

## News

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Holyport: Award won thanks to visually impaired Maleeka

# Holyport teen gives a hand to architects

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Architects have won an award for their work after taking the advice of a visually impaired teenager from Holyport to help guide their vision for the town centre.

JTP Architects, designers of the Nicholson's Quarter, won the award for their work's 'genuine attempts' to understand the needs of 'all the community', following conversations with people with disabilities, among others.

The Nicholson Centre redevelopment will see the centre make way for 660 homes, 60 shops and restaurants, and workspace for 2,000 people.

In 2019, partially-sighted Maleeka Abbas from Holyport (then 13 years old) helped JTP make their plans more mindful of those with disabilities.

## Speed read...

**The designs for the Nicholson's Quarter have been recognised for their 'genuine attempts to understand the needs of the community' thanks to the help of a teenager from Holyport. Maleeka Abbas took JTP Architects staff on a blindfolded walk around the future Nicholson's Quarter site to demonstrate the challenges faced by those with disabilities.**

Maleeka's suggestions were inspired by examples of accessible infrastructure around the world – ideas that would benefit those with any disabilities.

Ideas she presented included pavements made with tactile materials of contrasting colours and shop assistants who are trained to know when to approach someone who might need help.

Other suggestions included a phone app that would help people navigate the town, wide and well-lit stairs and lampposts in sensible locations with tactile surrounds.

Looking back, Maleeka – who recently turned 16 – said she noticed that signs and odd objects like buckets were often left in the way and can present a hazard, as JTP staff discovered for themselves.

Emmet O'Sullivan, senior architect, was blindfolded and walked around site using Maleeka's cane and alongside a sighted guide.

"Tripping over or needing to stop can be detrimental," said Maleeka.

"A lot of the time, we don't realise what's in front of us. It's a shock to have that experience. It's a whole other world, an experience he wouldn't otherwise have.



Maleeka Abbas recently turned 16.

"Doing something like this makes such an impact – guiding people through what it's like is my favourite way to do that.

"As a young person you're often overlooked, so it's amazing how my voice was acknowledged and we made progress. They respected me and we made a good team."

These experiences with Maleeka led the team to think about its plans and make some adjustments.

In the Good Work Planning Awards 2022, Planning Resource – which provides independent intelligence for planning professionals – gave The Nicholson Quarter the award for 'stake-

holder engagement in planning'. This means, of all the entries, the architects were the most engaged with outside inputs to guide their design.

The judges admired this 'innovative approach to engagement' and 'genuine attempts to understand the needs of all the community'.

Charles Campion, JTP Partner said: "We are delighted to have won this Planning Award 2022 and we thank the Maidenhead community for their local knowledge and creativity through the process and their support for the proposals that have emerged to transform the town centre."