

Shaping My Future

A guide for people with
physical disabilities in Essex

Section 6: Going out and about



This is the sixth section of a six-part guide. For details about accessing the full guide and the other sections go to the back page.



**1. Planning for change:
getting started**



**2. Family, friends
and connections**



3. Learning and working



4. My home



5. Health and wellbeing



6. Going out and about

Delivered by:



Commissioned by:



Information in this section

	Useful to me?
Travel	115
• Advice	115
• Support with mobility	117
• Driving	118
• Public transport	121
• Community transport	122
• Taxis	123
• Air travel	123
Accessible activities	124
• Inclusive activities	124
• Finding accessible places to visit	125
• Accessible toilets	126
Page for notes	127

Why this section might be helpful

Being able to go out and about means much more than just getting from A to B. Lack of mobility and/or accessible transport can prevent you from meeting up with family and friends, connecting with people and being involved in things that you enjoy. It can also limit options in relation to work, housing and healthcare. You have a right to be able to get out and about so, if you need additional information or advice, talk to your GP or a health or social care practitioner to get the support you need.

In this section, you will find information and ideas about getting around, including mobility aids, driving, different forms of public and community transport and air travel. There is also information about finding accessible places to enjoy leisure time.

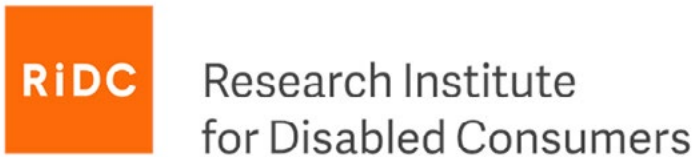
This is the sixth section of a guide called Shaping My Future. It has five other sections but you do not need to look at them all. Choose the ones that you think might be useful to you at this point in time.



Travel

Advice

The websites below give general advice and useful starting points for thinking about what might be helpful to you.



The Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC) has unbiased reviews, information and guidance on products and services based on its research with disabled and older consumers.

It's worth looking at its website to see if it has carried out research that addresses queries you have; for example, it has recently done a survey of motability scooters (see below). You might find that there are areas of research that you want to participate in too. RiDC uses its findings to raise issues, for example, regarding accessibility of electric vehicle charging points.

RiDC also has a car search database to help people find cars with flat, easily accessible boots that have room for a folded wheelchair or have lots of leg room and high seats. www.ridc.org.uk

Email: mail@ridc.org.uk

Phone: **020 7427 2460**



Motability is a not-for-profit scheme that enables people to hire a mobility scooter or car for up to three years. To qualify you must receive a government-funded disability allowance – either the Disability Living Allowance (DLA), if you already receive that particular benefit, or the Personal Independence Payment (PIP), if you are applying now. You will receive your wheelchair or mobility scooter in exchange for all or part of your allowance.

Further information can be found here: www.motability.co.uk.

There is also a tool to check eligibility for the scheme: www.motability.co.uk/about/check-your-eligibility.




East Anglian Driveability provides a regional transport hub which gives free individual advice to people who are finding it difficult to get out and about. This advice is for both people who are no longer able to drive and those who have never driven but whose needs have changed. The advisers combine their local knowledge about what is available with considerations about an individual's accessibility needs. They can help with journey planning and thinking about which schemes may be of benefit to you. This service is linked to Driving Mobility (see page 118).

More information about this service can be found here:

www.eastangliandrivability.org.uk/regional-transport-hub.

 Telephone for general enquiries: **01842 753029**

 Telephone for booking an appointment: **01787 222873**

You can also go through Motability to get a powered wheelchair but the best place to start is by contacting your local wheelchair service (see page 117).

Transport for All
Access, Rights, Advice


Transport for All is a disabled-led organisation that gives individual advice and campaigns for better access to transport and street space (for example clear pavements). There are two different categories of advice: one-off enquiries and casework.

One-off enquiries may be advice on how to apply for concessions (such as the Freedom Pass, Blue Badge or a Taxicard), advice about your rights when travelling, or how to complain if you've had a problem on a journey.

 For this sort of enquiry phone **020 7737 2339** or

 email contactus@transportforall.org.uk.

A casework enquiry is usually more involved and could include appeals if an application for a concession was turned down unlawfully, persistent issues with a transport provider or instances where you feel discriminated against on transport due to your disability.

 The phone number for casework enquiries is **020 7737 2339** and the email is casework@transportforall.org.uk.

Membership is free. If you sign up, you will receive email updates and have the opportunity to get involved with transport campaigns: www.transportforall.org.uk/membership.

Support with mobility

There are a number of websites where you can read about what to consider when choosing mobility aids.

If you are considering getting a walking stick, walking frame, wheelchair or mobility scooters, there is information on Essex County Council's website: www.essex.gov.uk/walking-and-mobility and also on the NHS website: www.nhs.uk/conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/care-services-equipment-and-care-homes/walking-aids-wheelchairs-and-mobility-scooters.

You may be entitled to a manual and/or an electric wheelchair depending on your needs. Ask your GP to refer you to your local wheelchair service for an assessment to find out if you need one and, if so, what type. You can use these links to see your local service:

- **Braintree, Witham, Chelmsford and Maldon (Provide Wheelchair Service):**
www.provide.org.uk/service/wheelchair-service
- **Epping, Harlow, Uttlesford (NHS):**
<https://eput.nhs.uk/our-services/holly-wheelchair-service>
- **Colchester and Tendring (NHS):**
www.esneft.nhs.uk/service/wheelchair-services
- **Basildon, Brentwood and Thurrock (NHS):**
www.nelft.nhs.uk/services-brentwood-wheelchair-special-seating

In Section 5: Health and wellbeing, page 110 there is information about personal wheelchair budgets which can give more choice and flexibility when choosing a wheelchair.



Which? has published a review of different walking sticks and rollators and gives advice about making the right choice: www.which.co.uk/reviews/mobility-equipment/article/buying-the-best-walking-stick-frame-or-rollator-aUxbU0H2gpLr.



The **RIDC** website has information about powered wheelchair assessments and funding: www.ridc.org.uk/features-reviews/out-and-about/getting-powered-wheelchair/getting-assessed-powered-wheelchair and also, as mentioned above, about mobility scooters, including a checklist to help you decide which scooter is right, covering comfort, ease of use and what you want to use it for: www.ridc.org.uk/features-reviews/out-and-about/choosing-wheelchair/mobility-scooters/mobility-scooters-checklist.

ShopMobility UK is a scheme that co-ordinates a network of local centres that hire out mobility scooters, powerchairs and wheelchairs so you can enjoy your independence while out and about.

You can use this link to find centres in Essex and elsewhere: www.shopmobilityuk.org/find-a-centre.

Driving

Many people with different forms of disabilities are able to drive independently and, where necessary, highly sophisticated specialist driving systems can be fitted to vehicles and tailored to meet individual needs.

These include automatic 'tie-down units' to allow someone to drive while seated in their wheelchair, electronic and infra-red controls for brake/accelerator, a joystick for steering the vehicle, or a combination of any of these. The Motability scheme, mentioned above, can be used to cover most of the costs of these adaptations.



The process of applying for a provisional licence can take a long time and involve completing medical information forms. Therefore, it's advisable to start as early as you can.

There is more detailed information about having a driving assessment and applying for a provisional driving licence under **Disability Grants** below. It may be useful to know that if you are in receipt of the higher rate of the mobility component of DLA/PIP you can apply for a provisional licence and start learning to drive from the age of 16.

Carers who need to learn to drive to give lifts to the person they support may be able to obtain funding by arranging a carer's assessment with Adult Social Care (see Section 1: Planning for change: getting started, page 33 for contact details).



Driving Mobility

Driving Mobility, an umbrella charity supported by the Department for Transport, co-ordinates 20 independent driving and mobility assessment centres across the UK.

The Essex centre provides:

- car driving assessments
- high-tech driving adaptations (including driving from a wheelchair)
- driver and passenger access and seating assessments
- wheelchair and scooter loading assessments.

The centre's aim is to help people retain or gain their independence with getting around, build confidence and share information about what is available. Its assessment is not a test but a way of finding out what you need and trying out different options and adaptations.

The main centre in Essex is in Colchester:

www.drivingmobility.org.uk/information-centres/view/colchester



Phone: **01787 222873**



Email: **kimb@eastangliandriveability.org.uk**



Disability Driving Instructors is an independent, not-for-profit Community Interest Company (CIC) that works closely with Driving Mobility. The company provides a 'one-stop shop' to help disabled people get impartial advice about how to start to learn to drive, how to return to driving after an accident or illness and how to keep driving safely. It has an accessible online register of specialist driving instructors who are specially trained and have adapted cars for lessons:

www.disabilitydrivinginstructors.com.

☎ Phone: **0844 800 7355**

✉ Email: admin@disabilitydrivinginstructors.com

disability grants

Helping you Find the right grant

The **Disability Grants** website has information about applying for a provisional licence and possible funding for driving lessons: www.disability-grants.org/funding-for-driving-lessons.html.



The **Blue Badge** scheme is a national scheme to allow people with disabilities to park closer to their destination because they are less able to walk long distances or take public transport.

You can use a Blue Badge as a driver or passenger.

Some people will be automatically eligible, for example if you get the higher rate of the mobility component of DLA, or the mobility component of PIP and score eight points or more on the 'Moving Around' activity of the mobility component.

You may also be eligible if you are unable to walk, or have considerable difficulty in walking, such as (but not limited to), heart or breathing conditions, arthritis and other joint conditions, pain or balance issues.

It's worth looking at the details to find out whether you might be eligible and how to apply at: www.essex.gov.uk/topic/blue-badge.

✉ Email: blue.badge@essex.gov.uk

✉ Post: Blue Badge team, Essex County Council, Essex House, 200 The Crescent, Colchester CO4 9YQ

Ben's experience of learning to drive



"From an early age I was always very interested in driving – maybe it was the idea of being able to travel much further independently than I could ever manage in my wheelchair! Due to the nature of my disability, I knew I would need some highly specialist vehicle adaptations to achieve my dream.



When I was 18, I visited a driving centre that had numerous different types of vehicles and control systems that I could try out on its private road network. At first, it felt very strange but eventually we found a model of van and range of driving adaptations that seemed to work for me. Given that I use an electric wheelchair at all times, I need a van that I can enter and drive whilst remaining seated in my chair. I have a remote control that presses a button to electronically open the back door of the van and deploy a lift or ramp for me. Once inside, I position myself behind the steering wheel and over an electrical system on the floor that secures my wheelchair in place. On my left hand, I wear a glove with a metal peg going into the steering wheel and with my right, I operate a lever for the brake/accelerator. My head operates a pressure pad to control switches, such as indicators and windscreen wipers.

Buying a vehicle and installing these specialist adaptations doesn't come cheap. I approached

Motability and provided them with a copy of the report from the driving centre. They assessed my case and then approved me for funding. It took a while but eventually my new van was delivered to my home.

The next step was for me to have formal lessons in it and to pass my driving test in the same way that anyone else has to do. Over time my skills and confidence grew and, after six months of lessons, I was ready to sit my driving test. I passed first time and within the space of a few months I was happily doing journeys of over 100 miles, often on busy motorways!

More than 20 years on, I have my third adapted vehicle, held under a lease with Motability. It is paid for through the mobility component of my statutory PIP benefit. Fuel is my only ongoing cost as Motability meet the cost of all repairs, maintenance and insurance. I enjoy travelling and have driven around the majority of the UK and many European countries."

 **Learning to drive and passing my test has had a revolutionary impact on my independence and, without any doubt, I feel that it is the biggest achievement of my life to date.** 

Public transport

Rail travel

You may be eligible for a Disabled Persons Railcard, which will entitle you to one-third off the price of a rail ticket for both you and a companion. The card currently costs £20. More information can be found at: www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk. Check here to see if you are eligible for a pass: www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk/are-you-eligible.

→ You can find information on the National Rail website about buying tickets, planning journeys, receiving assistance and accessibility of specific stations: www.nationalrail.co.uk/stations_destinations/passenger-assist.aspx.

Bus travel

You may be entitled to an English National Concessionary Bus Pass. Information about who is eligible and how to apply can be found on this website: www.essexhighways.org/getting-around/concessionary-fares. You can also collect an application form from your local library. Alternatively, phone **0345 200 0388** to obtain one or for assistance completing it.

For information about accessible bus travel, you can contact your local bus company or visit its website. The main bus companies in Essex are Arriva and First Bus Essex.



Arriva's website has information about its policy towards customers with disabilities and its assistance card: www.arrivabus.co.uk/help/customers-with-disabilities.



First Bus Essex has information about the steps it takes to make its services accessible: www.firstbus.co.uk/essex/plan-journey/bus-accessibility and a card that can be used to ask for extra help when using its service: www.firstbus.co.uk/essex/extra-help-travel.



Community transport

There are a number of schemes that come under the umbrella of community transport that provide additional travel options to help people who either have restricted mobility, live in rurally isolated areas or find it difficult to access conventional public transport.

The local community transport organisations in Essex offer a range of transport services, such as social cars, dial-a-ride and group travel. They vary in what they offer to people who use wheelchairs. Below are links to the groups in different areas of Essex with information about what they provide.

District	Organisation	Contact
Basildon	Basildon Community Transport - www.basildoncts.co.uk	01268 465858
Braintree	Braintree District Community Transport - www.braintree.gov.uk/info/200300/community_transport	01376 557883
Brentwood	Brentwood Community Transport - www.brentwoodct.co.uk	01277 228080
Castle Point	Wyvern Community Transport - www.wyvernct.org.uk	01268 754936
Chelmsford	Chelmsford Community Transport - www.chelmsfordct.org	01245 477750
Colchester	Colchester 360 - www.community360.org.uk/services/community-transport	01206 216600
Epping Forest	Epping Forest Community Transport - www.efcommunitytransport.co.uk	01992 579556
Harlow	Harlow Community Transport - www.efcommunitytransport.co.uk	01279 446871
Harwich	Harwich Connexions - www.harwichconnexions.co.uk/cms/community-transport.html	01255 552010
Maldon	Colchester 360 - www.community360.org.uk/services/community-transport	01621 843164
Rochford	Wyvern Community Transport - www.wyvernct.org.uk	01268 754936
Tendring	Tendring Community Transport - www.dial-a-ride.org	01255 436962
Uttlesford	Uttlesford Community Travel - www.uttlesfordcommunitytravel.org	01371 875787

There may be other community transport schemes in your local borough or district.

For more information phone **03457 430 430** or email passenger.transport@essex.gov.uk.


Additional information about accessible transport options in Essex can be found here: www.essex.gov.uk/accessible-transport.

Taxis

If you need accessible taxis, you can contact the taxi licensing office at your local council to get advice about what is available. This link will help you find the details of the relevant council: www.gov.uk/find-local-council.

Taxi and minicab drivers must not discriminate against you and cannot treat you less favourably than other customers. They should also make any 'reasonable adjustments' (see Section 1: Planning for change: getting started, page 26) to their service to enable you to make your journey. Assistance dogs must be allowed into the vehicle, unless the driver has an exemption certificate (which will be displayed on the windscreen) and you cannot be charged extra. More information about the law can be found here: www.gov.uk/transport-disabled/taxis-and-minicabs.

Uber has three services to assist people with disabilities: Uber Access for those using wheelchairs, Uber Assist for those with assistance dogs and UberX for those in need of extra help because of their mobility issues. Further details can be found here: www.uber.com/gb/en/ride/uberwav.



Taxi and minicab drivers must not discriminate against you and cannot treat you any less favourably than other customers.

Air travel

If you are thinking about flying but feel anxious about the practicalities, Queen Elizabeth's Foundation for Disabled People has an Accessible Aviation Team to support people who have concerns or need practical help and advice.

The foundation runs Tryb4uFly assessment centres where someone guides you through the journey in a realistic cabin environment and you can try equipment and look at options for comfort during a flight. There are centres in Surrey, Birmingham and Leeds.

→ Further information can be found here: <https://qef.org.uk/our-services/accessible-aviation>. It also has online flight video guides that you can watch at home (www.qef.org.uk/service/accessible-aviation/flight-video-guides-your-guide-to-flying-with-a-disability).

→ The **Equality and Human Rights Commission** has produced a list of FAQs and top tips for disabled and less mobile passengers. Follow this link to find out about your rights and what to do to make sure you have the best chance of a smooth journey: www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/top-tips-disabled-and-less-mobile-air-passengers.

It's important to be aware that even with plenty of planning, people still experience difficulties, including damage to electric wheelchairs. However, the information in the link above helps to put the right things in place to reduce risks and help you decide whether you want to travel by air.

Accessible activities

Inclusive activities

A range of activities specifically organised for people with physical disabilities is available in Essex.

These activities create opportunities for people to meet others, keep fit and active and explore new interests. Some are provided by disability organisations, while others have been set up by generic services with the aim of offering accessible activities. You will find links to a variety of these activities in Sections 2 and 5 of this guide.

One organisation that was frequently mentioned by contributors to this guide for giving confidence to go out and take part in organised activities was **Sport for Confidence** (more information about what they provide in Section 5: Health and wellbeing, page 107). In her story to the right, Emma describes how an activity organised for people with disabilities gave her motivation to get out and make new friends.

There are also services in Essex that provide information about activities where people can meet up with others who have similar interests. **Essex Connects** is an online directory where you can search for social activities, such as a local group or club, in your area. You can also use it to get in touch with local charities, voluntary groups and community sector services: www.essexconnects.org.uk.

Emma's story about going along to Sport for Confidence



I have never been sporty or competitive. I never played a sport as a hobby when I was able to. But with limited mobility and wishing to do something that was at least a bit active, I was interested when I saw an ad for Sport for Confidence activity sessions at my local leisure centre.

I did not want to try the swimming sessions as I was not confident about getting in and out of the pool or showing my body. Racket sports did not hold any interest for me. But having played boules on many occasions, I was excited at the prospect of learning to play boccia, which has fewer physical demands. I never regretted it one bit! There was a vast difference in the abilities of the people who attended, but everyone was accepted and each person's game was adapted according to their needs. There was never any pressure to attend every week and with a pay-by-session system, there is no upfront payment and subsequent loss of money if sessions aren't attended. I very rarely missed a session as I loved it so much! My husband was welcome to stay with me and we very quickly formed bonds with many of the other players and also the coaches.

COVID put a stop to all of it, yet the friendships formed from it have continued throughout and we have had social gatherings when permitted and safe, showing that wonderful things came from being brave enough to just go to that very first session. I am not a particularly confident person so I feel anyone can do it if I can. I would strongly urge others to give things a go. One hour out of your life can change so much and if, for whatever reason, it's not right for you, there's probably something else that is!

Finding accessible place to visit

Planning visits and days out can take a bit of work but there are plenty of places that provide access for people with disabilities or mobility issues. Below are some examples of websites that give information about accessible places.

Accessible Countryside for Everyone (ACE) provides information and promotes accessibility to the English countryside for people with mobility issues, their carers and families. You can follow ACE on Twitter at @access4everyone to get up-to-date news about events. Its website has a specific Essex page: www.accessiblecountryside.org.uk/essex.

AccessAble has access guides with detailed information gathered by trained surveyors who check inspect and review every place in person. The user community decides which information they collect. You can use the information to plan where to go to or use the app or website while you are out and about. It has a specific Essex page on its website: www.accessable.co.uk/essex-county-council.

Accessible Travel Club is a Facebook group where questions can be asked about accessible travel anywhere in the world: www.facebook.com/groups/AccessibleTravelClub.

Disability Horizons' website has lots of interesting and fun ideas for getting out and about, such as information about all-terrain wheelchairs, travel accessories for disabled adventurers and preparing for a festival as a wheelchair user: <https://disabilityhorizons.com/category/travel-and-disabled-holidays>.

Euan's guide is a website with lots of reviews, written by people with disabilities, about the accessibility of a variety of places. You can use it to look for local places to visit or plan a trip away. The guide also provides access information about events and venues, such as sports stadiums. You can sign up to the newsletter to receive the latest reviews: www.euansguide.com.

The **Rough Guide to Accessible Britain** aims to give inspiration and practical advice to help plan a day out. As well as covering physical access, it includes information about other facilities such as quiet spaces, small group tours and free admission for carers. More information here: www.motability.co.uk/news/rough-guide-to-accessible-britain.





Many places that receive visitors have wheelchairs available to hire, which can be helpful if there's a lot of walking involved in the visit or you're feeling less mobile than usual. Some venues hire out motorised vehicles for wheelchair or mobility scooter users. These are likely to be better suited to the terrain of the venues and may also save you the job of cleaning mud off your own wheelchair or scooter –and car boot – once you get home! You may need to phone, before you set off, to reserve a wheelchair or scooter.

Accessible toilets

And lastly, but often most importantly, accessible toilets!

There is information about where to find them and how to apply for a **RADAR** key at this link: www.essex.gov.uk/disabled-toilets-and-changing-facilities.

To use the toilet in safety and comfort, many people need to be able to access a **Changing Places** facility, which has more space than an accessible toilet and additional equipment, such as a height-adjustable changing bench and a hoist.



The Changing Places website has a search facility and also a list of motorway service stations:
[www.changing-places.org/
find_a_toilet.aspx](http://www.changing-places.org/find_a_toilet.aspx).





My notes

Use this page to make a note of anything you're interested in following up from this section.
Do this in whatever format works best for you to make sure your thoughts and ideas don't get lost.



Information about Shaping My Future

Shaping My Future should be helpful to anyone with a physical disability, impairment or long-term condition who would like ideas and information to help think through, and make decisions about, possible changes in their life.

It has been written for people living in Essex, with links to both national and local services and organisations. In the introduction to the full version there are tips to get the most from using the guide.

The PDF versions of the guide contain fillable text boxes that you can type into to save your ideas. You will need to download and save to create an offline copy and then save each time you write more. The coloured tint in the text boxes will not appear if you choose to make a printed copy.

Go to: www.essex.gov.uk/shaping-my-future

- to request a printed copy of the full guide
- to download the full guide and the six individual sections

Acknowledgements

This guide was commissioned by Essex County Council and written by Christine Towers at Together Matters (www.togethertatters.org.uk).

An Expert Reference Group helped to shape the guide and contributed content ideas, personal stories and thoughts on how to make the guide relevant to a diverse audience. Particular thanks to Ben Iles, Jade Hamnett, Karen Mutsatsa, Leslie Lodge and Emma Smith.

Feedback

Please let us know how you have used the guide, ways in which it has been helpful and suggestions to improve it. We are also keen to hear people's stories about how it gave support with shaping the future so that stories, ideas and learning can be shared. Please send any feedback to christine@togethertatters.org.uk.

Disclaimer

Every effort has been made for the information in this guide to be as accurate and up-to-date as possible. If you see something that needs amending, please email info@togethertatters.org.uk.

January 2023

© Christine Towers

Delivered by:



Commissioned by:

