Hearing Loops in Central Southampton:

Auditing hearing loops in shops and restaurants across central Southampton

Lets Loop

healthwatch Southampton

GO! SOUTHAMPTON

Foreword / Steve Beal

It is estimated that approximately 33,500 residents of Southampton (13.7%) are currently affected with a hearing loss condition.* This number is expected to rise to approximately 36,000 (14.3%) by 2019.

These figures show that it is essential that we act now to ensure that our communities are designed to be accessible for all.

In response to this issue, the Lets Loop Southampton project was founded in February 2017 in partnership with Healthwatch Southampton and the Lets Communicate Hard of Hearing Club with the vision of making Southampton the first fully looped City in the country.

I'd like to thank our passionate team of volunteers that have conducted an audit across Central Southampton to assess which shops are fitted with a hearing loop system, whether signage is visible and if staff are trained on how to use the loops.

Although the Equality Act 2010 (and Disability Discrimination Act in Northern Ireland) states that businesses, shops and public buildings are expected to make reasonable adjustments to any building used by the public, our findings show that the vast majority of buildings are yet to be fitted with hearing loop systems.

Although the overall level of stores looped is very low, we have seen some successful outcomes when making stores aware of this issue.

Following on from our work, St Mary's Stadium was fitted with over 20 hearing loops, and Cath Kidston and Body Shop both committed to conducting an nationwide audit of their stores to ensure they were all fitted with well-functioning hearing loop systems.

Furthermore, I'm pleased to note that local Business Improvement District (BID) GoSouthampton! have agreed to partner with us and invest £4k, enabling businesses within central Southampton to apply for a free hearing loop system.

Steve Beal
Founder
Lets Loop Southampton

33.5k residents of Southampton estimated to have hearing-loss condition in 2011*

13.7% percentage of Southampton thought to have a hearing-loss condition in 2011*

7.5%+ increase of residents expected to have a hearing-loss condition by 2019*

£18m estimated annual spend of local residents with hearing loss in 2011**

How big is the problem?

Current estimates indicate that around 11 million people in the UK are currently living with some form of hearing-loss condition. This breaks down to around 1 in 6 people or 33,500 people in Southampton.

With a aging population this number is expected to rise dramatically over the coming decade - Action on Hearing Loss estimate that over 15.6 million people in the UK will have a hearing-loss condition by 2035.

Their extensive research also shows that individuals with hearing loss have double the risk of developing depression, social anxiety/isolution and other mental health conditions.

We all have a role to play to help make Southampton easy to access for everyone - a well thought out hearing loop system can go a long way to tackling social isolution with those affected by a hearing loss condition.

2011 statistics indicate that people with hearing-loss conditions are worth around £4 billion a year across the UK. This figure equates to approximately £18 million a year to businesses in Southampton.

Although it is a legal requirement to ensure you comply with the Equality Act 2010 and Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), it is also good customer practice.

""By not looping our City, we are creating barriers for those affected to get out and integrate within our community. Over time these barriers disencourage our residents to engage, increasing social isolation and loneliness. Healthwatch Southampton is committed to continue working with Lets Loop Southampton to help to tackle this growing issue."
- Rob Kurn
Manager, Healthwatch Southampton

*Statisitcs from Action on Hearing Loss. Calculated based on the most robust data on the prevalence of hearing loss among different age groups (from Adrian Davis, Hearing in Adults, 1995), updated for the most recent population statistics (ONS mid-2014 data, see http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/sape/small-area-population-estimates/mid-2014-and-mid-2013/rft-clinical-commissioning-group-formatted-table-2014.zip), and rounded to the nearest 500.
**Statstics from 2011 Action of Hearing Loss ' Hearing loops: a guide for services' Report. £18 million calculated by dividing £4 billion national estimate using the most recent population statistics for Southampton (ONS mid-2014 data, see http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/sape/small-area-population-estimates/mid-2014-and-mid-2013/rft-clinical-commissioning-group-formatted-table-2014.zip)

What is a hearing loop?

A hearing loop (sometimes called an audio induction loop) is a specialised sound system designed to be used by people using hearing aids.

It wirelessly transmits a clear, magnetic signal across a small distance that can be picked up individuals close by wearing hearing aids that have been set to the 'T' (telecoil) setting.

Each hearing loops contain a microphone and a amplifer and a loop cable which picks up and amplifies any noise and radiates it through the loop cable to any hearing aid within the vincinity of the cable.

The presence of a hearing loop is generally advertised with a series of signs, often blue, across the store. There are various types of hearing loops, each suitable for different types of venues and needs:

Counter Loop
Counter Loops are commonly found in banks, or stores with individual counters. Each counter is fitted with a individual loop and microphone that only transmits it's signal across a small area to customers standing directly in front of that counter.

Portable Loop
A portable loop is similar to a counter loop in that it only transmits it's signal across a small area, often to only one individual at a time.

Unlike counter loops, portable loops are not fitted to the counter and are able to be moved easily to respond to the needs of the organisation. They are designed for small businesses or offices that do not have a high footfall.

Room Loop
These types of loops are commonly found in large conference rooms and places of worship. Unlike counter and portable loops, the loop cable is fitted around the perimeter of the room.

When a Speaker talks into a microphone, a stronger signal is transmitted to everyone inside the loop cable wearing a hearing aid.

Keith's Story

Throughout his childhood, Keith, from Lordshill, had several different procedures and eventually a operation which ultimately helped to improve his hearing.

Although Keith wears dual hearing aids, he often struggles to communicate when out shopping. Unless a shop is fitted with a hearing loop, background noise make it hard for him to understand what shop assistants are saying.

The issue is further exacerbated when shops not fitted with hearing loop systems play music: *"The background noise in premises that aren't looped, especially when they're playing music, makes it really difficult for me. It's embarrassing to not be able to communicate with staff."*

Without a hearing loop, Keith's hearing aids are unable to differentiate between different sources of sound. Sadly this problem is not unique to Keith; most people fitted with hearing aids face the same daily struggle.

"When in a public place, your hearing aid can pick up a lot of unwanted background noise, which makes it difficult for it to work efficiently. A hearing loop will cut out this background noise. This helps not just the individual using the loop, but also the staff when interacting with them!"
- Keith, Volunteer,
Lets Loop Southampton

Hearing loops help to cut out unwanted background noise and interference, sending a clear signal directly to the listener. They are essential for Keith and residents like him to be able to communicate when out and about. Without them, it simply would not be possible.

Keith has recently started volunteering with Lets Loop Southampton: *"I like knowing that I'm helping to fix something that affects people. More so, volunteering has helped keep me connected with my community."*

295 locations audited in Southampton

13% of locations are fitted with a hearing loop

14% of locations in West Quay are looped

0% of locations in Marlands are looped

24% of locations on the High Street are looped

Methodology

Throughout 2017, our trained team of Lets Loop Southampton volunteers visited 295 shops within central Southampton, conducting an audit of their hearing loop facilities.

Stores visited are broken down into the following categories:

West Quay	128
Marlands	42
High Street	62
Below Bar	23
East Street	17
Hanover / Queensway	23
Total	295

Upon entering a store our volunteers check to see whether there is a hearing loop available and whether it is switched on/operational, asking and recording the following information:

- Is the hearing loop working correctly?
- Is there a sign for a hearing loop displayed?
- Is the hearing loop permanently switched on?
- If not, then are staff trained how to operate it?
- What equipment, if any, is required for the loop to work (eg: specific headphones)
- Is there a named member of staff trained to operate the hearing loops?
- Is it tested regularly and what evidence is there to show this?

Stores that had satisfactory facilities are presented with a certificate. Those without are left with literature outlining why it was important for stores to be accessible for all.

Results and Outcomes

It is disappointing to report that the vast majority of locations audited in Southampton did not have any looping facilities.

This equates to just 39 (13%) of the 295 locations audited. Particularly, it's disappointing to note that none of the stores at Marlands Shopping Centre are looped. We have been in dialog with building management and look forward to attending a meeting with store managers to discuss this further.

West Quay recently opened their new extension, Watermark, which was included in our audit. Although new buildings are expected to be built in line with Equality Act 2010 regulations, sadly only 4 (14%) of the 29 newly built stores / restaurants were fitted with a loop.

On a positive note, we are pleased to note that each of the 5 Costa Coffee branches audited were fitted with hearing loops and signage.

Following our audit, we've also been in communication with several national chains. Both New Look and Cath Kidston have now installed a hearing loop and signage with Cath Kidston promising to install hearing loops at all their stores.

When visiting the Body Shop, we discovered their hearing loop was not working. We're pleased to report that Body Shop have now repaired the loop and committed to reviewing all their hearing loops nationwide.

John Lewis have revamped their store, improving signage and adding a loop system to their Waitrose outlet.

Data

Location	Stores Looped	Stores Not Looped	Total
West Quay	18 (14%)	110 (86%)	128
Marlands	0 (0%)	42 (100%)	42
High Street*	15 (24%)	47 (76%)	62
Below Bar	1 (4%)	22 (96%)	23
East Street	1 (6%)	16 (94%)	17
Hanover/Queensway	4 (17%)	19 (83%)	23
Total	**39 (13%)**	**256 (87%)**	**295**

*When audited, ASDA was fitted with a hearing loop however it was not operating correctly.

Case Study / John Lewis

In March 2017, Lets Loop audited the John Lewis branch in Southampton. Although John Lewis has been fully looped for a number of years, we noted there were some issues with three of their hearing loops and a lack of signage.

We were put in contact with their Operations Manager Adrian Young who worked with us to repair the affected hearing loops and install signage across the store.

"It's fantastic to see that John Lewis are committed to serving the needs of all their customers by ensuring their store is accessible to all. I'm pleased to award them with this Lets Loop certificate for having hearing loops throughout the store alongside clearly marked signage."
Steffie Nightingale,
Healthwatch Southampton

"We have had a loop system in branch for a number of years, which should always be regularly checked by our maintenance team. However When Lets Loop came in to check they found a few areas where this was not the case. It was hugely useful for us to get feedback so we could put it right as there is little point having the equipment if it is not working correctly. We were able to swiftly address the problems and get ourselves fully operational thanks to Lets Loops support. We hope customers who need this system find it useful and helpful and look forward to being able to welcome them to our shop."
- Adrian Young, John Lewis

Case Study / St Mary's Stadium

When originally auditing the Saints Store in West Quay in March 2017, we noted that they weren't fitted with a hearing loop.

After contacting Southampton Football Club, we were invited to visit St Mary's Stadium to discuss what measures we felt would be appropriate.

We explained that although the tickets office had a hearing loop it wasn't of a good quality and furthermore, there were no other loops at the site.

In addition to agreeing to install a hearing loop at their store in West Quay, Southampton Football Club also agreed to fit multiple hearing loops throughout St Mary's Stadium. We are incredibly pleased to say that this has now happened with over 20 hearing loops installed.

"This is a fantastic outcome for every football fan with a hearing condition that wishes to visit St Mary's Stadium. It can be very intimidating for those with a hearing condition to visit venues or busy shopping facilities without hearing loop facilities. We applaud Southampton Football Club for ensuring that their grounds are accessible for all."
Steve Beal,
Lets Loop Southampton

"Let's Loop highlighted a need for us to improve the loops that we had and to expand our coverage to different areas. Their help and advice was invaluable, and we are delighted that we are even more accessible for our visitors with a hearing loss condition. Thank you to Steve and the team!"
- Khali Parsons, Supporter Relations Manager, Southampton FC

Responses

"We're supporting the Let's Loop Southampton campaign as it will help to make the city's retail district more open and welcoming to all. We fully support the traders who have already installed hearing loops and maintain them, and are looking forward to more retailers following their excellent example."
- Cllr Warwick Payne,
Cabinet member for Housing and Adult Care

"The ability to communicate is the most important of all human functions, and the inability to do so affects every aspect of people's lives. Business's, especially retail, depend for their very existence on communication and persuading customers to buy their goods. It is therefore astonishing that any business would choose to exclude potential customer that have hearing difficulties - especially when a proper loop system is such a low price item for any business - They are losing the spending power of these people. We champion those few businesses that have taken these issues seriously."
- Ian Loynes,
Chief Executive, SPECTRUM Centre for Independent Living

"I always encourage hearing aid wearers to use loop systems as they can make a big difference to someone's ability to hear in a difficult listening environment. This was a timely and important project and I am delighted to see that it has already made a big impact locally and nationally."
- Dr Victoria Watson PhD,
Clinical Scientist (Audiology) ISVR, University of Southampton

"Let's Loop Southampton have done a fantastic job identifying some of the stores and facilities in the Southampton that currently do not have loops installed. But better than that they have persuaded some to install or repair existing loops. It is so important that we all continue to work to support the hearing impaired community and encourage others to do likewise."
- Caroline Nokes MP, Romsey and Southampton North

"I would like to thank Let's Loop and Healthwatch Southampton for this report. It is vital we support people with a hearing loss condition. That is why NHS Southampton City CCG has already set up a hearing loop in our building and I encourage more businesses to work with Let's Loop and set up hearing loops."
- John Richards, NHS Southampton City Clinical Commissioning Group

Future

Under the Equality Act 2010 businesses, shops and public buildings are expected to make reasonable adjustments to any building used by the public to ensure they are assessible to all.

We believe that hearing loops remain the best way to improve living conditions for those living with a hearing-loss condition.

In addition to continuing to monitor premises already audited, we intend on extending our coverage, with audits planned for the wider areas of Southampton, including Shirley, Portswood and Woolston.

Lets Loop Southampton has also been endorsed by local Business Improvement District (BID) provider GoSouthampton!, who have agreed to support Lets Loop Southampton by establishing a grant for independent businesses inside the BID to accquire funding for hearing loop systems.

Furthermore, we will be partnering with Healthwatch Southampton to carry out audits of GP surgeries in Southampton to assess whether they are compliant with both the Equality Act 2010 and the Accessible Information Standard.

"Healthwatch Southampton is proud to partner with Let's Loop, who have worked tirelessly to educate local businesses, public sector organisations, charities and voluntary groups about their role in ensuring premises are accessible to those with a hearing-loss condition. We look forward to continuing our partnership through an audit of GP practices ensuring better accessibility to services for all with hearing-loss conditions."
Ben Grace,
Healthwatch Southampton

The Accessible Information Standard (AIS), which came into effect from 31st July 2016, ensures that anyone with a disability, impairment or sensory loss receives the communication support that they need from organisations that provide NHS or publicly-funded adult social care services.

Our vision is to see Southampton accessible to anyone affected with a hearing-loss condition. We remain committed to this aim:
Together we can make Southampton the first fully-looped City in the United Kingdom!

"This initiative can make such a difference for the experience of visiting the City and Go Southampton is fully committed to supporting this scheme and will help promote more businesses to consider a Loop system that will benefit their customers."
- Spencer Bowman, Metricks Coffee and Go Southampton Vice Chair

Lets Loop Southampton, 2018
www.letsloopsouthampton.co.uk