at info points.
- Clear signage at the bars, at both regular eye height as well as the height of someone in a wheelchair or with short stature. Ideally the signage would show what's available, at what price - with photos if possible. For example, you could provide an A4 or A3 laminated sheet. This would also be a good communication aid if necessary, for example with a deaf customer.

Summary

These are just a few issues off the top of my head. Thanks for reading them!

Please do not think that everything I have to say is a complaint, as that certainly isn't the case - for example, the mobility bus between the campsite and car park is an absolute godsend! The staff in the campsite are always friendly and helpful too, and I'm delighted that we can get Personal Assistants in where needed this year, which will make a huge difference. Thank you! However I hope you agree feedback and continued commitment to improve is always useful.

I do realise that the number of disabled festival goers make up a relatively low proportion of all Glastonbury attendees, but many adjustments can be made simply with a bit of forethought rather than requiring drastic changes or expense. Hopefully in that way, the number of disabled people who attend "the best Festival in the world" can begin to mirror the proportion of us in society as a whole! After all, the DDA says that if you can reasonably make an adjustment, then you must.

As you know I am not only mobility impaired myself, but have a brother with learning difficulties, as well as many friends with various impairments. I have also done disability features for the BBC website and on the radio, and I work with many charities which support disabled people – so I hope this all makes me qualified to comment, not just on my own needs but on those of very many different types of impairment. And if I can't help, I can find someone who can!

I hope this information is useful to you.

I am very happy to provide any information, advice or help that might be necessary to improve things for disabled users at the Festival, please just ask.

Looking forward to Glastonbury 2007!

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