

Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

**Minutes of the Meeting held via Zoom on Tuesday, 16th July, 2024,
at 2 pm**

Present:

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| Linda Hoggarth | Disability Forum for Suffolk (Chair) |
| Paul Kelly | Resident (Vice Chair) |
| Simon Barnett | Integrated Transport & Enhanced Partnership Manager, Suffolk County Council |
| Peter Coleman | Resident/ Member, Norfolk & Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust |
| Simon Daws | Resident / Suffolk Guide Dog Forum |
| Deborah Darby | Melton Parish Council |
| Patricia Ferreira-Whittaker | Communities Officer – Beccles, Bungay & Halesworth, East Suffolk Council |
| Bryan Frost | Resident / Trimley St Mary Parish Council |
| Oliver Horsman | National Disability & Carers Card |
| Margaret Morris | Felixstowe Town Council (Secretary) |
| Joss Mullett | Communities Officer – Framlingham, Wickham Market & Surrounding Villages, East Suffolk Council |
| Steve Race | Manager, Disability Advice Service East Suffolk |

Guests:

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| Graham Footer | Chief Executive, Disabled Motoring UK |
| Steven Foulkes | Resort Supervisor, Asset Management, East Suffolk Council |
| Jonathan Mason-Gordon | Adviser, Citizens Advice Bureau, East Suffolk |
| Chloe Robison-Smith | Environment Strategy Project Manager, Suffolk County Council |

Apologies:

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| Lorna Bellamy | Walton Parish Nurses |
| Trevor Garrod | East Suffolk Travellers Association (ESTA) |
| Steve Hodgkiss | Suffolk Sight / Disability Forum for Suffolk |
| Sylvia Izzard | Resident |
| Linda Layton | Resident |
| Elise Martin-De-La-Torre | Resident |
| Yvonne Smart | Trimley St Martin Parish Council |
| Graham Walker | Chair, Disability Advice Service – East Suffolk |
| Sally Watson | Community & Engagement Manager, Healthwatch Suffolk |

1. Welcome & Introductions

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

2. Apologies

The above apologies were received and noted.

3. Electrical Vehicle Charging and Accessibility Plans

3.1 Chloe Robison-Smith, Environment Strategy Project Manager, Suffolk County Council, was welcomed to the meeting and invited to explain the plans to members.

3.2 Chloe said that Suffolk is installing electric vehicle charging points under the Plug In Suffolk banner and she is the Project Manager for this. Suffolk has been awarded £6.7m from the Department of Transport Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure funding. £1.36m of this is to be used for community venues and £5.33 for on street venues. The points are to be constructed to PAS-1899 standard in order to be accessible to everyone.

3.3 She outlined the growth of electric vehicles in the next 10 to 15 years and the need for charging points both for community and private use. She showed graphs that indicated the changes.

3.4 It is estimated that 120,000 vehicles will be registered in Suffolk by 2030 with 40,000 of these in East Suffolk. The demand for electric vehicles will increase and this also means there will be an increase in the number of charging points needed.

3.5 By 2040 it is expected that between 11,000 to 13,000 charging points will have been installed, from the current 362 points. This will include rural areas as well as urban areas.

3.6 There are particular difficulties for properties with no off street parking and it will be necessary to have points where there are no trailing cables across pavements to cause trip hazards. It is estimated that there is 25% on street parking in the bigger towns.

3.7 A 12 month slot channel trial is to take place which will ensure cables are placed into gullies in the pavements. Members can contact evcharging@suffolk.gov.uk/plugin.suffolk if they are interested in being part of this.

3.8 More information about Plug In Suffolk can be found at:
<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/transport-planning/plug-in-suffolk>.

3.9 It is hoped that people without off street parking will be able to access a charging point within a 5 to 10 minute walk of a charge point. There will be a contactless payment system.

3.10 Further reading can be found here:
<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/asset-library/imported/SEVC-INFRASTRUCTURE-STRATEGY-2023.pdf>

3.11 Members were keen that all electric vehicle charging points would be fully accessible to all people, including wheelchair users, and that there were no barriers created by the installation of charging points that involved crossing pavements. Channels in pavements will need to be kept covered and it will be dependent on the user to ensure that.

3.12 In response to a question, Chloe said that bus operators would be responsible for their own charging facilities.

3.13 Chloe was thanked for her presentation. Her slides will be attached to the minutes.

4. Disabled Motoring UK and Transition to Electric Vehicles

4.1 Graham Footer, Chief Executive, Disabled Motoring UK, was welcomed to the meeting and invited to talk about his organisation and the transition to electric vehicles.

4.2 Graham explained that Disabled Motoring UK has a long history and is led by disabled people. Its roots go back to 1922 when it was set up by veterans from the First World War. In 1933, there was an attempt to stop disabled people from driving but this was overturned.

4.3 It is a merger of the Disabled Drivers' Association (founded as the Invalid Tricycle Association in 1948) and the Disabled Drivers' Motor Club (founded in 1922). Only disabled people are able to become trustees.

4.4 The charity is a campaigning charity for disabled drivers, passengers and Blue Badge holders. It lobbies government and

businesses across the UK in order to improve parking, refuelling and access provision for disabled people so that they can access the goods and services that they need. It also campaigns for and supports passengers, scooter and wheelchair users, families and carers. It is based in Norwich, Norfolk.

4.5 Their information officers can answer questions about accessible parking, vehicle adaptation, congestion charging and other issues that affect their members. A monthly magazine is free to members and keeps them up to date on a wide range of campaigns and issues.

4.6 There is more information on the website and Graham also encouraged members to also become members of Disabled Motoring UK. <https://www.disabledmotoring.org/>

4.7 The move to electric vehicles presents a number of challenges for disabled people who appear to be 'left behind'. 40% of disabled people are likely to be reliant on public charging points and this is a deterrent to purchasing electric vehicles.

4.8 Their Park Access Accreditation Scheme now includes checks on electric vehicle charging but no car parks inspected actually meet this standard. It was noted that the PAS 1899 standard is for guidance and is not mandatory.

4.9 In a survey, disabled people identified the following concerns:

- Lack of an accessible parking bay
- Height of machinery
- Complexity of charging machinery and booking/payment apps
- Machinery being on a plinth without a dropped kerb
- Weight of charging plug and cable
- Cost of purchasing an electric vehicle
- Concerns about charging on longer journeys

4.10 Disabled Motoring UK feels that the market is concentrating on the masses and little thought is being given to disabled drivers and their particular issues.

4.11 Members asked the following questions:

- Is Motability considering extending the length of time that people can have a lease on a particular vehicle?
- Are converters of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles able to convert these to electric vehicles?

Response: Graham said there was no plan to change the leasing arrangements for Motability. He noted that there were particular difficulties in respect of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles where the floor is currently lowered to accommodate a wheelchair. This cannot be done for an electric vehicle because of the location of the battery.

4.12 It was thought that the availability of driverless vehicles would be a highly desirable development for disabled people.

4.13 Graham noted that the Disability Forum would be willing to become involved with any campaigns where it could help make a difference.

4.14 Graham was thanked for his very helpful contribution. It was hoped that Plug In Suffolk could liaise with Disabled Motoring UK with regard to the ensuring of available and accessible electric charging points in Suffolk.

5. Citizens Advice, Woodbridge

5.1 Jonathan Mason-Gordon, Adviser, Citizens Advice East Suffolk, was welcomed to the meeting and invited to provide information on the service now available in Woodbridge.

5.2 Jonathan explained that the Woodbridge service has now moved out of Woodbridge Library into offices in 7 Cumberland Street. This provides a better space and longer opening so is a welcome development. It is open on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, from 10am to 2pm. Freephone: 0808 278 7866.

5.3 It might be possible to open longer if more volunteers are able to be recruited.

5.4 People using the service have a range of issues including debt, housing, health, and benefits. Rural poverty is a key issue for people living in villages around Woodbridge and it was this increase in work that demonstrated the need for Woodbridge to have its own office as this would mean that more appointments could be made with case workers and the ability to employ specialist advisers as necessary.

5.5 Jonathan explained that 18% of their clients required assistance with disability benefits and it is vital for people to claim as they really need this extra income.

5.6 He mentioned the National Red Index report on the cost of living and the statistics contained within it. The link is below for members to access this:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/policy/publications/the-national-red-index-how-to-turn-the-tide-on-falling-living-standards/>

5.7 More information on Citizens Advice East Suffolk can be accessed at: <https://citizensadvicееastsuffolk.org.uk/>

5.8 Jonathan was thanked for his input to the meeting.

6. Update on Seashore Village, Felixstowe

6.1 Steven Foulkes, Resort Manager, Asset Management, East Suffolk Council was welcomed to the meeting and invited to update members on Seashore Village.

6.2 Steven said that the five wheelchair accessible beach huts were now available for hire and bookings were being taken. However, he did not provide any information on the hire charges. Feedback on the accessibility and facilities of the huts is good. Enquiries to SeashoreVillage@east Suffolk.gov.uk

6.3 In response to a question, Steven said that progress on acquiring a new beach wheelchair for Felixstowe is slow but work continues on this.

6.4 To hire a beach wheelchair in Lowestoft, Southwold or Felixstowe Please direct all enquiries to beach.wheelchairs@east Suffolk.gov.uk

6.5 Steven was thanked for attending the meeting.

7. Minutes of the Meeting held on 9th April, 2024

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum, held on 9th April, 2024, were agreed as a correct record.

8. Matters Arising

8.1 Item 5 East Suffolk Disability Information Day: This had taken place as planned at the Kesgrave War Memorial Community Centre, on Wednesday, 8th May, 2024. The event had been very successful with a good range of stall holders and with a reasonable number of members of the public attending. Linda thanked Steve Race from the Disability

Advice Service East Suffolk and Joss Mullett from East Suffolk Council for their assistance in planning, arranging and attending the event – it had proved an excellent working partnership. She also thanked those members of the Forum who had attended and assisted on the day. The Planning Group may consider further such events in other parts of the area in due course.

8.2 Item 7.3 East Suffolk Planning Applications: Joss said that, whilst the applications can be accessed on line, this remains difficult for visually impaired people depending upon the software or equipment they use.

9. Issues, Concerns and News from Members

9.1 Seating in Stores: Bryan raised the issue of seating not being provided in large department stores to assist customers with mobility difficulties. A recent experience had identified a particular problem with Marks & Spencer in Norwich, a very large store with no seating in retail areas for customers. This would be taken up with Marks & Spencer. However this was also an issue within other stores.

Action: Planning Group

9.2 Bus Services:

9.2.1 Simon provided an update on the Bus Service Improvement Plan and said that there was still some funding that could be allocated to new schemes and suggestions have been requested from transport operators, local parish councils and community groups.

9.2.2 In response to a question, Simon said that no progress had been made in setting up a specific group of disabled people to discuss bus services. However, disability issues were part of other meetings and, in fact, a member of the Haverhill Disability Forum had shown a useful video of disabled people using bus services to a meeting of bus operators.

9.2.3 Members continued to await news of the rerouting of the No 64 service through Martlesham village.

10. Update from Healthwatch Suffolk

No update was available.

11. Information Round / Any Other Business

There were no further items raised.

12. Future Meetings

12.1 Topics for Future Meetings: The Planning Group would follow up the following suggestions:

- Benefits of the National Disability and Carers Card – Oliver Horsman
- Jobcentre Plus (outstanding from the April Meeting)

12.2 Format of Future Meetings: Members were content with the arrangements for on line meetings via Zoom as this made it easier for them to take part and avoided travel difficulties. However, the Planning Group would continue to give consideration to arranging a face-to-face meeting and noted offers of venues in Woodbridge.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, 22nd October, 2024, from 2pm to 4pm, via Zoom. The link for the meeting will be sent out in due course.