

Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

Meeting held on 22nd November, 2016 between Helen Greengrass – Change Director, Felixstowe Forward, Linda Hoggarth and Margaret Morris

The following points were discussed arising from the Recommendations contained in the Report from the Felixstowe Action Day which took place on the 5th July, 2016:

- **Recommendation 1: A shuttle service should be considered during the peak season to assist people to access the town from the beach and vice versa. It could be a route using Convalescent Hill.**

Response: It was agreed that a shuttle bus service between the seafront and the Town should be considered perhaps run by First Bus / Eastern Counties. This could stop at the Leisure Centre. The Forum's link with First Bus is Stephen Fountain. Helen suggested that Felixstowe Travel Watch is involved through Cllr Graham Newman **(MM to Action)**. The shuttle bus should run in the summer months and for main events held on the Promenade.

Additionally it was thought that it might be worth considering a Shopmobility Scheme for Felixstowe as in many of the other towns in Suffolk, Ipswich Lowestoft, Bury St Edmunds, Stowmarket and Newmarket. It was worth asking Phillips Mobility if they have any statistics on the number of wheelchairs loaned out to residents and visitors to the town. **(MM to Action)**

- **Recommendation 2: A leaflet and on-line information should be prepared to provide disabled residents and guests with information about the facilities in Felixstowe, including its accessibility, location of accessible toilets, Changing Places facilities, car parking, the Sea Front Gardens, the Beach Wheelchair and the Martello Park. This would put all useful information 'in one place'.**
- **Recommendation 3: More information on the accessible (or step free) routes in the Sea Front Gardens would be very sensible. This could be developed to show the nearest toilets, access to the beach, and other facilities. A dropped kerb would be useful to access the path to the Gardens near the parking spaces in front of the Spa Pavilion (not the path to access the Theatre itself).**
- **Recommendation 8: Information about the facilities at the Martello Park should be made more readily available particularly to families with disabled children.**

Response: A leaflet/on line information could be developed for inclusion on the Felixstowe Forward website. **(HG to Action)** Leaflets could be available in the Tourist Information Points in Felixstowe Library and in the beach huts used as Information Points in the summer. This could include:

Seafront Gardens route for wheelchair users
Accessibility of the Pram Walk
Access to the Beach and the availability of the Beach Buggy
Location of Accessible Toilets / Changing Places facilities
Martello Park
Viewing Point at Landguard Point

The location of the dropped kerbs near the Spa Pavilion would be checked **(HG to Action)**.

- **Recommendation 4: The Shared Space area is very cluttered with A-Boards and advertising banners. These cause difficulties for people who are blind or visually impaired, guide dog users, and people with mobility difficulties. Clarification on the rules and criteria for using these (including the number, and type of advertising material used) would be welcomed.**

Response: It was noted that the location of A Boards and Banners are an obstruction and cause difficulties for people with visual impairments. It was felt that the introduction of advertising banners was not included within the guidance issued by Suffolk County Council in relation to A Boards. As the Shared Space is the responsibility of Suffolk County Council, this needs to be referred to local county councillors such as Cllr Graham Newman. **(LH to Action)**

There was some discussion regarding the Shared Space as to whether this would be better if there was only access for Blue Badge holders. It would be helpful to have a clear definition of what Shared Space is and this would be raised with Cllr Newman **(LH to Action)**.

- **Recommendation 5: It was felt that some businesses would benefit from providing more training to their staff in disability awareness including dementia awareness.**

Response: Work is underway to make Felixstowe a Dementia Aware Town by March, 2017. This would involve dementia awareness raising. The Chamber of Trade and Commerce may be able to promote some awareness raising training. The Forum would investigate whether there was any suitable on line disability awareness training to assist small businesses.

Investigations has shown that the following organisations offer on line training – there is a cost to this as it was not possible to find any disability training that was free of charge – Equo (based in Lowestoft) www.equo.co.uk or DisabledGo (an organisation that specialises in access for disabled people) www.disabledgo.org/disability-equality.

- **Recommendation 6: There was a general concern regarding the accessibility of fire exits in the shops and businesses and it was considered that a review of these should be taken out in conjunction with Suffolk Fire and Rescue.**

Response: This particularly referred to Marks & Spencer and the new Manager is Bethany Saunders. It was agreed to contact her. **(MM to Action)**

- **Recommendation 7: It would be sensible to conduct a proper trial in respect of the use of the beach wheelchair to assess its suitability for purpose.**

Response: It is understood that the beach wheelchair was not provided by local Rotary Clubs though certainly it was provided through fundraising. It was considered difficult to use unless the disabled person was very light. It might be better to replace it with a mobility scooter and an ordinary wheelchair and direct people to more accessible areas on the seafront.

- **Recommendation 9: In respect of the gaps (where the floodgates are) along the main path in the Martello Park, signage should be introduced to indicate which of the gaps are accessible to wheelchair users, those with mobility problems and people with pushchairs.**

Response: This was noted. It was thought that Suffolk Coastal Norse could provide this and that Cllr Tracey Green may be able to help.

- **Recommendation 10: It would be helpful to know which floodgates are left open during the winter and only closed in the event of bad weather.**

Response: This was noted.

- **Recommendation 11: Doors of accessible toilets in car parks owned by Suffolk Coastal District Council need to be easier to open especially for unaccompanied wheelchair users.**

Response: This was noted for immediate action.