

# Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum

**Minutes of the Meeting held in the  
Council Chamber, Suffolk Coastal District Council Offices, Woodbridge,  
on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2014 at 1pm**

## **Present:**

Linda Hoggarth	Suffolk Consortium of User Led Organisations & Individual Disabled People (Chair)
Moyra Bevilacqua	Resident
Jean Cook	Leading Lives
John Dubois	Suffolk Coalition of Disabled People (SCODP)
Kevin & Partner	Residents
Michael Friend	Resident and Hollesley Parish Councillor
Allen Hoffman	Coastal Accessible Transport Service (Leiston)
Sylvia Izzard	Resident - Woodbridge
Paul Kelly	Resident
Linda Layton	Resident/Family Carer
Liz Mark	Bawdsey Parish Council
Maureen Mee	Resident (Bawdsey)
Cllr Margaret Morris	Resident & Suffolk Coastal District Council
Anita Moxley	Action for Blind People
Bill Smith	East Anglian Sailing Trust
Liz Warden	East Suffolk Disability Advice Service

## **Guests:**

Richard Best	Principal Service Manager (Active Communities), Waveney & Suffolk Coastal District Councils
Cliff Hussey	Manager, Ipswich Depot, First Eastern Counties Buses
Phil Magill	Operations Manager – Passenger Transport, Suffolk County Council
Louise Plummer	Customer Service Manager, Tesco Martlesham
Patrick Ramsey	Compliance Manager, Tesco Martlesham
Keri Ryder	Active Communities Team, Waveney & Suffolk Coastal District Councils
Kieran Smith	Work Experience Student (with Phil Magill)

## **Apologies:**

Carmel Ambridge	Resident
Tom Ambridge	Resident

Cliff Cocker	Resident/Family Carer
Sue Davey	Community Transport Manager, Suffolk County Council
Karen Hubbard	Active Communities, Waveney & Suffolk Coastal District Councils
Geoff Knight	Headway Suffolk Ltd
Matthew Percy	Youth Patron of Ambitious about Autism
Mark Taylor	DC Leisure
Judith Wood	Resident

## 1. **Welcome**

Linda Hoggarth welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

## 2. **Apologies**

The above apologies were received and noted.

## 3. **Further Debate on Transport Issues for Disabled People**

3.1 The following guests were welcomed to the meeting: Phil Magill, Operations Manager – Passenger Transport, Suffolk County Council; Cliff Hussey, Manager – Ipswich Depot, First Eastern Counties Buses; Louise Plummer, Customer Service Manager and Patrick Ramsey, Compliance Manager, Tesco Martlesham. Phil explained that Sue Davey, Community Transport Manager, Suffolk County Council, was unable to attend the meeting but he would relay any issues back to her.

3.2 After brief introductions, it was agreed to start by following up the questions not fully answered at the last meeting and adding in additional questions as follows:

**Question:** Why has the route for the 174 bus at Martlesham Heath been changed? The bus stop at Martlesham Heath was well used.

**Response:** Phil Magill explained that it was necessary to set a balance between competing demands as there is only a finite amount of money available.

**Question:** Can the 64/65 buses be re-routed to go past Ipswich Hospital?

**Response:** Part of the problem is that only two buses at a time can stop outside the Garrett Anderson Centre. It was appreciated that it

means a long walk from the bus stop in Heath Road. However, if the 64/65 went into the hospital then another route would lose out. There has to be a balance.

**Question:** When are all buses going to be fully accessible for wheelchair users?

**Response:** First Buses will all be totally compliant by October 2014.

**Question:** Why are pushchairs not moved when they are using wheelchair spaces on buses?

**Response:** A driver can ask people to collapse them but cannot insist. Recent cases show one judge stating that buggies should be collapsed and another judge saying the opposite. A test case is going to the House of Lords. Drivers would find it easier if the law was clear. People with disabilities are protected in law but so are parents. Motorised scooters are also a grey area and it was noted that not all scooter users are disabled. A powered wheelchair is not a mobility scooter.

**Question:** In some places, passengers have steps up to get from the pavement to the bus. What is being done about this?

**Response:** DDA compliant kerbs are being put in. The problem comes when the setting down place is on a grass verge.

**Question:** Adults with learning difficulties can have problems if the bus route is changed. People are not notified of route changes. Someone with learning disabilities may not recognise the road and so will not get off as they will not know how to get home.

**Responses:** Phil said that it is a question of good information for all passengers. A buzzer is available that goes off when the bus stop is near. The council has tried different ways of communicating with people, not just using the website.

Cliff explained that disability issues are covered in the training given to drivers but unfortunately not all drivers take it in. There is also a module on discrimination. Anita offered to help with training for blind and partially sighted people, though a charge may be made for this.

Louise and Patrick said that Tesco provides a lot of training, which is being revised. They also have specialists for different types of disability. Assistive technology may help.

Phil said that as more people with disabilities use buses, changes happen. For instance there are more display signs in buses now.

It was felt that bus companies such as First could publicise the accessibility of their bus services more widely and particularly on their leaflets to encourage people with disabilities and also promote the use of such initiatives as the Safe and Better journey cards that can be downloaded from the website.

[www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/suffolk\\_norfolk/bus\\_access/safe\\_journey\\_card/](http://www.firstgroup.com/ukbus/suffolk_norfolk/bus_access/safe_journey_card/)

**Comment:** There were complaints about the Underground where there are steps everywhere.

Contact had been made with the Boris Johnson, Mayor of London, to complain about the inaccessibility of the London Underground. His office had replied that there are a number of stations that are not fully accessible but it is a question of funding priorities.

**Travelling by Train:** Gill Charlton, Contracts and Compliance Manager, had responded to further questions and said that timetables are available at all staffed stations and via their website. Timetables can also be found at some council offices and libraries. Additionally, large print timetables are available for visually impaired people either on their website or by asking their Contact Centre to post one out (Tel. 0345-600-7245).

The location of help points on stations are shown on the station maps on the National Rail website (go to [http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/stations\\_destinations/](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk/stations_destinations/) and enter the name of the station) - for example, at Woodbridge, the help point icon (a question mark in a circle) can be seen on Platform 1, next to the telephone icon.

The planned upgrade of communications is to install public address systems, customer information screens, and help points at places that do not currently have them, so there is some means of communicating to customers at those stations.

Nearly all the stations in Suffolk are unmanned. It is easier to say the ones that **are** manned! The only Suffolk stations that are manned are Ipswich, Stowmarket, Bury St Edmunds, and Lowestoft.

**Question:** Why do some buses and vehicles give a bumpy ride?

**Response:** Phil responded that when buses are lower in order to provide access at bus stops then there is less suspension. In addition buses are getting larger; therefore, the lower the bus, the bumpier the ride. Most bus drivers have suspended seats which help the driver.

There was a suggestion that buses could have three entrances – but then kerbs would all need to be adjusted.

Community Transport vehicles go down roads where ordinary buses cannot go. Suffolk County Council intends to use 'Mystery Shoppers' to check whether there are specific problems with Demand Responsive Transport including the way the vehicles are driven.

**Question:** What about the difficulties with school buses in country roads?

**Response:** Phil said that verges on country roads tend to creep in and buses are getting wider. This gives problems with some village lanes. The trees cannot be cut until September because of the birds nesting in them. There is also the question of ownership of trees. However, school buses **have** to get children to school. The council can identify all overhanging trees, then they have to identify the landowner and give them the opportunity to get the trees cut back, and then either they do it or the council does it and charges them. In addition, when it rains/snows, the branches hang lower.

**Question:** In Woodbridge it can be possible to get to an event using Dial-a-Ride but then not be able to get a taxi home.

**Response:** Dial-a-Ride finishes at 5 p.m. because the service is not funded to run beyond that time. As resources are tight and the service relies on volunteer drivers, it was unlikely that Dial-a-Ride services could be run in the evenings. Phil said that evening buses have been tried but there are not enough passengers to make them financially viable. However, in Hadleigh, 3,000 people signed a petition for evening buses and they are now getting 5/6 regular passengers so it is viable. Sunday services are being trialled from August until after Christmas to Woodbridge, Debenham, and Shotley and these will be publicised soon.

**Question:** Why is it that supermarkets do not do more to keep their specific parking spaces for Blue Badge Holders exclusively for that purpose?

**Question:** Does Tesco support the 'Baywatch' campaign designed to stop the abuse of parking spaces for Blue Badge holders?

**Response:** All main supermarkets are signed up to this campaign to ensure that parking spaces for Blue Badge holders are kept free for them.

Louise said that Tesco used to have staff patrolling the car parks to check parking spaces for Blue Badge holders and parent/child spaces. However, financial restraints have meant that staffing levels have been reduced resulting in fewer staff being available for such monitoring.

She pointed out that those patrolling get really foul abuse from those abusing the system. So the biggest reason for not monitoring the spaces is the kind of abuse staff are subjected to by customers. They cannot fine people who are misusing the parking spaces if they cannot enforce them. Most people are reasonable; it is just a few that are not. It is similar to the abuse bus drivers get when they ask people to fold buggies to free up the wheelchair space.

Members thought that posters emphasising that parking for Blue Badge Holders and Parent/Child should not be misused would be helpful. Tesco agreed to consider this and the Forum offered to act as a consultee in respect of the wording and design. This could be a project for local schoolchildren.

#### **Action: Tesco Martlesham**

Louise said that baskets and trolleys are stolen for scrap including those that are specifically for disabled customers.

Members were disappointed that the actions of a minority of the population were preventing schemes to help disabled people from running well.

Linda pointed out that it is much easier now than it was some years ago to access supermarkets as they have made big efforts to improve access for disabled people thus enabling disabled people to do their shopping. However, it was necessary to remain vigilant to ensure that standards for disabled people do not slip.

Tesco runs 'Everyone Welcome' training for staff. The focus now is – 'Making Moments Matter.'

Members noted that it is important for people to thank staff when they have been particularly helpful.

3.3 Guests were thanked very much for their time and for their very helpful comments and responses to questions.

#### **4. Consultation on Suffolk Coastal District Council Leisure Strategy**

4.1 Richard Best, Principal Service Manager (Active Communities), Waveney & Suffolk Coastal District Councils, provided an update on the development of the Leisure Strategy for Suffolk Coastal District Council.

4.2 He explained that they are looking particularly for 'gaps' in current provision. Keri has done a fantastic job working strategically and involving a wide variety of groups. They were pleased to have the opportunity to talk to Forum members.

4.3 Their aim is that more people should have access to increased leisure opportunities within Suffolk Coastal. They have looked at other authorities to see what a top rate facility (building) looks like.

4.4 The consultation included questions relating to people with disabilities. They are interested in the quality and provision of existing facilities. The plan will be for a 10/15 year period – and 'DC Leisure' (now 'People and Places') has been contracted by Suffolk Coastal District Council to implement that. They are looking for a Development Partner to work with them.

4.5 Members made comments about the accessibility of changing rooms, quiet lanes, the Suffolk Sports cycling challenge, and the 'Easy Going Guide' of accessible walks in Suffolk, produced by Suffolk County Council in partnership with disability organisations.

4.6 An audit is being undertaken of all public toilets and the Forum will be asked to comment on this.

4.7 Suffolk County Council has a Most Active County initiative.

4.8 Mark Taylor, People and Places, will be asked to put his findings about access to the Leisure Centres into the new plans for the Leisure Centres, identifying them as short/ medium/long term issues.

4.9 Members felt strongly that 'Changing Places' facilities should be provided in all three swimming pools.

4.10 Change will only happen if people ask for it – and ask strongly. It is up to people to identify gaps in provision and then for the contractor to take them forward.

4.11 Members identified the following barriers that prevent people taking part in leisure activities:

- Transport (However, people may be prepared to travel further for particular/excellent provision)
- Cost of transport and the activities
- Lack of Carers and Support Workers
- Lack of support from trained professionals e.g. swimming coaches
- Availability of suitable equipment
- Attitude of other people
- Attitude of staff (understanding of the variety of disabilities)
- Quality and accessibility of facilities
- Opening hours
- Lack of facilities in rural areas (A five star swimming pool is unlikely to be provided in a remote rural area)
- Temperature of the water in swimming pools
- The difficulties caused by having separate male and female facilities (e.g. when a disabled man is being assisted by a female carer)
- Lack of seats in showers
- Refusal to allow entry to assistance dogs including guide dogs.

4.12 Keri took note of these barriers to bear in mind as the Leisure Strategy progresses. There was still an opportunity to complete a hard copy of the consultation questionnaire by contacting Keri on [Keri.Ryder@eastsoffolk.gov.uk](mailto:Keri.Ryder@eastsoffolk.gov.uk) . The online survey was now closed.

4.13 Richard and Keri were thanked for providing members with an update and for giving them the opportunity to contribute to the Leisure Strategy.

## **5. Minutes of the Meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2014**

The minutes of the Meeting held on the 8th April, 2014 were agreed as an accurate record.

## **6. Matters Arising**

**6.1 Item 6.1 A-Boards:** There will be a meeting in Felixstowe in August about this issue. There is no information regarding the continuing problems with A-Boards in Woodbridge. However, the local press has highlighted the difficulties and dangers of the proliferation of A-Boards in towns in Suffolk Coastal. Margaret will seek further information.

**Action: Cllr Margaret Morris**

**6.2 Item 6.3 Issues regarding Parking, Pavements and Paths:** The Planning Group and Tom continue to follow up specific issues.

**6.3 Item 6.4 Leaflet about Parking for Blue Badge Holders in Suffolk Coastal:** No progress has been made in respect of producing the leaflet due to lack of resources within Suffolk Coastal Services Ltd.

**6.4 Item 7.1.1 Fort Green Car Park, Aldeburgh:** This is being followed up by the Planning Group.

**6.5 Item 7.3 Independent Living Fund & Item 9.2 Personal Independence Payment:** In response to questions asked, the Planning Group had distributed specific fact sheets to provide members with relevant information.

## **7. Updates on Specific Issues**

**7.1 Disability Involvement Day:** This event is provisionally planned for the 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2014 at One, the Suffolk Sixth Form College, which has good facilities for disabled people. The event is to be rebranded and refreshed to ensure that it is responsive to the wishes of disabled people and their organisations.

**7.2 Blue Badges for Community Transport Vehicles:** The Planning Group will look at the issue of Community Transport Vehicles not being eligible for a Blue Badge because they are classified as transport providers, not care providers. However, it was noted that an individual passenger who is a Blue Badge Holder can use his/her Badge when travelling in the vehicle.

**Action: Planning Group**

### **7.3 Access to the Beach at the Spa Pavilion end of Felixstowe:**

A member raised the fact that there is a drop from the Promenade to the Beach as a concern and this will be followed up by the Planning Group.

**Action: Planning Group**

## **8. Membership of the Suffolk Consortium of User Led Organisations & Individual Disabled People**

It was unanimously agreed that the Suffolk Coastal Disability Forum should become a member of the Suffolk Consortium of User Led Organisations & Individual Disabled People.

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

**9.1 East Anglian Sailing Trust:** Bill updated members on forthcoming activities of the East Anglian Sailing Trust which provides a range of opportunities for people with disabilities to take up sailing. For more information, go to [www.east-anglian-sailing-trust.org.uk/](http://www.east-anglian-sailing-trust.org.uk/).

## **10. Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2014, 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 3.15 pm.