

## **Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum**

**Minutes of the Meeting held in the  
Council Chamber, Suffolk Coastal District Council Offices, Woodbridge,  
on Monday, 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2015 at 1pm**

**SCC: Suffolk County Council; SCDC – Suffolk Coastal 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
Simon Daws	Resident
Stephen Fountain	Staff Manager, First Eastern Counties Buses
Corrine Franklin	Volunteer Manager, Felixstowe Opportunity Group
Simon King	Community Development Officer, Healthwatch Suffolk
Liz Mark	Resident and Bawdsey Parish Council
Margaret Morris	Resident
Stella Morris	SNAP
Dawn Rourke	Age UK Suffolk
Bernadette Smith	Volunteer, Healthwatch Suffolk
Graham Walker	Avenues East

### **Guests**

Cllr Lady Caroline Blois	Deputy Mayor, Woodbridge
Ann Bannister	Woodbridge Neighbourhood Plan
Louise Plummer	Customer Service Manager, Tesco Martlesham
Patrick Ramsey	Compliance Manager, Tesco Martlesham

### **Apologies:**

Moira Bevilacqua	Resident
Lynda Dart	Resident & Ipswich Sports Club for the Disabled
Stuart Ellis	Resident – Melton
Michael Friend	Resident and Hollesley Parish Councillor
Sylvia Izzard	Resident – Woodbridge
Brenda Joyce	Suffolk Coalition of Disabled People
Linda Layton	Resident / Family Carer
Paul Kelly	Resident
Maureen Mee	Resident
Don Tricker	Pastel
Chris Wightman	Catch & Crop, Saxmundham
Judith Wood	Resident – Felixstowe

## **1. Welcome**

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Following the recent elections, Cllr Mark Amoss has been asked to represent Suffolk Coastal District Council on the Forum and was invited to this meeting.

## **2. Apologies**

The above apologies were received and noted.

## **3. Accessible Britain Challenge**

3.1 Members were reminded that the vision of the Accessible Britain Challenge is for communities to become more inclusive and accessible by working with disabled people to remove barriers that prevent them being full and active contributors in their community. Following our discussion at the last meeting, it had been agreed to consider access to shops and businesses in the Suffolk Coastal area. It was good to welcome Cllr Lady Caroline Blois, Deputy Mayor and Chairman of Woodbridge Amenities Committee to our meeting. Unfortunately Chris Wightman from Saxmundham was not able to be present, and Felixstowe Chamber of Trade and Commerce had been unable to send a representative.

3.2 Members were invited to raise particular concerns about shops that were not accessible. A number of shops in Woodbridge were mentioned, particularly those where access at the entrance is up or down one or two steps. There were some shops where the entrance was accessible but the aisles and displays allowed no room to move around inside, particularly if using a walker or a wheelchair. It was noted that some shops will provide a ramp at the entrance if asked but this was not necessarily known to people using the shops. Most shopkeepers are helpful – when asked. Lady Caroline Blois noted the names of shops mentioned. She commented that towns are trying to keep their local shops profitable and one way to do this is to make shops as accessible as possible.

3.3 The following concerns were noted:

- The placing of A-boards on the pavements is a huge and continuing concern for people with visual impairments and also for people using wheelchairs, mobility aids and pushchairs. Simon Daws said it felt like a maze when trying to walk around A-boards.

- Saxmundham is not considered good for wheelchair users. Although ramps and low pavements do exist, not all shops have access or wide enough doors. The most overwhelming feeling is of the danger posed by the amount of traffic, coupled with narrow pavements.
- In many instances where there are dropped kerbs, the dropped kerb on the other side of the road is often not opposite its counterpart.
- Felixstowe Shared Space is good for wheelchair users as it is level. However, it is not easy for people with visual impairments especially guide dog users as there are no pavements to assist the dog.
- The camber on pavements often makes it difficult to push a wheelchair along the pavement or onto/from the road.

3.4 People with visual impairments often do not have good experiences when they are shopping. Simon commented that mobility scooters are very quiet and can creep up on him unheard. Recently, an electric car just missed him because these vehicles also run very quietly. With a guide dog he is in effect walking two-abreast so cannot walk on narrow pavements. He complained to a lorry driver who was parked across a zebra crossing – and got abuse from the driver.

3.5 There were a number of concerns raised about people using powered mobility scooters thoughtlessly and, as a result, they were a danger to the public. It was suggested there should be a training / testing scheme for new drivers as currently they are not required to have training. Not all mobility scooters have hooters or wing mirrors, only those that can also be used on the road in addition to the pavement. Users are not required by law to have public liability insurance. It would be useful to identify safe routes for mobility scooters in Woodbridge – the town centre is pedestrianised but Blue Badge holders can still drive through.

3.6 Ann Bannister explained the work being undertaken in respect of the Woodbridge Neighbourhood Plan. This is a community-led plan that will shape development in the parish over the next 15 years. It will look at topics such as where new housing should be built and how to keep the Town Centre and riverside vibrant. She asked for feedback on issues related to access for people with disabilities and would note the comments being made at this meeting with regard to the accessibility of shops and businesses and the ease of negotiating pavements.

3.7 It was pointed out that there is a parking meter in a Council-owned Car Park in Woodbridge where there is a step so wheelchair users are not able to reach up in order to pay for parking.

3.8 In respect of using buses, Stephen explained how First Bus had solved problems with buses at the Turban Centre in Woodbridge being missed by people with visual impairments, who could not read the signs on the buses. The problem had been caused by cars parking on the yellow lines so the buses could not park in the right place. First Bus had trained their drivers on how to speak clearly, and there is now compulsory training for drivers on how to respond to people with disabilities. Members commented positively on talking buses and would like them introduced on all routes. However, First Bus were unable to commit to introducing them throughout the company.

3.9 Members raised the long running issue about the times that people can use their concessionary bus passes. As the bus pass cannot be used before 9.30am, it was of limited use to people with disabilities who work, attend college, or have volunteering placements. Suffolk County Council continues to maintain that it cannot afford to make a discretionary enhancement to the local scheme to enable people with disabilities to travel free before 9.30am. People with disabilities are told they are in effect being given a half price ticket if they pay in the morning and travel free in the evening. In addition there are considerable problems in rural areas with people having early hospital/medical appointments. In response to questions about further lobbying, it was noted that considerable lobbying had been undertaken and there was no doubt that the issue would continue to be raised.

3.10 Lady Caroline Blois suggested having a Disability Awareness Day in Woodbridge at the end of September, asking the Mayor to raise awareness by using a wheelchair and attempting to get around in the town. This was welcomed and it was thought that Guide Dogs for the Blind would take part. Similar events could also be held in other towns. This could include exploring the difficulties of public transport.

3.11 A Parliamentary Bill, initiated by Guide Dogs for the Blind, is being debated to give local authorities the power to ban parking on pavements. Parking on pavements is already banned in London. It was noted that Therese Coffey MP did not seem to understand that there was an upcoming bill that local people would like her to support, and it was suggested she should be asked to the Disability Awareness Day.

3.12 Dawn Rourke from Age UK Suffolk reported that Heather McRoberts from the Dementia Action Alliance would be interested in Felixstowe developing Dementia Friends in their community. There is a suggestion of putting a forget-me-not sign in the windows of shops that are dementia-friendly. The 12<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> September have been suggested as provisional dates for a Dementia Awareness Day in

Woodbridge and it was thought that it might be possible to expand this to become a Woodbridge Disability Action Day.

3.13 It was agreed to refer this to the Planning Group who would keep in touch with Lady Caroline.

**Action: Planning Group and Cllr Lady Caroline Blois to agree a date for a Disability Awareness Day in Woodbridge town centre.**

#### **4. Minutes of the Meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015**

Subject to the correction of the spelling of Chris Harrold's name in Item 3.2, the Minutes of the meeting held on the 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2014, were accepted as a correct record.

#### **5. Matters Arising from the Minutes**

**5.1 Item 3 Accessible Britain Challenge:** Other actions relating to this were being considered by the Planning Group.

**5.2 Item 3 Accessible Housing:** It appears that Suffolk Coastal District Council has no strategy for the provision of Lifetime Housing and relies on the requirements of current Building Regulations in terms of ensuring accessibility to housing.

**5.3 Item 5.6 Framfield House:** It is understood that action is being taken to install a buzzer system between the two sets of doors so that people needing assistance can alert staff within the building that they need the inner set of doors opened.

#### **6. Updates on Specific Issues**

**6.1 Disability Focus 2015:** This will take place on Tuesday, 27<sup>th</sup> October, 2015, at One (formerly Suffolk One), Scrivener Drive, Ipswich. Booking information would be sent out shortly. Linda explained that it would not be possible to offer transport except possibly for people in the Ipswich area who can get to a central pick up point, but people could access community transport services. Members suggested that people attending could offer lifts to those people without access to transport.

##### **6.2 Healthwatch Suffolk:**

6.2.1 Simon K was asked if Healthwatch were able to capture information on people with disabilities not being able to use their bus pass before 9.30am to attend hospital appointments. It was commented

that this restriction encourages people with disabilities to be seen as 'off peak people'. Simon felt that people could use the feedback section on the Healthwatch website to report such difficulties.

6.2.2 Simon K reported that their Mental Health and Wellbeing research project is still running and can be accessed online at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/HWS\\_wellbeing](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HWS_wellbeing). Healthwatch is continuing to gather feedback. People can rate the service they have received from the Norfolk & Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust.

6.2.3 The report on the survey, 'Accessing transport to healthcare services', is almost finalised and will be available shortly.

### **6.3. Tesco Martlesham:**

6.3.1 Louise said that Tesco Martlesham has introduced an Automatic Number Plate Recognition System in order to identify cars belonging to people parking for longer than 3 hours in their car park. It seems that some people are using their car park instead of the Park and Ride or while visiting other stores nearby. Drivers of cars overstaying their time will first receive a letter, then further action will be taken against repeat offenders. Tesco have applied to be part of a Penalty Issuing Scheme where drivers can be given parking fines. Blue badge holders who, for reasons relating to their disability, take longer than three hours to do their shopping or when using the café in Tesco, can be excluded from being fined provided they advise Customer Services.

6.3.2 Tesco had received a lot of abuse from youths using the car park to race their skateboards. Being part of the Penalty Issuing Scheme will mean incidents like that can be reported straight to Head Office. Abuse of the Blue Badge parking spaces will be included and it was suggested any fines raised could go to a Charity.

6.3.3 New signs will be introduced soon to deter people from parking in spaces reserved for Blue Badge holders and parents with children. Tesco have been monitoring the spaces in the Blue Badge area for 10 weeks and have always found a space available. A member said that the extra width of these spaces is needed in order to open the doors fully to enable someone to get into and out of their wheelchair. The Blue Badge spaces do not therefore always have to be close to the entrance as the wheelchair user can be pushed to the store.

6.3.4 In Tesco at Martlesham and Felixstowe there are Community Boards which raise funds to assist community projects. Approximately £20k is raised for community projects per annum by the company.

6.3.5 Members commented that the aisles in the supermarket are much clearer of clutter and easier to get around. They also said that Customer Services' staff are always very helpful.

## **6.4 Report back from Planning Group**

**6.4.1 Accessible Taxis:** Margaret reported that only Helpful Cabs in Felixstowe has a taxi that can accommodate a person seated in their wheelchair. It is better to book this in advance. It was noted that it (or indeed any taxi) could be expensive to use for a hospital appointment where the driver is asked to wait for a patient to be seen by their consultant or for treatment.

**6.4.2 Car Parking Leaflet:** Gillian reported that she is working on this but the information provided to her by Suffolk Coastal Services Ltd was far from clear so it is not an easy task.

**6.4.3 Publicity Leaflet:** Gillian has offered to draft the leaflet and will do this as soon as time allows.

**6.4.4 Terms of Reference:** It was noted that the Terms of Reference are to be reviewed.

**6.4.5 Future Meetings:** The Planning Group will invite Councillor Colin Noble – leader of Suffolk County Council – to a future meeting to discuss issues relating to people with disabilities in respect of services provided by the County Council.

**6.5 Access Issues:** The Head of Planning at Suffolk Coastal District Council, Philip Ridley, has suggested that the Forum could comment on planning applications, but that is not easy for the Forum as it requires intensive input from members together with a knowledge of reading and understanding planning applications. The system of putting all applications on the website does not make it easy to identify which applications would have issues for people with disabilities. Philip has been invited to the next meeting to discuss how to ensure that the Forum can comment on relevant applications. However, he has not yet responded.

## **7. Information Round/Any Other Business**

### **7.1 Avenues East:**

7.1.1 Graham reported that Suffolk County Council have begun consultations about their tendering proposals for community transport

(covering Demand Responsive Transport, Dial-A-Ride services and Community Car services) in Suffolk. There are a number of local community transport operators including Avenues East, Felixstowe Area Community Transport and Coastal Accessible Transport. It seems that the County Council would like there to be one operator in each local district or borough council area, meaning that operators may need to put in a joint tender or perhaps find themselves outbid by another operator. It would also be possible for a small operator to be subcontracted to the main operator in an area.

7.1.2 There are concerns about this arrangement as historically community transport has been set up in specific areas by local enthusiastic volunteers. It is also possible that community transport will be less effective as a result of these changes. It was also noted that the County Council intends to dispose of its fleet of Dial-A-Ride and Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles.

7.1.3 It was not known how this proposal affected services provided by Suffolk Norse.

**7.2 Age UK Suffolk: Advisors on Dementia:** Dawn reported that Age UK Suffolk is working to ensure that a Dementia Advisor is available in every GP surgery.

**7.3 Leisure Strategy:** Margaret commented that at a meeting of the Advisory Board at a Children's Centre in Felixstowe, parents had also agreed that the water temperature at Felixstowe Leisure Centre is too cold – and they go to Crown Pools in Ipswich.

**7.4 Deben Estuary Access Group:** Linda has been invited to join the Deben Estuary Access Group to comment on the accessibility of public areas and paths. However, she has not yet attended any of the meetings due to holidays and confusion over meeting arrangements.

## **8. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place on **Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> October, 2015**, in the Council Chamber, Suffolk Coastal District Council Offices, Melton Hill, Woodbridge, from 12.45pm, for a 1pm to 3pm meeting.

The meeting closed at 3pm.