**Mid Suffolk Disability Forum**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 17th January, 2024,**

**from 10.30am to 12.30pm, via Zoom**

**Present:**

Linda Hoggarth - Chair / Resident / Disability Forum for Suffolk /

Avenues East

Simon Barnett - Integrated Transport & Enhanced Partnership

Manager, Suffolk County Council

Jo Beales - Activities & Wellbeing Co-ordinator, Everyone

Active

Libby Brooks - Diversity Group, Mid Suffolk Liberal Democrats

Emma Buckmaster - Prospective Candidate, Green Party

Terence Carter - Vice Chair / Resident / Mid Suffolk District

Council & Stowmarket Town Council

Jonathan Chew - Self-Advocacy & Engagement Lead, ACE

(Anglia) Ltd

Nigel Crisp - Staff Manager – Ipswich Depot, First Bus

Wendy Johns - Communications & Engagement Officer,

Suffolk Sight

Sam Lake - Corporate Manager Customer Operations, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Council

Steven Largent - Resident / ACE (Anglia) Ltd

Gareth Moir - Community Resilience Officer, Suffolk County

Council

Alan Neville - Community & Customer Engagement Manager,

Greater Anglia

Miles Row - Suffolk Artlink

Christine Steward - Sensing Change

Claire Smith - Resident / Suffolk Parent Carer Forum

Sue Spiller - Resident, Ixworth

Elizabeth Storer - Community Development Officer, Healthwatch

Suffolk

Helen Toffanello - Secretary / Resident

**Guests**

Sophie Buist - Blue Badge Team Leader, Suffolk County

Council

Luke Cantwell-Forbes - Principal Transport Development Planner,

Highways, Suffolk County Council

**Apologies**

Bethany Couch - General Manager, The Regal, Stowmarket

Town Council

Anselm Gurney - Partnership Manager, Everyone Active

Paul Hughes - Corporate Manager – Building Control &

Access Officer, Mid Suffolk & Babergh

District Councils

Cllr John Matthissen - Mid Suffolk District Council

Jen Overett - Access for All, Needham Market & Inclusion &

Diversity Committee, John Peel Centre

Stephen Wort - SEND Family Co-ordinator, Families Together

Suffolk

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Linda thanked Chewy and ACE (Anglia) Ltd for hosting this meeting on Zoom.

**2. Apologies**

The above apologies were noted.

**3. Issues relating to Dropped Kerbs**

3.1 Luke Cantwell-Forbes, Principal Transport Development Planner, Highways, Suffolk County Council was welcomed to the meeting.

3.2 Luke explained that his role is to provide Highways Authority responses on planning applications as a formal consultee. Using a series of slides he illustrated his work, briefly highlighted as follows:

3.3 The aim is to promote sustainable transport modes, to provide safe and suitable access for all and to give priority to pedestrians, cyclists, and wheelchair and mobility scooter users. The access and layout has to be safe and suitable for all with good accessibility to the surrounding area.

3.4 The Suffolk Design Streets Guide 2022 prioritises pedestrians and wheelchair and mobility scooter users. It dictates that tactile paving must be used to delineate spaces for cars, pedestrians and crossing points. New developments have to now be linked to the surrounding area through its layout and off-site infrastructure.

3.5 The Movement Framework includes the designing of safe junctions and intersections, prioritising non-car users.

3.6 Crossings have to have the level differences removed and tactile paving installed.

3.7 The Footways, Cycleways and Bus Infrastructure incorporates separate routes for pedestrians and cyclists, Dutch kerbs to retain the height of the footway and limit the height difference, the removal of gradients such as replacing steps with ramps, the reduction of clutter, building bus shelters with dropped kerbs, provision of as much parking on-site as possible to limit on-road parking and routes that are as direct as possible.

3.8 Luke asked if the Forum would be willing to be involved in being part of a panel to help design highway infrastructure. The Planning Group will discuss how this can be achieved.

**Action: Planning Group**

3.9 In new developments, members identified that kerbs are often too raised and crossing points do not always line up. Luke said that the new guidance issued in 2022 should put a stop to lips on kerbs being built in the future.

3.10 In Gateway 14, it had been noticed that dropped kerbs had been built in line of sight but not outside entry and exit points which proved impractical for wheelchairs and mobility scooter users.

3.11 Members said that the kerbs on the new roundabout on Crown Street in Stowmarket had been rebuilt without lowered kerbs and tactile paving. Luke will flag this with Suffolk County Council.

**Action: Luke Cantwell-Forbes**

3.12 It was felt that levels of maintenance of roadways needed to be improved and dropped kerbs should always be constructed flush with the road. Luke will try to find a contact who can attend the Forum to discuss this issue.

**Action: Luke Cantwell-Forbes**

3.13 It was suggested that when issues such as lack of crossing points, difficulties with dropped kerbs and pavements, are identified, the Council’s reporting tool should be used.

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/highway-maintenance/report-a-highways-issue>

3.14 Linda thanked Luke for attending the meeting. His slides will be distributed with the minutes.

**4. Blue Badge Processes and Procedures**

4.1 Sophie Buist, Blue Badge Team Leader, Suffolk County Council, was welcomed to the meeting.

4.2 Members were concerned that a number of children with invisible conditions such as ADHD, autism, POTS, epilepsy, high anxiety and hypermobility were being refused a Blue Badge as they were able to walk and Sophie was asked to explain the eligibility criteria.

4.3 Sophie explained that children aged under 3 can only apply if they have life difficulties and carry lifesaving equipment. Children aged 3+ are treated as adults.

4.4 In 2019 a hidden non-visible criterion was introduced. A person’s diagnosis does not determine whether someone gets a Blue Badge. It depends what the impact is on the person’s ability to walk. There is strict guidance on this and takes account of age, milestones and ability to walk.

4.5 Each Blue Badge application must have supporting evidence such as an Education Health and Care Plan, or reports from a specialist, doctor, clinical or behavioural psychologist, a social worker. an occupational, speech and language therapist or the learning and disability team.

4.6 If the evidence is insufficient, an expert, usually a senior occupational therapist or physiotherapist, will undertake an assessment with the applicant to determine their cognitive abilities, memory and hazard awareness, behaviour and anxiety issues, ability to travel independently and follow instruction, level of physical aggression and verbalisation skills, by telephone or in person.

4.7 The number of applications for Blue Badges for adults and children with non-visible disabilities is increasing with 845 in 2023. 70% of those applications were successful. The Blue Badge Team dealt with over 17,000 applications for Blue Badges in 2023, 3% of those were in the non-visible disability category.

4.8 One member commented that it took about 3 years to get a diagnosis and usually the parent had to battle and go privately to achieve it. Suffolk is also currently the 2nd worst county in the UK for issuing Education Health and Care Plans. Therefore, if a Blue Badge applicant has a diagnosis, it is usually with good reason.

4.9 Sophie explained that if an applicant is unsuccessful and wants to lodge an appeal, they can go to the local Government Ombudsman.

4.10 Once a year Blue Badge Officers attend an event in London with the Department of Transport whose guidance the officers have to follow. On this day the teams can raise issues and suggest changes to the system.

4.11 Members noted that the criteria for the issue of Blue Badges is laid down nation-wide by the Department of Transport and have to be followed by issuing teams. Consequently representations for any changes to the criteria can only be made to the Department of Transport.

4.12 More information on the criteria can be found at:

<https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/parking/blue-badge-scheme/who-can-get-a-blue-badge>

. 4.13 Sophie was thanked for explaining this issue which clearly impacts on families with children with non-visible disabilities. It was hoped that Sophie could attend a future meeting to discuss other issues regarding Blue Badges.

**5. Update on SHELF**

. 5.1 Kate Parnum, Regeneration Project Manager, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Council, would provide a written update for inclusion with the minutes of this meeting.

**6. Minutes from the Meeting held on the 11th October, 2023**

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

**7. Matters Arising**

Matters arising were dealt with in Item 8.

**8. Updates, Issues, Concerns and News from Members**

**8.1 Greater Anglia:** Alan Neville, Community & Customer Engagement Manager, Greater Anglia reported as follows:

* Stowmarket Railway Station has been awarded Access for All funding to improve the access and works will begin later in 2024.
* With regard to Needham Market Railway Station, an update meeting has been held to discuss the options for access to Platform 2. Option 1 was chosen to present to the Department of Transport for funding. It was not feasible to take the lift down to ground level in order to reach the Needham Lake side unless additional funding was forthcoming. Funding might not be given as both Stowmarket and Ipswich stations will be fully accessible and other areas in the country might have greater need. Cllr Matthissen, Jen Overett and Linda were present at this meeting.
* Performance across Greater Anglia remains good.

**8.2 Changing Places:** Works will start on installing the Changing Places facility in Stradbroke Swimming Pool and Fitness Centre on the 26th February. It was not known whether the Changing Places facility had been installed at the Food Museum in Stowmarket.

**8.3 Everyone Active:** Jo reported as follows:

* The Table Tennis Sessions for adults with disabilities and Chair Based Exercise Sessions have been very popular with participants including those who are wheelchair users. The Table Tennis sessions take place on Fridays, 10.45am to 11.45am.
* Activity sessions for people with Parkinson’s will start on the 13th February.
* Sporting Memory sessions for people with dementia, which incorporate 45 minutes of activity and discussion about sporting events and activities they have seen or taken part in, will start soon.

**8.4 Bus Services:** Simon 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 and adjustments needed to reach the card machines, confidence of wheelchair users to travel by bus, assistance from drivers. There was little engagement from many of the operators and it was intended to set up a separate working group to bring about greater engagement.
* Suffolk County Council have now received the funding from the Bus Improvement Settlement Plan (BSIP+) and decided which projects to fund. Some are in Mid Suffolk and will be announced shortly.

**8.5 West Suffolk Archives:** Sue reported that Suffolk County Council was proposing, as part of its cost cutting, to close the Records Office in Bury St Edmunds and move all records to the Hold in Ipswich. This will cause considerable access difficulties for disabled people from the West of the County in terms of travelling to and from the Hold. The West Suffolk Disability Forum will be registering their concerns regarding this proposal. It was agreed that the Mid Suffolk Disability Forum would also register their concerns. Additionally, members noted the impact on Suffolk Artlink as the proposal also includes withdrawal of their funding from Suffolk County Council.

**Action: Linda Hoggarth**

**8.6 Food Museum, Stowmarket:** Terence reported that building works have started at the Food Museum but no completion date has been set.

**8.7 Gateway 14:** Terence reported that a date for a site visit to Gateway 14 has not yet been sent. He had visited the Range warehouse and noted that the access ramp is too steep. This would cause difficulties for any disabled employees. He also felt that the dropped kerbs were below standard.

**9. Access Issues**

**9.1 Planning Applications:** Comments have been made on the following Planning Applications:

DC/23/02247 – Land north west of Stowupland Road, Stowmarket – Reconsultation showing the design of the Playground, one piece of equipment is designed for wheelchair users.

DC/23/03589 – Barham & Claydon Surgery, Kirby Rise, Barham – Reconsultation re 9 dwellings all houses.

DC/23/01323 – Chilton Sports Club, Chilton Way, Stowmarket – Application for planning permission for the Stowmarket Health, Education, Leisure Facilities (SHELF), the proposed new sports pavilion and community well-being hub. The well-being hub application has been changed to an outline planning application.

DC/23/05006 – Land off Jacks Green Road, Creeting St Mary – Application for a variation to planning for 43 dwellings to enable Phase 3 to be all single storey dwellings.

DC/23/02430 – Land west of Barrells Road, Thurston – Reconsultation on a development of 8 dwellings.

DC/23/05380 – Land south of Melvin Way, Woolpit – Outline planning permission has already been granted for 40 dwellings, this application is for reserved matters.

DC/23/05536 – Land off Church Road, Thurston – Reserved Matters, development has outline planning permission for 15 dwellings.

DC/23/05641 – Paddock House, Wellington Road, Eye – Variation of planning conditions for 16 dwellings.

DC/21/04377 – Grove Farm, Queen Street, Stradbroke – Planning application for 42 dwellings and 2 barn conversions. Development does not include any bungalows.

DC/23/05651 – Land to the north and west of School Road, Elmswell – Outline planning application for a Care Village, with a 66 bed care home and 40 bungalows for people aged 65 and over.

DC/23/05768 – Land to the south of Shop Street, Worlingworth – Variation of planning conditions for 26 dwellings.

DC/23/05929 – Land to the south of Eye Airfield and north of Castleton Way, Eye – Application for approval of reserved matters for a development of 127 dwellings, including a small number of bungalows. The development already has outline planning permission.

**9.2 Playground Equipment:** It was noted that Planning Applications which include playgrounds did not always include play equipment that was inclusive of all children and therefore did not cater for children with disabilities. It was noted that Scope are campaigning for more inclusive equipment in playgrounds.

**9.3 Other Access Issues:** There were none to report.

**10. Health and Social Care**

10.1 Elizabeth provided a report from Healthwatch Suffolk which will be distributed with the minutes.

**11. Future Meetings**

**11.1 Topics for Discussion:** The Planning Group will work on the following suggestions:

* Community Transport
* Difficulties in children getting Education Health and Care Plans.

**11.2 Format of Meeting:** Sam is continuing to search for a suitable venue for a hybrid meeting for the Forum but she thought that there would need to be a compromise on its facilities and location. She hopes to be able to suggest possible venues at the next meeting for members to discuss. Consequently the next meeting of the Forum will take place on Zoom.

**Action: Sam Lake**

**12. Information Round / Any Other Business:**

* 1. **Suffolk Sight:** Wendy reported as follows:
* Starship Robots, which are used for delivery of groceries and parcels, could be introduced in Ipswich. These robots are currently used in Cambridge. There were concerns that these would be a hazard for people with visual impairments. Details of an open day to give more information will be circulated.
* The Be Well Bus has recently been visiting Stowmarket – this offers support and advice to people with their health and well-being. There were a number of professionals on board including a physiotherapist, a nurse and a representative from Suffolk Sight. There will be further visits, dates to be announced.

**13. Date of Next Meeting:**

The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday, 17th April, 2024, 10.30am to 12.30pm, via Zoom.

The link for the meeting will be sent in due course.