

Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held at Woodbridge Library, New Street,
Woodbridge, on Tuesday, 2nd October, 2018, at 2pm

SCDC: Suffolk Coastal District Council, WDC: Waveney District Council
SCC: Suffolk County Council

Present:

Linda Hoggarth	Disability Forum for Suffolk (Chair)
Gillian Benjamin	Communities Officer, Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils
Stuart Ellis	Resident
Cllr Steve Gallant	Suffolk Coastal District Council
Paul Kelly	Resident
Margaret Morris	Resident (Secretary)
Tony Nunn	Disability Advice Service East Suffolk
Cllr Caroline Page	Suffolk County Council
Graham Walker	Kirton Parish Council

Apologies:

Dan Bristow	Disability Advice Service East Suffolk
Simon Daws	Resident
Stuart Ellis	Resident
John Fitzpatrick	Resident
Michael Friend	Carer and Hollesley Parish Council
Steve Hodgkiss	East Suffolk Association for the Blind
Sylvia Izzard	Resident
Linda Layton	Resident and Carer
Gill Manning	Resident
John Manning	Resident
Liz Mark	Resident and Bawdsey Parish Council
Maureen Mee	Resident
Kerry Overton	Community Development Officer, Healthwatch Suffolk

1. Welcome & Introductions

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made. Cllr Page explained that she had been to the wrong venue for the last two meetings. She also commented that there is new staffing at Woodbridge Town Council. However, the new Town Clerk had been expected to attend the meeting.

2. Apologies

The above apologies were received and noted.

3. Discussion on the accessibility of shops, businesses and facilities in Woodbridge and Felixstowe and Follow Up of Outstanding Actions

3.1 Surveys: Members had previously been sent the survey reports for Woodbridge and Felixstowe including the draft report from the second Action Day which took place in September.

3.2 Members were asked to consider which town provides better opportunities for disabled people.

3.3 A-boards and Street Banners:

3.3.1 Both towns had problems regarding the increasing use of A-Boards and Street Banners. Some businesses have more than one outside their premises and, in Felixstowe, many are placed over the tactile strip that provides a 'division' in the shared space between the 'road' and the 'pavement'.

3.3.2 Caroline commented that, in Woodbridge, replacing A-Boards with a sign above a shop would need multiple planning permissions so was not feasible.

3.3.3 Steve commented on a recent meeting of the Felixstowe Highways Advisory Committee, made up of representatives from the Town, District and County Councils and SCC Highways, attended by Margaret, which discussed the issue of accessibility to shops. The Committee were suggesting that a letter be sent from the Town Council to the local shopkeepers stating there are concerns about safety and other issues in the Shared Space, and asking for their comments.

3.3.4 In the past, there was an agreement of one A-board per business to be placed where it is not causing an obstruction. However, Caroline pointed out that in Woodbridge the pavements are much narrower than in Felixstowe and even one A-board is an obstruction.

3.3.5 Members also discussed their concerns regarding the increasing use of 'flying banana' Street Banners particularly as they swing round in the wind.

3.3.6 It was agreed that the Forum would write to the Town Clerks of Woodbridge and Felixstowe Town Councils giving factual information about the problems caused by the proliferation of these street signs for people with a range of disabilities.

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3.4 Street Furniture:

3.4.1 The black bollards in the Thoroughfare at Woodbridge now have a reflective red strip to make them more visible.

3.4.2 The cycle racks in the Shared Space in Felixstowe need to be highlighted as these are grey against grey paving.

3.5 Traffic in Town Centres

3.5.1 A number of concerns were raised about the Shared Space area in Hamilton Road, Felixstowe, as follows:

- The speed of the traffic going through the area;
- The apparent indiscriminate parking;
- The anticipated use of electric cars which are currently silent;
- The dangers for pedestrians in the area including children;
- The confusion for all users of the area.

3.5.2 It was thought that it might be possible to have a trial period whereby the Shared Space area is closed to all traffic on Saturdays, or possibly once a month.

3.5.3 Whilst this may not be welcomed by all blue badge holders, it was noted that there is a considerable amount of parking available close to Felixstowe Town Centre. There would be some impact for disabled people who are dropped off outside a particular shop and then picked up once their shopping is complete.

3.5.4 Such a proposal would need to take account of the views of the community of Felixstowe. Traders have historically been against this.

3.5.5 Civic policing will not now start until 2020 and therefore the indiscriminate parking is likely to continue.

3.5.6 Members present agreed that a 'traffic free' trial for Saturdays should be pursued with Felixstowe Town Council to ensure that one day per week was made as safe as possible for disabled people.

3.5.7 It was agreed to contact Felixstowe Town Council to suggest that a trial period to restrict traffic in the Shared Space area on one day per week is considered.

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3.5.8 The Thoroughfare in Woodbridge is pedestrianised from 10am to 4pm though certain vehicles have access between these times.

3.5.9 A public consultation had resulted in the majority of respondents being in favour of no access at any time in the Thoroughfare except for permit holders and unloading/loading. Changes to the current Traffic Regulation Order will be required.

3.5.10 The Community Infrastructure Levy could be used for traffic calming.

3.6 Access to Shops

3.6.1 The surveys had raised concerns regarding the inaccessibility of the majority of fire exits and how disabled people could be evacuated safely in an emergency.

3.6.2 It was felt that Marks & Spencers in Hamilton Road, Felixstowe, should make efforts to make one of their two rear exits accessible particularly as these lead out to the road and car parking.

3.6.3 It was agreed that a representative of the Fire Service should be invited to a future meeting to explain the current regulations. Denise Whiting was suggested as a suitable person.

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3.6.4 Many shops have steps to their entrances particularly in Woodbridge. A joint letter from Suffolk Coastal District Council, Choose Woodbridge, and the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum, had been sent to shops in Woodbridge to suggest a number of measures that could be taken to improve access and to remind them that, even in a Conservation Area, some adjustments can be made.

3.6.5 It was thought that the Choose Woodbridge Town Guide could indicate which shops were wheelchair accessible. The suggestion could be raised at their 'Open Meetings'.

3.6.6 It was suggested that the Forum should write directly to business which have poor access and make suggestions for improvements such as encouraging the installation of an outside doorbell to attract attention.

3.6.7 Members discussed whether it was feasible to introduce a scheme whereby shops displayed a sign to indicate their accessibility to all people but it was thought difficult to introduce and maintain.

3.6.8 The role of the Forum is to encourage shops to make their premises accessible to everyone. Approaches to contacts within the local Chambers of Trade and Commerce could also be helpful.

Post Meeting Note: Major retailers have backed the launch of the UK's first "accessible shopping day", which will see businesses promise to introduce new measures to benefit their disabled customers. 'Purple Tuesday', to be held on 13th November, is being led by Purple, the social enterprise formerly known as the Essex Coalition of Disabled People.

3.7 Triggers for Epilepsy: Caroline explained that some frequencies of lights used in shop refrigeration units can trigger epilepsy, particularly the Co-op in Woodbridge and also Tesco's. It is not clear if this is caused by a certain frequency or manufacturer. This will be raised with the East of England Co-operative Society.

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3.8 Additional Benches in Woodbridge: Caroline explained that the request for additional benches has not been progressed due to SCC Highways not yet replacing a member of staff. She will ensure this is progressed in due course.

3.9 Beach Wheelchair: The current beach wheelchair, stored at the Leisure Centre, is not suitable for the Felixstowe beach. Helen Greengrass will be deleting reference to it in the online Guide to Felixstowe. It was noted that Aldeburgh has a beach wheelchair, but it was not known whether this was in regular use. Enquiries will be made.

Action: Planning Group

3.10 Changing Places Facilities:

3.10.1 Gillian is in discussion with the Asset Manager about access to the key to the Changing Places facility at Martello Park, Felixstowe. The sign on the door advises people the key can be obtained from the library, some distance away. The key is not a RADAR key. It is possible to obtain a key from SCDC – details on their website.

3.10.2 It was agreed to contact Cllr Carol Poulter to ask her to review how the Changing Places facilities are accessed and the arrangements for holding keys. This should be copied to Andy Jarvis, Strategic Director.

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3.10.3 Members were very concerned to learn that there is no Changing Places facility in Woodbridge.

3.10.4 The survey report suggested that one could be sited in the toilet block down by the river. This is being pursued.

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3.11 Getting between the beach and the town in Felixstowe:

Whilst it is possible to access a bus service, it was felt that the hill between the beach and the town is a deterrent to visitors and a lift should be considered. This will be raised with the Town Clerk and the Change Director.

Action: Planning Group

3.12 Going Forward:

3.12.1 It was agreed that the surveys of both Felixstowe and Woodbridge have been very useful and the reports provided detailed information.

3.12.2 It was suggested that an Action Plan be drawn up from the recommendations contained in the reports and the subsequent discussions.

3.12.3 Members agreed that Felixstowe provided the best facilities for disabled people and that Woodbridge was hampered by the age of the buildings in the Thoroughfare.

3.12.4 The Report of the Felixstowe Action Days (Updated September, 2018) was agreed for distribution.

Action: Planning Group

4. Consideration of further Action Days

4.1 Members agreed that there was merit in extending the surveys to other towns in Suffolk Coastal and suggested the following: Leiston, Aldeburgh, Saxmundham and Framlingham.

4.2 It was noted that people in rural areas often travel into these towns to shop and therefore the transport arrangements also need to be considered.

4.3 As these are relatively small towns, it was suggested that it was worth considering undertaking a survey in the morning in a particular town, and then finding a meeting venue to hold one of the regular quarterly meetings of the Forum in the afternoon. The Planning Group would take this suggestion forward.

4.4 It was felt that the resulting survey reports from each town could be brought together and produced as a single report on access in Suffolk Coastal.

Action: Planning Group

5. East Suffolk District Council

5.1 Members noted the upcoming merger of the Waveney and Suffolk Coastal District Councils in May, 2019, to become East Suffolk District Council and the possible impact on the Forum.

5.2 It was agreed to discuss this with the Waveney Disability Forum as it was expected that because of the large area covered by the new District Council there would be a need to retain both Forums to ensure that disabled people could access meetings. A joint meeting may be necessary to progress this.

Action: Planning Group

6. Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday, 3rd July, 2018

The Minutes were agreed as a correct record.

7. Matters Arising

7.1 Item 4.2 Location of Accessible Toilets Suffolk Coastal:

Gillian is currently working on the preparation of a list of accessible toilets throughout Suffolk Coastal.

8. Updates on Specific Issues

8.1 Disability Focus 2018: This event will take place on Tuesday, 23rd October, 2018, at One, Scrivener Drive, Ipswich, and everyone with an interest in disability issues is welcome to attend. Margaret will send out the reminder with booking information to all members.

Action: Margaret Morris

8.2 Report back from the Planning Group

8.2.1 A representative from the Long Shop Museum had attended the last meeting of the Planning Group to explain the plans for improving the Museum. A number of points were made to improve the accessibility for disabled people.

8.2.2 The Leisure Contracts Manager, SCDC, and the architect working on the redevelopment of the Leiston Leisure Centre also attended the meeting and talked through the plans for this. It was felt particularly helpful to engage with the architect at an early stage.

8.2.3 Comments were provided on the draft local plan for Suffolk Coastal particularly in respect of the Equality Impact Assessment which had recorded no impact on disabled people or indeed many of those with protected characteristics against the majority of policies within it. This was not considered an accurate picture and a member of the Planning Department Team will be attending the next Planning Group meeting to discuss our comments.

8.2.4 Members of the Planning Group continue to make comments on major Planning Applications.

8.2.5 The Planning Group is still to progress the issue of a discount for the essential carer who is at the Leisure Centre to assist a disabled person on the equipment but not use it themselves.

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8.2.6 Members noted that there continue to be many issues affecting the lives of disabled people. While the attendance at our Forum is sometimes small, it is not indicative of the number of people in the community who take an active interest in our work.

9. Views on Health and Social Care

9.1 Kerry had provided the following updates:

- She had noted that a patient from Saxmundham was no longer able to access podiatry services at Saxmundham Clinic but now has to attend Aldeburgh Hospital. Paul confirmed that this was indeed the case. All clinics in Saxmundham have ceased and are only available in Aldeburgh or Woodbridge. There is now just one GP Surgery which is oversubscribed. The Forum noted that 20% of new housing developments will be in Saxmundham.
- Kerry has been in contact with the Ipswich & East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group regarding inconsistencies with prescribing paracetamol. However, it is understood that if a patient requires a long term prescription of paracetamol for a long term condition, it is likely to be prescribed.
- The NHS Wheelchair Service is no longer sub-contracted to Bartrams which went into administration in June. As there was no adverse effect on wheelchair users, patients and GPs were not advised of this. The new provider, Ross Care, has been sub-contracted by Medequip and it is not thought that wheelchair users will notice very much difference to the service despite the new contracting arrangements. There have recently been some concerns about the wheelchair service reported to Healthwatch Suffolk who would be pleased to receive any further comments or concerns.

9.2 Flu Jabs: It was noted that only 43% of hospital staff at the Ipswich Hospital had elected to have a flu jab in 2017. It was 63% at Addenbrookes Hospital. It was agreed to note that hospitals should not forget that flu jabs are now available,

10. Information Round / Any Other Business

10.1 Administration: There has been a change in the way members are notified of meetings and sent various documents. Margaret is now undertaking this task on behalf of the Forum. Jen Morcom had been thanked for her considerable efforts in circulating details of meetings on our behalf over many years.

10.2 Gillian Benjamin: The Forum were sorry to hear that Gillian is leaving Suffolk Coastal District Council in November. She will be very much missed by the Forum as she has provided an amazing amount of support in very many ways for the Forum. She was warmly thanked for all her assistance to us. It is anticipated that the Council will appoint a replacement.

11. Dates and Locations of Meetings in 2019

Meetings will take place in January, April, July and October in 2019 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

The Planning Group will confirm the dates and venues for meetings as soon as possible.

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