

Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

**Minutes of the Meeting held in the
Council Chamber, Suffolk Coastal District Council Offices, Woodbridge,
on Tuesday, 5th January, 2016, at 1pm**

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

Present:

Linda Hoggarth	Suffolk Consortium of User Led Organisations & Individual Disabled People (Chair)
Gillian Benjamin	Active Communities Officer, Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils
Moira Bevilacqua	Resident / East Suffolk Disability Advice Service
Lindsay Daws	Resident and Carer
Simon Daws	Resident
Stuart Ellis	Resident
Steve Hodgkiss	East Suffolk Association for the Blind
Paul Kelly	Resident
Liz Mark	Resident and Bawdsey Parish Council
Margaret Morris	Resident
Kerry Overton	Community Development Officer, Healthwatch Suffolk
Tim Pryke	Resident
Bernadette Smith	Volunteer, Healthwatch Suffolk
Graham Walker	Avenues East

Guests

Liz Beighton	Development Management Team Leader (South Area), SCDC & WDC
Darren Knight	Head of Customer Services, SCDC & WDC
Sue Keeble	Operations Manager Community Services, Suffolk Coastal Norse
Kevin May	Car Parks Supervisor, Suffolk Coastal Norse
Amy Louise Nettleton	Agent for Change, The New Wolsey Theatre
Wendy Hughes	PA to Amy Nettleton, The New Wolsey Theatre

Apologies:

Sam Curry	Age UK Suffolk
Stephen Fountain	Staff Manager, First Bus
Michael Friend	Hollesley Parish Councillor
Linda Layton	Resident / Family Carer
Maureen Mee	Resident

Anita Moxley
Wendy O'Connor

Action for Blind People
Level 2 Youth Project

1. Welcome

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

2. Apologies

The above apologies were received and noted.

3. Discussion with Darren Knight, Head of Customer Services, SCDC & WDC

3.1 Members were pleased to welcome Darren Knight, the Head of Customer Services at both Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils. He was invited to explain his role and his current work in respect of front-facing services at Woodbridge Library.

3.2 Darren apologised for not having been in contact with the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum before but he had not been aware of its existence. He provided some brief background information on his role. He is responsible for customer demand services and 54 members of staff over 6 locations.

3.3 He explained that front-facing services have been in place at Woodbridge Library since 2013, a decision made before his arrival in Suffolk. In advance of SCDC moving offices from Melton Hill to Riduna Park, he said that, as there would be no front-facing services at Riduna Park, it was necessary to make improvements to the Library to accommodate all customer services there. Those improvements were currently under way. This will make the Library more sustainable and there are benefits for customers in being able to access a range of services in one location. An Equality Impact Assessment had been completed in respect of this development.

3.4 Linda said that concerns had been expressed by Forum members about the lack of parking for people with disabilities close to Woodbridge Library. There is already a busy car park in Oak Lane without adding more people wishing to access the Library to use Customer Services. In addition, the Equality Impact Assessment had not involved any specific consultation with disabled users.

3.5 Darren said that there is the same number of spaces for blue badge holders as before and that they are in the correct ratio laid down

in national guidance. Linda said that the Equality Impact Assessment had indicated that a free parking space was being explored. Darren said that Cabinet had decided not to pursue this.

3.6 Members pointed out that people in rural areas have to use their cars to get to Woodbridge because of the lack of public transport and therefore need easy access to parking.

3.7 Darren said that SCDC will review the move of customer services from their current offices to Woodbridge Library and other locations in March, 2017. He agreed to talk to Suffolk Coastal Norse about monitoring the use of spaces for blue badge holders in the car park closest to the Library (Oak Lane).

Action: Darren Knight

3.8 The view of the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum was that the move from free parking for Customer Services (currently available at the Council Offices) to having to access the public car park in Oak Lane with car parking charges was a decision that disadvantaged all customers and particularly those customers who are disabled and have restricted mobility. There was no consultation with disabled people before this decision was taken. Darren was asked to note that the Forum disagrees with the Project Board's decision in respect of car parking to access Customer Services at Woodbridge Library.

Action: Darren Knight

3.9 Members expressed some concern about the length and gradient of the ramp from the car park to Woodbridge Library. Darren said that he had been informed that the ramp met current building regulations.

3.10 In response to a question about being able to talk about confidential matters, Darren said that improvements were being made to the acoustics and facilities at the Library which will be completed by the end of March, 2016.

3.11 Members noted that the Tourist Information Centre is now based at Woodbridge Library, instead of near the Railway Station, and this would increase the pressure on the Oak Lane Car Park. This move had not been subject to consultation with the Forum

3.12 Darren agreed to take feedback from the Forum to the Corporate Management Team that they needed to improve consultation with

disabled people. However, he said that decisions were being made in order to save money.

Action: Darren Knight

3.13 The Forum noted that the current financial position of SCDC should not stop consultation with disabled people. SCDC is well aware of the existence of the Forum and that the Forum is set up as a consultative body – so they should use our expertise.

3.14 Darren said that he would be working on improving consultation and involvement with customers. He gave an example where those responsible for changes to the Housing Benefit website section had, at Darren's instigation, consulted 7 people on the changes. As a result there were 22 improvements. However, it was noted this was very limited and had not included people with visual impairments or mental health issues. He agreed that there should be wider consultation and more time taken to get the views of service users. It is his intention to use 'mystery shoppers' to gather experiences of those using services.

3.15 The Forum noted the need to consult people at the initial stages of planning or changing services, not tacked on as an afterthought.

3.16 In response to questions about the width of the spaces for Blue Badge Holders in the Oak Lane Car Park and its general use, Darren would investigate this with Suffolk Coastal Norse. He said that there would be a variety of ways to publicise the changes including the use of Facebook and requesting feedback. Suffolk Coastal Norse would undertake more inspecting of the spaces for blue badge holders in all Woodbridge car parks.

Action: Darren Knight & Suffolk Coastal Norse

3.17 A member asked why SCDC did not provide a shelter for homeless people and Darren would investigate this.

Action: Darren Knight

3.18 Linda thanked Darren for attending the meeting and for his undertaking to investigate the concerns raised. She reiterated that the Forum wants to contribute to future consultations and that a number of members would be interested in being 'mystery shoppers'. Darren asked for his email to be included in the minutes so that members can contact him directly: Darren.Knight@eastsoffolk.gov.uk

4. Planning in Suffolk Coastal

4.1 Liz Beighton, Development Team Leader (South Area), Suffolk Coastal District Council and Waveney District Council, was welcomed to the meeting. Linda explained that the Forum wants to find out how members can contribute their views to planning applications for buildings and developments that people with disabilities were likely to use or visit.

4.2 Liz said that previously volunteers from Optua had commented on planning applications where relevant but this had been discontinued. Planning applications can be viewed on line and comments made. However, that was difficult because it meant going through many applications to find those that were relevant to disabled people.

4.3 It was noted that many issues affecting disabled people were dealt with by Building Control and not by Planning, such as internal fixtures and fittings.

4.4 The Forum noted that as well as shops and business open to the public they would be interested in the infrastructure for larger housing developments, such as car parking spaces, widths of access roads, siting of bins, and the availability of lifts.

4.5 In response to a question about increasing the number of parking spaces per house due to the fact that households often have more than two cars, Liz explained that there are national guidelines which allow for 1.4 spaces per house. The Planning process needs to ensure roads are wide enough for parked cars and emergency vehicles. Garages are wider than they used to be. Parking bays have to be 5 metres long. In towns, some developments now have no parking spaces at all.

4.6 With regard to cars parking on pavements, it is illegal for cars to drive on pavements but not illegal to park on pavements provided that they are not obstructing the pavement. This was an issue to discuss with Suffolk County Council.

4.7 In determining how the Forum could become a formal consultee, Liz asked for a clear steer on the type of applications that the Forum would wish to comment on. These are to be e-mailed to the Development Management Team, together with the contact details for those taking on the role of commenting on the planning applications. Then relevant planning applications would be e-mailed to those contacts, including the reference numbers for each planning application.

It would be necessary for those making comments to have access to the internet. This will be taken forward by the Planning Group.

Action: Planning Group

4.8 Members repeated their concerns that the new Council Chamber at Riduna Park will be on the first floor. In the event of a fire, disabled people will have to be evacuated using 'evac' chairs, instead of being able to use a properly fire-proof lift.

4.9 Liz was thanked for attending the meeting and for her contribution. The Planning Group will take forward the need to find Forum members interested in commenting on planning applications.

5. A Guide to using Suffolk Coastal District Council car parks for Blue Badge Holders

5.1 Linda thanked Sue Keeble, Operations Manager Community Services, and Kevin May, Car Parks Supervisor, Suffolk Coastal Norse, for coming to the meeting to discuss the latest draft of the Guide.

5.2 Following the comments received from members, the Guide had now been drafted in A4 in a size 14 font. Whilst this made it a 10 page guide, it was felt to be easier to read and understand than cramped into a 3 fold A4 leaflet. Members were very pleased that their comments had been taken on board and considered that this was now a very useful guide.

5.3 A couple of typos were noted and it was agreed that there needed to be a publication date on the final copy so that people were clear about the date the information had been provided. It might then be possible to produce updates as and when necessary.

5.4 In terms of providing the guide in other formats, it was noted that an audio version would be useful and that there might be expertise within the council to progress this. A large print version may also be required though it was noted that visually impaired people were not likely to be driving.

5.5 Members discussed the distribution of the guide and the following suggestions were made:

- Tourist Information Centres at Felixstowe, Woodbridge and Aldeburgh;
- Leisure Centres throughout Suffolk Coastal;
- The Disability Advice Service;

- Local Libraries;
- Copies e-mailed to organisations for their users and/or members;
- An on line version that can be accessed on the website of Suffolk Norse and Suffolk Coastal District Council.

5.6 In response to a suggestion that the guide is sent out with applications for Blue Badges, it was noted that Blue Badges are dealt with by Suffolk County Council and they were not keen to do this.

5.7 Geotags could be useful in the guide as they work with mobile phones.

5.8 Linda asked for any other suggestions to be sent to her and she will forward them to Sue.

Action: All

5.9 Sue and Kevin were thanked for attending the meeting and for progressing the guide to a point where it is almost ready for printing.

6. Minutes of the Meeting held on 6th October, 2015

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 6th October, 2015, were accepted as a correct record.

7. Matters Arising from the Minutes:

7.1 Item 3 Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust: Linda will remind Dominic Mundy, Patient Experience Manager, Ipswich Hospital, to respond to the Forum on the queries and comments that had been made.

Action: Linda Hoggarth

7.2 Item 4 Suffolk Coastal District Council's New Offices: Margaret will invite Peter Revell to update the Forum on the plans for SCDC Offices at Riduna Park at the next meeting on the 6th April.

Action: Margaret Morris

7.3 Item 6.1 Disability Action Day in Woodbridge: There has been no further progress on this.

7.4 Item 6.4 Publicity Leaflet: Gillian has produced a revised leaflet and this will be discussed further by the Planning Group with the aim of presenting a draft to the April Forum meeting.

7.5 Item 9.5 Future Meeting: Cllr Colin Noble, Leader of Suffolk County Council, has been invited to a future meeting but his availability is very limited. Members agreed to an additional meeting specifically to discuss issues with Cllr Noble. This would mean planning an extra meeting for the afternoon of Thursday, 23rd June, 2016, his only availability in June and July. The Council Chamber is not available on that date and an alternative venue will be needed. The Planning Group will follow up suggestions.

Action: Planning Group

8. Updates on Specific Issues:

8.1 Disability Focus 2015: This had been a good event and the Forum was well represented by Liz, Maureen and Moyra. In addition, Gillian, Graham, Steve and Linda were also present. A report has been prepared and is currently being distributed. Hard copies are available on request from enquiries@avenuesgroup.org.uk. Linda will ensure a copy is sent to Liz.

Action: Linda Hoggarth

8.2 Access Issues: There was a query as to whether the loop system in the Council Chamber actually works. Additionally, there was a question about the installation of microphones in the new Council Chamber at Riduna Park. Margaret will follow up these concerns.

Action: Margaret Morris

8.3 Report from Planning Group: The majority of issues have been covered in other agenda items.

9. Information Round / Any Other Business

9.1 Issues with Wheelie Bins: Concerns have been expressed about wheelie bins being left by refuse collectors in the middle of pavements, causing obstructions for visually impaired people and wheelchair users. It was felt that this needed to be referred to Suffolk Coastal Norse to explain the difficulties being caused.

Action: Planning Group

9.2 The New Wolsey Theatre:

9.2.1 Amy explained that she is the Agent for Change at the New Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich. She said that this theatre is one of the most accessible theatres in the country and people from all over the region go to performances there.

9.2.2 Amy's role is to make performances more accessible and to publicise what is happening. There are a variety of ways in which performances can be made accessible to everyone. These include:

- Audio Described for those who are blind or partially sighted;
- British Sign Language interpreted;
- Captioned Performances to assist people with hearing loss;
- Relaxed Performances to deliver a more informal approach;
- Infra-Red Hearing Enhancement System which replaces the traditional loop system;
- Wheelchair Access.

9.2.3 Information for a particular production is available on the theatre's website (wolseytheatre.co.uk/access) or by phoning 01473 295900.

9.2.4 People with certain learning difficulties who might worry about attending a performance can be taken on a tour beforehand. Free tours of the theatre can be offered to any groups.

9.2.5 Assistance dogs can be accommodated. Drinks can be taken to people in their seats in the interval to avoid having to queue at the bar. Assistance is available to help people into the theatre.

9.2.6 There is the opportunity of a work experience placement for someone with disabilities each summer.

9.2.7 Parking is available in the Spiral Car Park and the Car Park in Black Horse Lane. There is also some on street car parking in Black Horse Lane.

9.2.8 Amy distributed the programme for Spring 2016 and some additional information on accessible performances.

9.2.9 Amy was thanked for this information which was very helpful.

9.3 Deben Pool at Woodbridge: A member had encountered some difficulties when using the Deben Pool and these would be discussed further by the Planning Group.

Action: Planning Group

9.4 Health and Care Services: Healthwatch Suffolk requested that this is an agenda item for the next meeting. It may be that a specific sub-group will need to be established for this.

Action: Planning Group

9.5 Mobility Scooters on Buses: It was reported that permission can be given to take a mobility scooter on a bus but it must first be tested for weight and for its capability to be taken on and off the bus.

9.6 Car Parks in Woodbridge: Due to lack of time at the meeting, these items were not discussed but are noted for further action by the Planning Group:

- Extra bench at Woodbridge “Hamblin Road” Car park - There is a bench next to the Fish Stall, but it is often full, so people waiting for the Link Transport have to stand. An additional bench would be helpful at this location.
- Drainage for the Station Car Park (at Woodbridge) - The parking spaces for blue badge holders are flooded as soon as there is rain. Some drainage work is urgently needed.

These two items have been raised with Suffolk Coastal Norse but require further discussion with Suffolk Coastal District Council.

Action: Planning Group

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next Meeting will take place on Wednesday, 6th April, 2016, in the Council Chamber, Suffolk Coastal District Council Offices, Melton Hill, Woodbridge, from 12.45pm, for a 1pm to 3pm meeting.