**Mid Suffolk Disability Forum**

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 19th July, 2023,**

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

**Present:**

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

 Avenues East

Cllr Terence Carter - Vice Chair / Resident / Mid Suffolk District

 Council & Stowmarket Town Council

Libby Brooks - Diversity Group, Mid Suffolk Liberal Democrats

Simon Barnett - Integrated Transport & Enhanced Partnership

 Manager, Suffolk County Council

Jonathan Chew - Self-Advocacy Co-Production Lead, ACE

 (Anglia) Ltd

Mark Conquer - Resident / ACE (Anglia) Ltd

Nigel Crisp - Staff Manager – Ipswich Depot, First Bus

Evie Edwards-Hill - Self-Advocacy and Coproduction Project

 Worker, ACE (Anglia) Ltd

Anselm Gurney - Partnership Manager, Everyone Active

Paul Hughes - Corporate Manager – Building Control &

 Access Officer, Mid Suffolk & Babergh

 District Councils

Wendy Johns - Communications & Engagement Officer,

 Suffolk Sight

Sam Lake - Corporate Manager, Customer Operations, Mid

 Suffolk & Babergh District Councils

Steven Largent - Resident / ACE (Anglia) Ltd

Cllr Adrienne Marriott - Mid Suffolk District Council

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

 Diversity Committee, John Peel Centre

Kate Parnum - Regeneration Project Manager, Mid Suffolk &

 Babergh District Councils

Miles Row - Suffolk Artlink

Christine Steward - Resident / Sensing Change

Elizabeth Storer - Community Development Officer, Healthwatch

 Suffolk

**Guests**

Richard Hunt - Strategic Lead: Visitor Economy, Suffolk

 Growth Partnership

Rebecca Brown - AccessAble

**Apologies**

Paul Attrill - Regional Director of Operations, Avenues East

Helen Cumbers - Suffolk SENDIASS (Special Education Needs

 and Disabilities Information Advice &

 Support Service)

Karl Daniels - Head of Community Services, Stowmarket

 Town Council

Tracey Evans - Later Life Community Engagement Manager,

 Communities Together East Anglia

Sue Hughes - Community Engagement Co-ordinator,

 Communities Together East Anglia

William Knights - Customer Insight & Intelligence Officer, Mid

 Suffolk & Babergh District Councils

Cllr John Matthissen - Mid Suffolk District Council

Gareth Moir - Community Resilience Officer, Suffolk County

 Council

Alan Neville - Community & Customer Engagement Manager,

 Greater Anglia

Cllr Steve Phillips - Needham Market Town Council

Heather Tooke - Community Centre Manager, Stowmarket

 Town Council

Claire Smith - Resident / Parents & Carers Together

Vicky Stone - Homestart, Mid Suffolk

Helen Toffanello - Secretary / Resident

Cllr Tim Weller - Mid Suffolk District Council

**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. Accessible Destination Suffolk**

* 1. Richard explained that he is the Strategic Lead: Visitor Economy for the Suffolk Growth Partnership. The Partnership works across all the local authorities in Suffolk and is leading the programme on visitor economy. Visitor economy is worth approximately £2 billion per year.

3.2 The Partnership wants to work on accessibility and inclusivity across all of Suffolk. A 70-page report has been prepared, which provides the detail on the economic case for improving accessibility as well as research, signposting, and shows how businesses and strategic partners can change to help improve their accessibility.

* 1. It is estimated that 1 in 5 people have an access need so it is important that our destinations are much more accessible.
	2. The value of the purple pound (the spending power of households where at least one member has a disability) is important to visitor economy and around £300 million relates to those who have an access need. There are examples of best practice around arts and museums which are included in the report to show how to ensure venues are accessible to all.
	3. The concern was that around 9% of responders (around 2,000) from a survey undertaken did not visit Suffolk due to accessibility issues and these are broken down further in the report.
	4. A working group has been formed and haa19 recommendations. The Growth Partnership are focusing on our ability to talk about this agenda across the different themes and agendas.
	5. Working with local authorities and AccessAble, 100 businesses are being sought to help develop Suffolk as a more accessible and inclusive visitor destination. This will include some streetscape guides. 1,000 licences have been commission for disability essentials training.

3.8 Further information can be found at:

[100 visitor economy businesses to launch Accessible Destination Suffolk | Suffolk Growth](https://www.suffolkgrowth.co.uk/100-visitor-economy-businesses-to-launch-accessible-destination-suffolk/)

[Accessibility and Inclusion – enabling growth in the Suffolk Visitor Economy | Suffolk Growth](https://www.suffolkgrowth.co.uk/accessibility-and-inclusion-enabling-growth-in-the-suffolk-visitor-economy/)

3.9 Forums such as this one, can assist by promoting the work to businesses and act as a critical friend.

3.10 Richard’s presentation slides will be sent to members at the same time as the minutes are circulated. Linda and Richard will arrange to meet to discuss how the Disability Forums can contribute to this work.

**Action: Linda Hoggarth / Richard Hunt**

3.11 Rebecca Brown from AccessAble explained the history and background to the work of AccessAble using presentation slides which will also be sent to members.

3.12 She explained that AccessAble helps to create accessible guides to help people navigate access information related to many services and venues.

3.13 AccessAble provides face-to-face surveyors who review the accessibility of each venue included on their website. It is broken down using accessible symbols and photos of the different aspects such as parking, the entrance, and the height of the reception desk. This helps visitors to the site to know what to expect when going to a venue. The information takes into account people’s different disabilities.

* 1. The website has a ‘recite me’ facility and an easy read option. The accessibility guides can be e-mailed and accessed through an app. Accessibility information is also made available where people would expect to find it, for example, through the Suffolk Libraries website, on the opening hours section for each library. <https://www.suffolklibraries.co.uk/visit/locations-and-times/stowmarket-library>
	2. Members asked if it will be possible to work with Google Maps to create a 360 degrees view of a venue. Rebecca explained that many partners are now taking up this opportunity, so this is available and is called ‘wayfinding’.
	3. Members complimented AccessAble on the search function of the website and the easy read function.
	4. Members asked if there were opportunities to extend AccessAble to broaden out to include accessible services, for example, specific services for people with special educational needs. Rebecca said that, whilst this is not possible for AccessAble to do, they do influence and promote businesses to update service information to help people access more details about specific services.

3.18 More information and the guides can be found at: [Home | AccessAble](https://www.accessable.co.uk/)

**4. Suffolk Learning Disability Strategy Focus Groups**

* 1. Mark and Evie explained how the Suffolk Learning Disability Strategy has been co-designed and has the following vision “People with learning disabilities live good lives, as part of their community, with the right support, at the right time, from the right people.” The implementation of the vision is overseen by the Suffolk Learning Disability Partnership Board.
	2. The Partnership Board has set up 4 Focus Groups to discuss issues that impact on the lives of people with learning disabilities, these are ‘My Life’, ‘My Health’, ‘My Home’, and ‘My Voice’ and people attending can discuss what works well, their experiences and what can be improved.
	3. At the last Partnership Board Meeting, a big topic was about assessment and reviews not work well and how improvements can be made. Work is underway with Suffolk County Council to improve issues such as accessible information and self-referral processes.
	4. Chewy said that the ‘My Health’ Focus Group has been seen nationally as a really positive piece of work and has been selected as a finalist for an award for reducing health inequalities. The winner will be announced in September, in Manchester.
	5. More information about the work of ACE Anglia and the Partnership Board can be found at: [Co-Production > Ace Anglia independent advocacy organisation based in Suffolk](https://www.aceanglia.com/what-we-do/co-production/)

4.6 More people would be welcomed to attend the Focus Groups meetings and to take the vision forward to help create change for people with learning disabilities. More information can be found at: <https://suffolkordinarylives.co.uk/>

**Action: All to note**

4.7 Mark and Evie were thanked for their presentation and commended on the film shown to illustrate the importance of listening to the voices of people with learning disabilities.

**5. Update on Stowmarket Health, Education and Leisure Facilities**

5.1 Kate said that the planning application for this development has been submitted. More information can be found at: [Stowmarket Health, Education and Leisure Facilities » Babergh Mid Suffolk](https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/business/economic-development/regeneration-areas-in-mid-suffolk/stowmarket-health-education-and-leisure/)

* 1. Once planning permission is granted, Kate will engage with the Forum on some more of the detailed decisions.
	2. Kate asked members if they had any questions or think of people that she should be consulting regarding the plans to send them to her at: kate.parnum@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk
	3. Kate and Sam will follow up with the Planning Department regarding the lack of notification for the Forum as a formal consultee.

**Action: Kate Parnum / Sam Lake**

**6. Minutes from the Meeting held on the 26th April, 2023**

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

**7. Matters Arising**

**7.1 Item 3 Access to the Moments Coffee Shop:** Members were pleased to note that Emile had now been able to have coffee and cake at the Moments Coffee Shop.

**7.2 Item 4.17 Planning Process Overview:** The Planning Group had confirmed that the Forum would wish to continue to comment on housing developments with ten or more dwellings and developments to which the public have access.

**7.3 Item 7.3 Everyone Active:** Anselm provided an update on plans to introduce further sports sessions for disabled people. This includes chair based exercises and table tennis. Members confirmed that they were happy to receive and circulate information on the sessions.

**7.4 Item 9.2.1 Stowmarket Railway Station:** Unfortunately, Alan Neville, Community and Customer Engagement Manager, Greater Anglia, was not able to attend this meeting. However he had responded to issues that had been raised by members regarding the car park. Linda was waiting for their response before contacting Alan again. It would seem that the lift access at the Railway Station is not progressing at this time.

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

**8.1 Bus Services:**

8.1.1 Simon reported that Suffolk County Council has been awarded £1.8m from the Bus Improvement Settlement Plan Plus funding which can be used to improve and enhance bus services with a similar amount promised for next year. However, Suffolk County Council is still waiting for the terms and conditions to provide a breakdown on how, where and why this funding can be spent. It is clear that this cannot be used for large infrastructure projects, so no new bus lanes or bus stations.

8.1.2 Members may like to consider where they would wish to see improvements to bus services especially if this can be backed up by evidence of need.

8.1.3 In response to a question, Simon said that it would require government legislation to increase the number of wheelchair spaces on buses. The impossibility of two wheelchair users travelling together was noted.

8.1.4 Members noted the practicality of using smaller buses on bus routes to help services remain viable.

**9. Access Issues**

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

DC/21/03287 – Land north west of Stowupland Road, Stowmarket – Approval for discharge of conditions. Planning permission has been given for a development of 265 dwellings. There is a playground with some play equipment but there appears to be no provision for disabled children. A further application for discharge of conditions shows that there is now some equipment that is inclusive for all children but there is still no equipment that is accessible to a child using a wheelchair.

DC/20/01716 – Land on north side of Norton Road, Thurston – Hybrid application for 112 dwellings, 9 of which are self-build. The playground does not appear to have any provision for disabled children.

DC/23/02430 – Land west of Barrells Road, Thurston – Outline planning application for 8 dwellings, referred to as executive type large dwellings.

DC/23/01254 – Land north of Laxfield Road, Stradbroke – Approval of reserved matters relating to outline planning permission for a development of 28 dwellings.

DC/23/02900 – Land east of Greenacres, Church Road, Old Newton – Variation of Conditions and Approval of Reserved Matters relating to a development of up to 64 dwellings.

**9.2 Other Access Issues:**

**9.2.1 East of England Co-operative Store, Bramford:** There is an issue with the doors to the freezer units which either block access or make access difficult for wheelchair users. This has been raised with the Co-operative Society and action is to be taken.

**10. Health and Social Care**

10.1 Given the lack of time, Elizabeth’s report from Healthwatch Suffolk will be circulated with the minutes.

**11. Future Meetings**

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

* Discussion with Greater Anglia to discuss the issues raised by members regarding Stowmarket and Needham Market Railway Stations.
* Opportunities for Public Transport Services – Simon Barnett

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

There was none.

**13. Date of Next Meeting:**

The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday, 11th October, 2023. 10.30am to 12.30pm.

Arrangements for the meeting will be circulated in due course.