



Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

Report from the Felixstowe Action Days (Updated September, 2018)

Introduction

Access to shops, businesses and other facilities in the larger towns in Suffolk Coastal has long been of concern to members of the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum.



As a result, an Action Day in Felixstowe was planned for Tuesday, 5th July, 2016. Members visited the shops and businesses in Hamilton Road, the Sea Front Gardens, the Martello Park, and tried out the beach wheelchair to attempt to gain access to the beach.

Following the findings of the first Action Day, a second Action Day was planned for Wednesday, 5th September, 2018. Members largely concentrated their visits on shops and businesses. The following is an updated version of the first report.

Acknowledgements

The Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum would like to thank Cllr Graham Newman, the Mayor of Felixstowe, and Members of the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum, for taking part in the 2018 survey and providing the information used to provide this updated report.

Disclaimer

It should be noted that these surveys were undertaken in good faith and are based on members' observations and experiences on the days in question.

The surveys are a basic access check and the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum does not accept any liability for any loss, inconvenience or damage caused as a consequence of the use any of the following information.

Recommendations from the 2016 Survey - *(2018 Updates in Italics)*

- 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. *The 77 First Bus service now runs hourly between the seafront and the town.*
- 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'. *Visit Felixstowe has produced an Accessibility Guide which is available on the website below:*
<http://www.visitfelixstowe.org.uk/visitor-information/publications/>
- 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). *This information is in the Visit Felixstowe – Accessibility Guide.*
- 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. *The Shared Space Area remains cluttered with A-Boards. Additionally, more 'flying banana' street banners are now in evidence and these pose a considerable hazard to all pedestrians especially those with sight impairment.*
- It was felt that some businesses would benefit from providing more training to their staff in disability awareness including dementia awareness. *Work continues to improve the awareness of staff.*
- 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. *No progress has yet been made.*
- It would be sensible to conduct a proper trial in respect of the use of the beach wheelchair to assess its suitability for purpose. *It is considered that the current beach wheelchair is not suitable for a shingle beach.*

- Information about the facilities at the Martello Park should be made more readily available particularly to families with disabled children. *Information is included in the online Visit Felixstowe Accessibility Guide.*
- In respect of the gaps 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. *No progress has been made.*
- It would be helpful to know which floodgates are left open during the winter and only closed in the event of bad weather. *The information is available in the online Visit Felixstowe Accessibility Guide.*
- Doors of accessible toilets in car parks owned by Suffolk Coastal District Council need to be easier to open especially for unaccompanied wheelchair users. *These have been checked and no further problems were identified.*

Recommendations from the 2018 Survey

- Whilst the paved area in the Shared Space is of a good standard, the pavements in the adjacent streets require attention.
- Traffic going through the Shared Space travels at a speed which is potentially dangerous to pedestrians. The incoming use of electric cars is a concern as these are quiet vehicles and pedestrians will not hear them approaching. Further consideration should take place regarding the current use of the Shared Space and the speed recommended for traffic.
- The signage for the Shared Space should be improved to provide more information to pedestrians and traffic.
- Steps should be taken to stop the current practice of illegal parking of cars in the Shared Space area and also to proper enforcement of the parking for blue badge holders.
- A trial period of stopping all traffic using the Hamilton Road Shared Space on Saturdays should be considered.
- The use of A Boards and 'flying banana' street banners should be reviewed and monitored.
- Steps should be taken to highlight the cycle racks as these are grey against grey paving and are not easily seen.
- The use of the crossings in Crescent Road and the courtesy crossings at the start of the Shared Space in Hamilton Road need to be clarified.

- Following the concerns identified, a more detailed survey of Undercliff Road West should be undertaken to identify locations for dropped kerbs.

General Comments

There were a number of issues that affected the Shared Space in Hamilton Road and many of the businesses and shops in it.

- There is a Shared Space sign at the entrance to the Shared Space but no information on it about what this means for traffic and pedestrians. Consequently, there is some confusion.



- In the Shared Space, it is not made clear to pedestrians what the sharing involves. Some drivers are considerate but not all. There were concerns that the speed limit at 20 mph is too high. Visitors do not know where the 'edge' of the road is and it is confusing for guide dogs that are trained to recognise kerbs. It was felt that traffic using the Shared Space travelled too fast and there were a number of instances of illegal parking.

- Cars are often illegally parked in the Shared Space area. In some cases, blue badge holders were also abusing the parking restrictions and proper enforcement would be welcomed.

- The cycles attached to the cycle racks through the Shared Space are a potential danger to blind and partially sighted people as the cycles can overhang the defining surface on the paved area. The cycle racks are not easy to see as they are grey against grey paving.



- Many fire exits at the rear of shops and businesses are too narrow for wheelchair users and often accessed via steps.

- Many of the cafés do not have accessible toilets and rely on the fact that there are accessible toilets in nearby car parks. This is within the law if the toilets are within 100m of the café.

- There are many obstructions, some of which are fixed such as the bins and cycle racks. However, many shops and businesses use A-Boards or banners to advertise their business. The number of these in use appears to be increasing. These cause difficulties for people who are blind or partially sighted or have mobility difficulties. The number of 'flying banana' street



banners is increasing and these are particularly hazardous for all pedestrians.

- The A Boards continue to obstruct pavements. In many instances 'flying banana' street banners are also being used and these are a hazard to all pedestrians but particularly those with visual impairments.

- The scaffolding outside Shoe Zone presented a hazard to anyone walking through it because of the cross beams. However the scaffolding was bright yellow and therefore showed up fairly well.



- The majority of cash machines (ATMs) are difficult to access for wheelchair users as they cannot get near enough to them and people can see their transactions and possibly also their PIN numbers. They are not practical for people with visual impairments to use.



- Concerns were raised about the safety of the courtesy crossings as it seemed that neither pedestrians nor traffic was fully aware of the way to use these. The use of these crossings needs to be clarified. Concerns were also raised regarding the crossings at the traffic lights near the Cinema in Crescent Road as these appeared to have no sound.

- In Undercliff Road West, concerns were raised regarding the lack of dropped kerbs particularly on the sea side at the bottom of Bent Hill near the shelter where there is a gap to allow access to the Promenade.

- A number of people commented on the difficulty of reaching the town centre from the promenade and vice versa. However, on the whole, people felt that the shared space area was of benefit to many disabled people, particularly wheelchair users.

Detailed Comments

Parking in Felixstowe

There are a number of car parks in Felixstowe which are the responsibility of Suffolk Coastal District Council. Those detailed below were visited by our surveyors. There are parking charges for blue badge holders in car parks provided by Suffolk Coastal District Council but blue badge holders get double the time they pay for.

Further information on all car parks in Felixstowe can be found by following the link below and clicking on Blue Badge Parking in Suffolk Coastal:

<http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/visitors/parking/>

Crescent Road	There is parking for blue badge holders and accessible toilets including a changing places facility.
Ranelagh Road	There is parking for blue badge holders and accessible toilets.
Martello Park	There are two car parks, Martello Park North and Martello Park South. There is parking for blue badge holders in the Martello Park South Car Park and there are accessible toilets including a changing places facility.
Parking near the Spa Theatre	There is some parking for blue badge holders along the Sea Front near to the Spa Pavilion.

There is some on street parking for blue badge holders in the shared space area in Hamilton Road.

Accessible Toilets

Crescent Road Car Park	The toilet block includes an accessible toilet and a changing places facility. The key to the changing places facility is available at the Library.
Ranelagh Road Car Park	The toilet block includes an accessible toilet.
Martello Park	The toilet block includes an accessible toilet and a changing places facility. The key to the changing places facility should be available in the refreshment kiosk. However the sign does not indicate this and refers to the key being at the Library, some distance away.
The Spa Pavilion	There is an accessible toilet at the rear of the Spa Pavilion.



Further accessible toilets are available elsewhere in the town and are listed on the Visit Felixstowe website under publications. RADAR keys are needed to access the majority of the accessible toilets.

Hamilton Road

A number of issues affecting disabled people were identified in the Shared Space area as highlighted in the section on General Comments.



The Department for Transport defines shared space as “*a street or place designed to improve pedestrian movement and comfort by reducing the dominance of motor vehicles and enabling all users to share the space rather than follow the clearly defined rules implied by more conventional designs*”.

The basic premise is that when vehicle users have to share space with pedestrians, they will naturally drive more slowly and cautiously, so reducing accidents. This allows pedestrians, cyclists and vehicle users to have equal ownership of the street and to benefit from an improved experience. In contrast to conventional traffic control systems where pedestrian safety is enforced by designated crossings, shared space is based on a courtesy system. Shared space designs aim to minimise street clutter such as traffic lights, signage, kerbs, road markings and railings to allow vehicle users to more easily read the road. Often features such as seating and planting are used to subtly indicate the best vehicular route.

Our surveyors noted particularly the number of obstacles to be negotiated in this area including A Boards, ‘flying banana’ street banners, street furniture, cycle racks, bollards and cars parked indiscriminately.

Orwell Road

The route from the Ranelagh Road Car Park to Hamilton Road via Orwell Road has some difficulties. The dropped kerbs near the Citizens Advice Bureau are particularly difficult because of the steep camber on the road into it and the steep slope on the dropped kerb itself with trees at the top of it.



Access to shops and businesses in Orwell Road is challenging due to the age of the buildings with stepped access.



Shops and Businesses in Hamilton Road and the adjacent roads

It was felt that the majority of shops and businesses in Hamilton Road were reasonably accessible, provided that staff were helpful and that shops were not overcrowded with goods or the aisles too narrow. However there are still some shops with small entrance steps, preventing easy access.




Shops and businesses in the roads adjacent to Hamilton Road tend to have more access difficulties.




More detailed access information provided by our surveyors regarding shops and businesses in Felixstowe is available on request.

Sea Front Gardens

Information is now included in the Visit Felixstowe Accessibility Guide.



<p>Parking</p>	<p>Parking provided by Suffolk Coastal District Council is available for blue badge holders in front of the Spa Pavilion and along the Sea Front. Blue Badge holders must pay for parking but get double time.</p>
<p>Kerbs</p>	<p>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).</p>
<p>Condition of paths and walkways</p> 	<p>The paths are wide enough for wheelchair users but not so wide that wheelchairs can pass each other easily. The surface is relatively good but there is still some loose gravel which prevents the tyres of wheelchairs gripping well and causes them to slip. Additionally people walking may find this loose gravel slippery. Presumably it is anticipated that the surface will bed down in time.</p>

<p>Signage</p> 	<p>The signage in the Gardens is of little use to wheelchair users and people with mobility problems as it does not identify routes which are accessible through the gardens. So people have no idea which path to follow. More information on the accessible (or step free) routes would be very sensible. This could be developed to show the nearest toilets, access to the beach, and other facilities. It is possible for someone using a power wheelchair to go up (and down) the Pram Walk to get to the top of Bent Hill though the slippery gravel caused some minor difficulty.</p>
<p>Barriers or Obstacles</p> 	<p>There are a number of flights of steps preventing wheelchair users from accessing the whole of the gardens.</p> <p>Additionally some of the slopes are rather steep which again prevents access.</p> <p>The path up behind the Spa Pavilion ends in a set of very steep steps and there is no signage indicating that this path is not suitable for wheelchair users or people with mobility difficulties.</p> 
<p>Toilets</p>	<p>There is an accessible toilet at the far end of the Spa Pavilion.</p>
<p>Any other comments</p>	<p>There is a fair amount of seating in the gardens, some of which can be reached by wheelchair users.</p> <p>It is noted that the Gardens have been restored as a result of a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund and, as such, cannot be made fully accessible to everyone. However, the Gardens are well worth a visit as they are very attractive and there are plenty of places to sit overlooking the sea that can be reached by the majority of visitors.</p>


The Beach


It is difficult for wheelchair users to access the beach due to the drop from the promenade to the beach and then its make-up of shingle and sand.



Martello Park






<p>Parking</p>	<p>The best parking for disabled people would be the South Car Park as this is close to the toilets and refreshment kiosks.</p> <p>There are spaces for blue badge holders.</p> <p>There is also car parking at the North Car Park and on street near the main entrance in Sea Road.</p>
<p>Condition of paths and walkways</p>	<p>The main path is excellent, it is wide enough for two wheelchairs to pass each other, a hard surface, and is level throughout the park. All paths have a good surface and accessible.</p>
<p>Seating</p>	<p>It would be helpful to have more seating along the main path in the Park as it is a long way from the Sea Road entrance through to the South Car Park.</p> <p>There did not appear to be a picnic table that could be used easily by wheelchair users (though we may have missed it!).</p>
<p>Signage</p>	<p>The signage is good throughout the Park, with a clear contrast between lettering and background. The map is also easy to understand. The information boards about the Martello Tower are clear and interesting.</p>
<p>Barriers or Obstacles</p>	<p>There are gaps along the main path where it is possible to access the sea front. However only one of these appeared to be easily accessible for wheelchair users. There was no signage to indicate which were accessible and which were not though of course it was easy to see the shingle. There were flood gates to close the gaps but it was not known whether one of these is open during the winter.</p>
<p>Toilets</p> 	<p>There is a Changing Places facility next to the South Car Park which has clear instructions about how to obtain a key for this. However, this refers to obtaining the key from the Library, some distance away. A key needs to be available at a closer location. All other toilets were unlocked and the</p>

	accessible one was clean and well equipped. The door was stiff to open.
Any other comments 	The play equipment was inclusive and means that disabled children are catered for. Information about the facilities at this Park should be made more readily available to families with disabled children. It is now included in the Visit Felixstowe Accessibility Guide. There was evidence of good use by local people using mobility scooters.

The Library



Location	The Library is in Crescent Road	
Parking	Parking is available in the Crescent Road Car Park just across the road where there are spaces for blue badge holders.	
Access	There is a ramp of a suitable gradient leading to automatic doors and also steps leading to the doors. The nosings of the steps require repainting.	
Internal access	The reception desk, self service points and the shelves of books are all reasonably accessible.	
Lift	There is a lift to access the upper floor. This is of sufficient size for a wheelchair user.	
Accessible Toilet	There is an accessible toilet available.	
Suffolk Coastal District Council Customer Service Point.	Suffolk Coastal District Council has a Customer Service Point within the library. It is easily accessible from the main entrance but there are some concerns regarding the privacy of the arrangements. There is an interview room available for private enquiries.	

The Railway Station



Location	The Railway Station is in Railway Approach
Parking	The Railway Station does not have its own parking.
Access	Level access is provided throughout.
Accessible Toilet	There is no accessible toilet available.
Staffing	The Railway Station is not staffed but there is a help point available.

Landguard Fort



Location	Landguard Fort is accessed via View Point Road
Parking	There is parking nearby with spaces for blue badge holders.
Access	Disabled visitors can be dropped off at the entrance. The ground floor of the Fort is accessible .
Accessible Toilet	There is an accessible toilet available.
Portable Loop	A portable loop is available.

Landguard Nature Reserve




Location	The Nature Reserve is accessed via View Point Road
Parking	There is parking nearby with spaces for blue badge holders.
Access	There is an accessible circular board walk but this is not signed adequately and the board walk is difficult to negotiate independently because of the camber. However, on a fine day, it is a very enjoyable walk.



John Bradfield Viewing Area and View Point Café



Location	The John Bradfield Viewing Area and the View Point Café are accessed via View Point Road.
Parking	There is parking available with spaces for blue badge holders. However, those marked for blue badge holders on the sea front are not sufficiently wide enough.
Access	The View Point Café can be accessed via a ramp at the side of the building. There is also a small flight of steps. Both the ramp and the steps lead to a level entrance. 
Accessible Toilet	There is an accessible toilet available.


Felixstowe Museum



Location	The Felixstowe Museum is accessed via View Point Road.
Parking	There is parking close by.
Access	Level access is provided throughout.
Accessible Toilet	There is no accessible toilet available.

The Spa Pavilion



Location	The Spa Pavilion is in Undercliff Road West on the sea front.
Parking	There is parking for blue badge holders close by. 

Access	Access to the theatre is via a ramp to the side of the building. Access to the café, restaurant and bar is level.
Accessible Toilet	There is an accessible toilet available.

Salvation Army Centre



Location	The Salvation Army Centre is in Cobbold Road
Parking	There is limited on street parking.
Access	The entrance door is quite heavy but it provides level access to the building. All doorways are level but a little narrow to some of the rooms.
Accessible Toilet	There is an accessible toilet available.

Trinity Methodist Church



Location	The Trinity Methodist Church is in Hamilton Road
Parking	The Church has no specific parking but there are car parks close by.
Access	There is a ramp to the church and a separate ramp to the function room.
Accessible Toilet	There is an accessible toilet available.