

Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held via Zoom on Tuesday, 23rd January, 2024,
at 2 pm

Present:

Linda Hoggarth	Disability Forum for Suffolk (Chair)
Paul Kelly	Resident (Vice Chair)
Simon Barnett	Integrated Transport & Enhanced Partnership Manager, Suffolk County Council
Jo Belfield	Communities Officer – Beccles, Bungay, Halesworth & Surrounding Villages, East Suffolk Council
Simon Daws	Resident / Suffolk Guide Dog Forum
Bryan Frost	Resident / Trimley St Mary Parish Council
Steve Hodgkiss	Suffolk Sight / Disability Forum for Suffolk
Paul Horne	Senior Transport Planner, Suffolk County Council
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
Cllr Edward Thompson	East Suffolk Council / Woodbridge Town Council
Jeni Watts	Development Officer - Felixstowe, East Suffolk Council

Guests:

Gary Crockett	Health & Housing Manager, East Suffolk Council
Sarah Garbutt	Resort Manager, East Suffolk Council
David Waterman	Senior Partnerships Manager, AccessAble

Apologies:

Peter Coleman	Member, Norfolk & Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust
Nigel Crisp	Staff Manager – Ipswich Depot, First Group
Deborah Darby	Melton Parish Council
Trevor Garrod	East Suffolk Travellers Association (ESTA)
Richard Hunt	Strategic Lead: Visitor Economy, Suffolk Growth Partnership
Sylvia Izzard	Resident
Linda Layton	Resident
Alan Neville	Customer & Community Engagement Manager, Greater Anglia
Yvonne Smart	Trimley St Mary Parish Council
Graham Walker	Chair, Disability Advice Service – East Suffolk

1. Welcome & Introductions

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

2. Apologies

The above apologies were received and noted.

3. Warm Homes, Healthy People Project

3.1 Gary Crockett, Health and Housing Manager, East Suffolk Council, was welcomed to the meeting.

3.2 Gary explained that it had been difficult to recruit to the Handy Person project. However, the Council is able to supply and fit measures related to cost of living or energy efficiency such as draught-proofing install, door adjustments, curtain install, or radiator panels. To be referred to this project, email: handy.person@eastsuffolk.gov.uk.

3.3 He updated members on the work undertaken through Warm Homes Healthy People which provides support for low income households to make their homes more energy efficient. Significant grants available at present are for off gas properties with grants for loft insulation, wall insulation, and solar panels. For a free home energy efficiency survey, telephone 03456 037686, or email: whho@eastsuffolk.gov.uk or go to: <https://www.warmhomessuffolk.org/>. Loan heaters are also available for those with a heating system breakdown.

3.4 Winter warmth packs are available for people who have an identified need and who have been referred via organisations such as the Disability Advice Service East Suffolk. There are two options, a pre-made pack (hat, gloves, scarf, blanket, body warmer) or a bespoke request which can include coat, draught-proofing, low energy light bulbs, or electric blankets to a budget of £70. To make a referral, go to: https://my.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/service/Winter_warmth_pack_referral

3.5 Home visits are arranged so that people's needs can be assessed.

3.6 Gary was thanked for joining the meeting and sharing the information on services provided.

4. Accessible Destination Suffolk

4.1 Unfortunately, Richard Hunt, Strategic Lead: Visitor Economy for the Suffolk Growth Partnership, was unable to attend the meeting. However, the Partnership works across all the local authorities in Suffolk and is leading the programme on visitor economy. Visitor economy is worth approximately £2 billion per year.

4.2 The Partnership wants to work on accessibility and inclusivity across all of Suffolk. A 70-page report has been prepared, which provides the detail on the economic case for improving accessibility as well as research and signposting, and shows how businesses and strategic partners can change to help improve their accessibility.

4.3 Working with local authorities and AccessAble, 100 businesses are being sought to help develop Suffolk as a more accessible and inclusive visitor destination. This will include some streetscape guides. 1,000 licences have been commissioned for disability essentials training.

4.4 Further information can be found at:

[100 visitor economy businesses to launch Accessible Destination Suffolk | Suffolk Growth](#)

[Accessibility and Inclusion – enabling growth in the Suffolk Visitor Economy | Suffolk Growth](#)

4.5 David Waterman, Senior Partnerships Manager, AccessAble was welcomed to the meeting. He explained the history and background to the work of AccessAble using presentation slides, the link for these will be forwarded separately to members.

4.6 AccessAble aims to help disabled people by creating accessible guides to help people navigate access information related to many services and venues. They have a variety of clients including hospitals and county councils, these include the Ipswich Hospital and Suffolk County Council.

4.7 So far, 125,000 venues have been surveyed nation-wide. AccessAble provides face-to-face surveyors who review the accessibility of each venue included on their website. The surveys are broken down using accessible symbols and photos of the different aspects such as parking, entrances, toilets, and the height of reception desks. This helps visitors to know what to expect when going to a

venue. The information takes into account people's different disabilities.

4.8 Currently, there are 76 detailed guides with a further 19 being worked on. They also provide Street Access Guides. Locally these are available for Ipswich and Sudbury.

4.9 Using Africa Alive as an example, David demonstrated how the AccessAble website can be used to find out a wide range of information including car parking, accessible toilets, the entrances and routes within the venue.

4.10 The overall aim is to give disabled people the confidence and information they need to be able to go to a wide range of venues in their locality.

4.11 AccessAble is currently working on developing a portal where smaller venues can include their information via a self-service initiative. David will provide further details of this when it is available.

4.12 In response to a question, David explained that AccessAble has to be commissioned to provide access guides for a particular area or venue.

4.13 David can be reached on 01438 842710, or via email: david.waterman@AccessAble.co.uk. More information and the guides can be found at: <https://www.accessable.co.uk/>.

4.14 David was thanked for his presentation and for showing members how the website works to help disabled people.

5. Update on the Felixstowe Seashore Village

5.1 Sarah Garbutt, Resorts Manager, East Suffolk Council, was welcomed to the meeting and invited to provide members with an update on the Seashore Village in Felixstowe.

5.2 Sarah was very pleased to say that construction work on the Seashore Village is now complete and the five accessible beach huts are now available for hire. The other 27 beach huts are available to buy. She was unable to advise members of the hire charges but will provide this information as soon as the charges are finalised.

5.3 She was able to show members a leaflet giving all the information about the accessible beach huts and their facilities at the Seashore Village. This will be sent out with the Minutes.

5.4 The new toilets including the Changing Places facility are also complete. Parking has been improved in the nearby car park.

5.5 In response to a question, Sarah said that a new beach wheelchair is to be provided but that the work for this to be in place was ongoing. Meanwhile, the old beach wheelchair would still be available from the Leisure Centre. Information about how to book beach wheelchairs in East Suffolk will be sent out with the Minutes.

5.6 Margaret had represented the Forum at the official opening of the Seashore Village. She was impressed with the accessible beach huts.

5.7 Sarah was thanked for providing the update.

6. Minutes from the Meeting held on the 10th October, 2023

The Minutes of the meeting of the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum, held on the 10th October, 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

7. Matters Arising

7.1 Item 3.6 Swimming Sessions for People with Disabilities:

Margaret will check the availability of specific swimming sessions for people with disabilities in the various public swimming pools in the East Suffolk area.

Action: Margaret Morris

7.2 Item 7.1 Closure of Ticket Offices at Railway Stations: Plans have been dropped to close ticket offices at Railway Stations following the consultation in 2023.

7.3 Item 7.3 Patient experience at Ipswich Hospital:

7.3.1 Given that parking is so difficult at the Ipswich Hospital, Linda had asked if it was possible to reserve parking for those wishing to undertake a site visit. She had not received a response as yet.

7.3.2 A member commented on the inaccessibility of letters from the Ipswich Hospital for people with visual impairments. Whilst there was

some progress in his own situation, he was unsure whether this was the case for all people with visual impairments.

7.3.3 There used to be an online system where people could check their appointments but this is not so easy and needs to be followed up.

8. Issues, Concerns and News from Members

8.1 Issues regarding Martlesham: Simon D reported as follows:

- There are continuing difficulties in trying to get a pedestrian crossing installed in Martlesham to improve safety for residents.
- It has proved difficult to get responses from the Suffolk County Councillor for Martlesham.
- The situation remains frustrating and a meeting is being sought with Therese Coffey MP.
- There are footpaths where the grass is not being cut so it obstructs the footpath and makes it difficult for people with visual impairments and also for those using pushchairs or wheelchairs.
- Such issues should be reported to Suffolk County Council via their Highways Reporting Tool at:
<https://highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk/>

8.2 Bus Services:

8.2.1 Simon B reported as follows:

- There had been a meeting of the Enhanced Partnership Forum which included a discussion to highlight disability issues to the transport operators. This had covered such issues as the size of wheelchairs, space in the bus, adjustments needed to reach the card machines, confidence of wheelchair users to travel by bus, and assistance from drivers. There was little engagement from many of the operators at the meeting and it was intended to set up a separate working group to bring about greater engagement. This would involve a number of disabled passengers.
- Additionally, it was thought that it would be possible to use the Park & Ride site to host a trial use of buses for people with a range of disabilities to give them the confidence to travel by bus.
- Suffolk County Council have now received the funding from the Bus Improvement Settlement Plan (BSIP+) and decided which projects to fund. There are a few in Suffolk Coastal and will be announced shortly.

8.2.2 Linda reported as follows:

- First Bus have been advised of the difficulties in getting buses to stop at the bus stop opposite the Ipswich Hospital in Heath Road because of a tree obscuring the driver's view and the speeding up of buses at this point to avoid having to wait at the traffic lights.
- Additionally, the issue of the route taken by the No 64 bus which avoids Martlesham Village has been raised again with First Bus.

8.3 East Suffolk Disability Information Day:

8.3.1 Linda and Joss explained the thinking behind putting on an East Suffolk Disability Information Day:

- This event would take place in the late Spring of 2024 and be organised in partnership with the Disability Advice Service East Suffolk.
- A bid has been made to the East Suffolk Communities Together Fund 2023/24 for some funding to support this which has been successful. The Forum also has some funding available through the support it receives from East Suffolk Council.
- It was considered that the event should be held at the Kesgrave Community Centre which would provide an accessible venue with parking and it is on a bus route.
- The format of the day has yet to be agreed but would include stands from organisations that provide services and/or assistance to disabled people. There would be an opportunity to have some brief presentations on the Forum, the Disability Advice Service and East Suffolk Council. Light refreshments would be available.

8.3.2 Members were asked for their support for this event and to advise Margaret if they were willing to assist with the planning and organisation of it and to volunteer on the day itself.

Action: All

Post Meeting Note: The date for the event has been set for Wednesday, 8th May, 2024 at Kesgrave Community Centre.

9. Views on Health and Social Care with Healthwatch Suffolk

9.1 Linda reported that Kerry Overton has now moved on from Healthwatch Suffolk and the Forum will need another representative. She will contact Sally Watson, Community & Engagement Manager, to progress this.

Action: Linda Hoggarth

10. Information Round / Any Other Business

10.1 East Suffolk Planning Applications: Members of the Planning Group who comment on relevant Planning Applications advised that, following some changes to the system, it is now much more difficult to access the documents on line. Joss will follow this up.

Action: Joss Mullett

10.2 Starship Robots: These Robots, which are used for delivery of groceries and parcels, could be introduced in Ipswich. They are currently used in Cambridge. There are some concerns that these would be a hazard on the pavements. An open day to give more information and to meet a robot will take place on Thursday, 22nd February, 2024, from 10am to 2pm, at Ipswich County Library, Wolsey Room, Northgate Street, Ipswich. For more information, visit:

<https://www.starship.xyz/the-starship-robot/>

10.3 North Felixstowe Garden Neighbourhood: Felixstowe residents are being invited to join a new panel which will enable the views and needs of local people to be considered in the development of a new garden neighbourhood in the north of the town. There is an engagement event on Saturday, 3rd February, 2024, from 10am to 3pm, with presentations from 11.30am, at the Orwell Hotel.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, 9th April, 2024, from 2pm to 4pm, via Zoom. The link for the meeting will be sent out in due course.