

Mid Suffolk Disability Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 11th October, 2023,
from 10.30am to 12.30pm, via Zoom

Present:

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| 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 |
| Hollie Brooks | - Resident / Journalist / Disability Campaigner |
| Libby Brooks | - Diversity Group, Mid Suffolk Liberal Democrats |
| Lee Carvell | - Regeneration & Capital Projects Officer, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Councils |
| Jonathan Chew | - Self-Advocacy Co-Production Lead, ACE (Anglia) Ltd |
| Mark Conquer | - Resident / ACE (Anglia) Ltd |
| Nigel Crisp | - Staff Manager – Ipswich Depot, First Bus |
| Emma Buckmaster | - Prospective Candidate, Green Party |
| Bethany Couch | - General Manager, The Regal, Stowmarket Town Council |
| Nigel Crisp | - Staff Manager – Ipswich Depot, First Bus |
| Anselm Gurney | - Partnership Manager, Everyone Active |
| Beth Hamilton | - Stowmarket Lawn Tennis Club |
| Paul Hughes | - Corporate Manager – Building Control & Access Officer, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Councils |
| Sam Lake | - Corporate Manager Customer Operations, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Council |
| Steven Largent | - Resident / ACE (Anglia) Ltd |
| Alan Neville | - Community & Customer Engagement Manager, Greater Anglia |
| Jen Overett | - Access for All, Needham Market & Inclusion & Diversity Committee, John Peel Centre |
| Miles Row | - Suffolk Artlink |
| Lauren Stevens | - Capital Projects Officer, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Council |
| Helen Toffanello | - Secretary / Resident |
| Stephen Wort | - SEND Family Co-ordinator, Families Together Suffolk |

Apologies

Cllr Terence Carter	- Vice Chair / Resident / Mid Suffolk District Council & Stowmarket Town Council
Sue Hughes	- Community Engagement Co-ordinator, Communities Together East Anglia
Cllr John Matthissen	- Mid Suffolk District Council
Gareth Moir	- Community Resilience Officer, Suffolk County Council
Kate Parnum	- Regeneration Project Manager, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Councils
Christine Steward	- Resident / Sensing Change
Claire Smith	- Resident / Parents & Carers Together
Elizabeth Storer	- Community Development Officer, Healthwatch 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. Greater Anglia Update

3.1 Alan Neville, Community & Engagement Manager, Greater Anglia, was invited to update members.

3.2 Alan said that, as part of the National Rail Contract, a business plan is put together each year which is measured against performance.

3.3 All rolling stock is new and no old stock is being used. Trains are performing well with 87.7% arriving on time. Greater Anglia has the lowest cancellation rate at 1.4% of any UK train company.

3.4 The Hare Fares initiative is currently available, offering tickets at £5, £10 and £15 from 27 September to 17 October.

3.5 Greater Anglia were runners-up in the National Rail Awards, with Lowestoft Railway Station the runner-up in the Small Station of the Year category.

3.6 Alan meets regularly with the Station Adopters, volunteers who provide links with the local community and make stations more pleasant and welcoming such as with flowers. There are 330 Station Adopters.

3.7 The industrial disputes continue with no end in sight.

3.8 The consultation period for the Ticket Office Reform has now ended and the 500,000 comments received are being analysed. The proposal is that station staff will operate from the platforms and become more visible. More staff will be trained in ticket purchasing so they can move round the station assisting passengers.

3.9 There will be more ticket machines with staff on hand to assist. There is also an assistance button on the ticket machine that connects with the 24-hour help desk at Norwich Station where a member of staff can manually take over the ticket purchase if needed. In addition, tickets can be bought from the conductors on the trains.

3.11 It was noted that the assistance signs in unstaffed stations like Needham Market are not accurate. The signs are the same for every station and not station specific. Jen will email the details of her concern to Alan to forward to James Bonehill, Accessibility Manager, Greater Anglia.

Action: Jen Overett / Alan Neville

3.12 The ongoing issue of announcements being made on trains to warn passengers if an upcoming station is not fully accessible was raised. Jen will email specific details to Alan to forward to James.

Action: Jen Overett / Alan Neville

3.13 The lift and bridge project at Stowmarket Railway Station will start next year. A full equality impact assessment is underway and Greater Anglia will invite the Forum to the stakeholders meeting early next year. Unfortunately, no further changes for those with access needs can be provided until the works are completed.

3.14 Another issue identified relates to the crossing gates at

Stowmarket. When the gates are closed, it is problematic for those who struggle to stand and asked if an assistance button could be put in place alongside Braille signs and text buttons. Hollie will email her suggestions for improvements to Alan to forward to James.

Action: Hollie Brooks / Alan Neville

3.15 It was also noted that engineering works and the resulting bus replacement services were problematic for disabled passengers and there needed to be greater understanding of the difficulties this causes disabled passengers.

3.16 The options report following the surveys of Needham Market Railway Station should be produced by the end of November.

3.17 Linda thanked Alan for his input to the meeting and asked that the Forum continues to be updated.

4. Update and Feedback – Skills and Innovation Centre, Gateway 14

4.1 Lee Carvell, Regeneration and Capital Projects Officer, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Councils was welcomed to the meeting. Lee had come in place of Kate Parnum who had sent her apologies.

4.2 Lee provided some background on the proposed Skills and Innovation Centre at Gateway 14. The formal planning application will be made early in 2024 following the Cabinet making a decision on the development on the 7th November.

4.3 The Centre will be part of the Innovation Cluster at Freeport East's Gateway 14 development in Stowmarket to attract more technology companies and skills to the area.

4.4 There will be provision for teaching and learning, courses, conferences, careers advice, a virtual reality centre, hotdesking and a café. This groundbreaking project will see the Council partner with Suffolk's University and Colleges to provide modular work-centred degrees. For example, greater training is needed in sustainable technologies.

4.5 The building will encompass 3 storeys. The ground floor will have a glass atrium, café, boardrooms and meeting rooms and a conference space. The first and second floors will have office space and rooms for hotdesking. Partitions between offices can be removed

to make the space more flexible. The building will be fully compliant with Part M requirements ensuring that it is fully accessible to all people.

4.6 Hearing loops, visually impaired signage, a Changing Places and larger lifts are included with plenty of parking spaces for Blue Badge Holders in the 150 space car park.

4.7 A subsidised electric bus service is proposed to connect the town and station with the Centre so two electric bus spaces will be located in the car park. The electric buses should be fully accessible.

4.8 Members requested that dropped kerbs are installed correctly so that there is level access between the kerb and the roadway or paths.

4.9 Lee agreed that it should be possible for hybrid meetings to be held in the Centre thus providing a fully accessible location for future meetings of this Forum.

4.10 Linda thanked Lee for attending the meeting. If there are any further points members are asked to email these to Linda to forward to Lee.

5. Issues relating to Dropped Kerbs

5.1 Sam explained that Suffolk County Council had been unable to find an officer to attend this meeting to respond to issues about dropped kerbs but would attend the next meeting.

5.2 Members were asked to raise specific issues regarding dropped kerbs in order to provide background information prior to the meeting.

5.3 Issues were recorded as follows:

- There are numerous examples throughout Mid Suffolk where the dropped kerb is not level with the roadway which creates difficulties for wheelchair users. It was noted that developers create new roads within developments but do not complete dropped kerbs.
- There is not always a dropped kerb on the opposite side of the street or road making it difficult for wheelchair users to cross and access the other side of the street or road.
- The dropped kerbs at the Crown Street, Stowmarket roundabout are in poor condition and had not been improved during the recent resurfacing works. It is only if the roundabout is new that

improvements are made.

- Attention needs to be given to the camber of footpaths which can make pushing wheelchairs very difficult.
- Grass between paving slabs on paths such as those opposite the Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre make for a bumpy ride for wheelchair and mobility scooter users. For complaints such as these, members can use the Highway Reporting Tool, <https://highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk/> entering the road name concerned or by zooming in on the map.
- The black patch of bitumen used to repair an existing path at Stowmarket Recreation Group looks like a black hole to people with dementia or a neurological condition.

5.4 Members were asked to provide further specific examples to Linda.

Action: All

6. Minutes from the Meeting held on the 19th July, 2023

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

7. Matters Arising

7.1 Item 3.10 Accessible Destination Suffolk: Linda will arrange to meet Richard Hunt, Suffolk Growth Partnership, to discuss how the Disability Forums can contribute to this work.

Action: Linda Hoggarth

7.2 Item 5 Update on Stowmarket Health, Education and Leisure Facilities: Lauren will ask Kate to provide a written update.

Action: Lauren Stevens / Kate Parnum

7.3 Item 7.3 Everyone Active:

7.3.1 Anselm provided the following update:

- Chair-based exercise classes for adults with disabilities are taking place on Mondays, 1.30pm to 2.30pm, with good attendance.
- Table tennis sessions for adults with disabilities are on Fridays, 10.45am to 11.45am. Only one person attended the first session as people from Leading Lives could not be present. Numbers should increase in the future.

- These classes and sessions are free of charge until the end of March after which there will be a small charge unless further funding can be sourced.
- Strength and Balance classes for those aged 65+ will take place on Tuesdays, 1.30pm to 3pm, for people who have fallen or are at risk of falling. A referral from a person's GP is needed.
- Proposed activities are activity sessions for those with Parkinsons, and Sporting Memory sessions for those with dementia which incorporate 45 minutes of activity and discussion after of sporting events and activities they have seen or taken part in.
- Members of the public can be referred by their GP to the Leisure Centre so they can use the pool and gym at a reduced cost.

7.3.2 A member asked about the availability of specific activities for people who have had strokes. However, it was noted that current activities on offer can be accessed by people with a wide range of disabilities.

8. Issues, Concerns and News from Members:

8.1 Bus Services: Simon reported that the funding of £1.8 million had come through from the Bus Improvement Settlement Plan Plus. A consultation will begin shortly between the bus services and the Councils to improve existing bus services and implement new routes. If members of the public have ideas for new routes or changes to existing routes, their suggestions should be sent to their local town or parish councils.

8.2 ACE (Anglia) Ltd: Chewy drew attention to the Suffolk Ordinary Lives website which has been improved and provides information about the different groups and meetings they offer. It has a clear layout, colour contrast and a speech tool where the speaking pace can be adjusted. <https://suffolkordinarylives.co.uk/>

8.3 Changing Places:

8.3.1 Lauren reported that Stradbroke Swimming Pool and Fitness Centre was awaiting quotes from contractors to start work at the end of November on the Changing Places facility. The current changing room for disabled people will be used for the purpose, and it is hoped that the works will be completed by the end of the year. Regular users have been contacted and given another area to use while the works are progressing.

8.3.2 A publicly accessible Changing Places facility is also being planned for the Food Museum in Stowmarket. The planning decision has just been made for the new toilet block where the Changing Places facility will be located. Linda commented that the Forum had not received notification of this planning application. Sam will follow this up.

Action: Sam Lake

8.4 Stowmarket Lawn Tennis Club: Beth reported that walking tennis had been started at Leading Lives as the tennis club site was not accessible due to the 30 steps down to the entrance. There is rear entry but this is down a bumpy track. New funding and ideas are needed as to how to improve the site to make it accessible to everyone. Beth would welcome suggestions. She has been in contact with Emile, ACE (Anglia) Ltd.

8.5 Mid Suffolk District Council:

8.5.1 Sam explained that Mid Suffolk District Council is refreshing its priorities in its Corporate Plan and is seeking the views of residents. In order to ensure that disabled residents should have the opportunity to comment, a virtual meeting is being arranged for Monday, 6th November, at 10am. Joining instructions will be sent as soon as possible. However, members can also attend other engagement events and there is an online survey on the Council website which runs until the 15th November. <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/web/mid-suffolk/w/joint-corporate-plan>

8.5.2 Sam said that the Council's new website has been launched and she thanked ACE (Anglia) Ltd for their assistance. Members are invited to visit the website and send any comments to Sam. <https://www.midsuffolk.gov.uk/>

9. Access Issues

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

DC/23/03370 – 135 Osprey Drive, Stowmarket – Erection of side/rear extension and alterations to form a shop – Objection made as the alterations to the dwelling make it unsuitable for people with mobility problems and the shop would be located in a residential area.

DC/23/03569 – Kirby Rise, Barham - Removal of former doctor's surgery to erect 9 dwellings, all 2, 3 or 4 bed houses. No bungalows are planned in this development.

DC/21/00407 – Land between the A1120 and the A14, Creeting St Peter, Stowmarket – This application refers to reserved matters in respect of the Gateway 14 development.

DC/21/03287 – Land north west of Stowupland Road, Stowmarket – Discharge of conditions, the Forum continues to comment on the lack of play equipment that could be used by children using wheelchairs.

DC/23/03723 – Land east of Old Station Road, Mendlesham – Application for outline planning permission for the erection of up to 28 dwellings, 9 of which will be affordable. There is no detail on the type of dwelling.

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. Members have already had the opportunity to discuss the plans for this development with the Council and the Architect.

9.2 Other Access Issues:

9.2.1 East of England Co-operative Store, Bramford: Action has been taken to improve the access to the freezer units at the rear of the store.

10. Health and Social Care

10.1 Elizabeth provided the following report from Healthwatch Suffolk:

“Physiotherapy **Services in Suffolk – share your experiences:**

In the weeks ahead, our Community Development Team are visiting physiotherapy services run by Allied Health Professionals Suffolk (AHPS). We'll be talking to people about their experiences, and making them known to the service to support service delivery and improvement. If you have used physiotherapy services in Suffolk run by AHPS, please tell us about your experiences to support our work with the service. You can also tell us about other physiotherapy services in Suffolk in hospitals and the community. If you have accessed physiotherapy support in Suffolk, it's easy to feedback using our Feedback Centre. Simply follow our links below:

Tell us about Allied Health Professionals Suffolk (AHPS) services:
<https://healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/services/allied-health-professionals>

Tell us about physiotherapy support in hospitals:
<https://healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/services/?filter=hospitals>

Tell us about community therapy services:
<https://healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/services/suffolk-community-health-teams>

“Your experiences of getting prescription medication explored in our latest briefing: Ready access to medication can be critically important to keep people well in communities. Yet, our analysis of public feedback shows people are facing barriers to getting prescription medication. Like many health and social care services (e.g., GP practices and dentists), pharmaceutical services are under increasing pressure. Nationally, they are facing staff shortages and problems with medication supply that can have a profound impact on some people’s experiences. Share your feedback or download our briefing at <https://healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/news/pharmacy-briefing23/>

“Experiences of living with cancer – take part in a survey from the East of England Cancer Alliances: The East of England Cancer Alliances, which work as part of the NHS to transform local cancer services, want to know what worked well and what might have made things better for patients and their families or supporters. A short survey to help improve cancer services across the east of England is available at <https://www.canceralliance.co.uk/news/share-your-cancer-story-help-improve-nhs-care-east-england>

“Simple changes can make a big difference for d/Deaf and hard of hearing people accessing health and social care:

We’re highlighting how services can take simple steps to improve support, such as ensuring staff are d/Deaf aware and informed about patient needs, switching on loop systems, purchasing assistive technology for use in services, and offering a range of contact methods. One hundred and forty-seven Suffolk people who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing responded to our call for experiences. Their responses show how local services are failing to consistently meet their obligations in law to offer accessible information and support to those who need it. But they also help to reveal the changes that can be made by services to improve accessibility of care. The tips for local services and the full report can be found at

<https://healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/news/why-we-must-see-improved-d-deaf-and-hard-of-hearing-support-in-health-and-social-care/>

“Save the date - the Healthwatch Suffolk Annual General Meeting: Wednesday, 8th November, 2023 - the meeting will include an opportunity to find out about Healthwatch Suffolk and how we have been working to make a difference to health and social care services in Suffolk. The event will be held at Blackbourne Community Centre, Elmswell, Bury St Edmunds, IP30 9UH. Please check the following web page over the next month or so to discover more, and to register your wish to attend: <https://healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/agm2023/>

“Support for Dementia- Report Launch:

‘A roundabout with many exits, and no signposts.’

We have launched our report that more than 120 people with dementia and their carers recorded their experiences by having detailed interviews with us and sending in feedback forms. This research is to support ongoing work in Suffolk to develop a joint health and social care strategy for dementia support. You can read more about it and watch an interview with Peter and Teresa here

<https://healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/news/dementiaresearch-2023/>

“New contract seeks to help tackle local NHS dental crisis: Ten dental surgery units will be established at the University of Suffolk in Ipswich, providing local people with an additional 18,000 hours of NHS-only dental appointments each year. The new service will also provide a teaching environment for student dental hygienists and therapists, as well as offering placements for local dental nurses, dental therapists and hygienists who have recently qualified or are currently in training. Details of how to book appointments will be available nearer the date of opening, which will be around the end of this year. People are asked to avoid contacting the University to book until further details become available.

“Updates from us: If you would like to receive updates from us, you can sign up easily here <https://healthwatchsuffolk.co.uk/membership/> “

11. Future Meetings:

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

- Dropped kerbs
- Community Transport
- Eligibility of disabled children for Blue Badges

11.2 Format of Meeting: It was agreed that the next Forum meeting will be held on Zoom as no suitable hybrid meeting venue has yet been found and an on-line meeting will be more appropriate for the winter.

12. Information Round / Any Other Business

No further items were raised. Linda reminded members that items could be sent to her for onward distribution.

13. Date of Next Meeting

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

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