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**Press Release**

**Blue Badge eligibility criteria changes could cause parking chaos**

The government has recently announced that it will be extending the Blue Badge eligibility criteria to include people with ‘hidden disabilities’ such as dementia, autism and a number of mental health conditions. The change which is due to be introduced early next year will be the biggest overhaul of the scheme since it was introduced in the early 1970s. From next year the eligibility criteria will cover those who:

* “Cannot undertake a journey without it causing them very considerable physiological distress”
* “Cannot undertake a journey without there being a risk of serious harm to their health or safety or that of any other person (such as young children with autism)”
* “Have very considerable difficulty when walking (both the physical act and experience of walking)”

These changes to the Blue Badge eligibility criteria have come following an eight week consultation earlier in the year. DMUK took part in the consultation and raised concerns over the possible effect the expansion would have on already limited disabled parking. DMUK urged the Department for Transport (DfT) to be realistic in its thinking. Just extending the criteria will not necessarily mean that more disabled people will benefit. Actually this change may have disastrous consequences for all Blue Badge holders, especially wheelchair users, as there is simply not enough parking to meet demand and concessions could soon disappear because of increased numbers.

Many organisations have welcomed this result and Sarah Newton, Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work commented: “We’re taking an important step forward in ensuring people with hidden disabilities get the support they need to live independently.” There is no argument that people with hidden disabilities will benefit from having a Blue Badge and DMUK also supports this group of disabled people. However, the increase in demand may make the entire scheme not fit for purpose and it may let down the people it was originally intended to help as well as disabled people with hidden disabilities.

DMUK advised the DfT to consider proper enforcement of the scheme before it looked to extend it. However we have been unsuccessful in this recommendation. The charity predicts we will be contacted more and more by disabled people who find their Blue Badge completely meaningless as they can never find adequate parking because it will be so oversubscribed. We implore the government to look at the issue of proper Blue Badge provision and enforcement as a matter of urgency so that the scheme maintains its integrity.

DMUK CEO, Graham Footer commented: “DMUK works to support the mobility of disabled people and there is no dispute that people with certain mental health conditions and cognitive disabilities could benefit from having a Blue Badge. However, the charity is concerned that increasing the numbers of Blue Badge holders will put more pressure on limited disabled parking which is poorly enforced and in some areas of the country not enforced at all. We are particularly concerned about how this will impact on wheelchair users.

In light of this recent extension DMUK would like to see the government put more pressure on local authorities to enforce the scheme to make sure it benefits genuine Blue Badge holders. The charity is very concerned that without adequate enforcement the integrity of the scheme will be undermined and of no benefit to any disabled person.”

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**Disabled Motoring UK**

Disabled Motoring UK is the national charity which supports disabled drivers, passengers and Blue Badge holders. We work with government and businesses to improve parking, refuelling and access provision for disabled people, so that they can access the goods and services that they need. Disabled Motoring UK is not just an organisation for disabled motorists; we also campaign for and support scooter and wheelchair users, families and carers.

The charity is a membership organisation and membership subscriptions is what the charity relies on to continue its work. Full members receive a monthly magazine, access to our information service and discounts on variety of good s and services.

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