

Mid Suffolk Disability Forum

Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 29th January, 2025,
from 10.30am to 12.30pm, via Zoom

Present:

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| Linda Hoggarth | - Chair / Resident / Disability Forum for Suffolk / Avenues East |
| Amanda Allen | - Family Support Manager, Families Together Suffolk |
| Simon Barnett | - Integrated Transport & Enhanced Partnership Manager, Suffolk County Council |
| Jonathan Chew | - Self-Advocacy & Engagement Lead, ACE (Anglia) Ltd |
| Nigel Crisp | - Staff Manager – Ipswich Depot, First Bus |
| Paul Hughes | - Head of Service – Building Control & Access Officer, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Councils |
| Wendy Johns | - Communications & Engagement Officer, Suffolk Sight |
| Steven Largent | - Resident / ACE (Anglia) Ltd |
| Samantha Lake | - Head of Service, Customer Experience, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Councils |
| Cllr John Matthissen | - Mid Suffolk District Council |
| Cllr Jen Overett | - Mid Suffolk District Council, Access for All, Needham Market / Inclusion & Diversity Committee, John Peel Centre |
| Miles Row | - Suffolk Artlink |
| Claire Smith | - Chair, Suffolk Parent Carer Forum |
| Elizabeth Storer | - Community Development Officer, Healthwatch Suffolk |
| Helen Toffanello | - Secretary / Resident |

Guests:

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| Zoey Banthorpe | - Arts & Culture Lead, Mid Suffolk & Babergh, District Councils |
| Alan Neville | - Community & Customer Engagement Manager, Greater Anglia |
| Luke Uttley | - Town Centres Lead, Economy & Business, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Councils |

Apologies:

Cllr Libby Brooks	- Diversity Group, Mid Suffolk Liberal Democrats
Mark Conquer	- Resident / ACE (Anglia) Ltd
Helen Cumbers	- Community Engagement Worker, SENDIASS
Anselm Gurney	- Partnership Manager, Everyone Active
Gareth Moir	- Integration & Partnership Manager, Ipswich & East Suffolk Alliance
Sue Spiller	- Resident
Christine Steward	- Resident / Sensing Change
Imogen Tink	- Communities Team, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Council

1. Welcome and Introductions

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

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

2. Apologies

The above apologies were noted.

3. Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy

3.1 Zoey Banthorpe, Arts & Culture Lead, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils, was welcomed to the meeting.

3.2 Zoey explained that the Culture, Heritage and Visitor Economy Strategy is a 5-year strategy and was adopted in 2023. It covers the yearly impact of tourism in the area.

3.3 In 2023, the visitor spend was £154 million, up 10% from the previous year. This includes tourist accommodation, attractions and local food and drink offerings.

3.4 The survey showed that 56% of visitors to the area stay with friends and family indicating that too few visitors are staying overnight in tourist accommodation and that the variety of offerings needs to improve to attract holidaymakers.

3.5 On average, visitors stay 3 nights. 10% are international visitors

with the majority from USA, Germany, France and the Netherlands. Many are interested in the World War history.

3.6 The visitors can be divided in two categories:

- Country Loving Traditionalists who like the countryside, outdoor activities, heritage and local food and drink and who are over 50 years of age.
- Free and easy mini breakers who are young, single workers enjoying a wide range of solo activities.

3.7 Cinema and TV films and programmes that are filmed in the area help hugely to attract visitors.

3.8 Sustainable green tourism and travel are key to success.

3.9 The Strategy has 4 themes:

- **Building Cultural Habits:** The aim is to improve the experience for residents and visitors overall. The government has given £120,000 from the Shared Prosperity Fund to make this happen. Groups can also apply for grant funding from the Mid Suffolk Cultural Fund of £100,000. The deadline for applications has now passed and was oversubscribed. The Heart of Suffolk Big Weekend was very successful last year and will be held again this year.
- **Developing the sector and its resilience:** Promoting sustainable travel via the Good Journey Scheme is key. If public transport is used, the ticket to the attraction is cheaper. Screen Suffolk is also working to bring more film and TV productions to the area to raise the profile of Suffolk and bring tourists in.
- **Data, Insight and Digital Transformation:** An accommodation study needs to be commissioned to encourage more tourists to make overnight stays. Apps to publicise walks and trails are part of this.
- **Driving Collaboration:** Food production, Primadonna and Jubilant festivals are examples of successful partnerships.

3.10 Accessibility and Inclusion Report of 2023:

- Suffolk Growth worked with agencies to improve accessibility and inclusion in Suffolk to attract disabled tourists to the area as the report highlighted the misleading and unreliable access and disabled information for attractions, accommodation and eating places.
- The value of the purple pound (the spending power of disabled people) should not be underestimated.
- AccessAble has surveyed a number of businesses and places to

visit but only 60% of businesses have disabled parking and full access. Streetscape is in progress for Stowmarket for the area between the Railway Station and Temple Road which will be useful for disabled visitors and residents.

- Disability Essentials is a free e-learning module available to businesses to make them more aware of the needs of disabled people and their carers so they can give a better service. There are 1000 licences but disappointingly only 48 businesses have signed up.
- The challenge is keeping the access information up to date and Zoey asked the Forum if they could assist with this. One member commented that the Food Museum access information was very thorough and detailed.

Action: All

3.11 A Dark History Trail is currently being put together covering topics like witch finding. There is a Food and Drink Trail and Itinerary around Suffolk as well as Love Exploring which has digital trails with audio – one could be made for Stowmarket to bring its fascinating history alive.

3.12 One member said that timings of events were an issue if carers were needed. Carers can often not attend evening events and therefore nor can the disabled person. Zoey will raise this with the Stowmarket Culture Group.

Action: Zoey Banthorpe

3.13 One member creates his own access pages for the venues he is using as part of his work to ensure accuracy and give more detail. E-learning, training and spot checks for venues might improve standards.

3.14 It was agreed that Zoey would return to a future meeting to discuss AccessAble and Streetscape in more detail. The Planning Group would arrange this with Zoey and members will be advised in due course.

Action: Planning Group

3.15 Zoey was thanked for her presentation and the Forum looked forward to working with her to improve tourist facilities for disabled people. Her presentation slides will be distributed with the minutes.

4. Stowmarket Wayfinding Project

4.1 Luke Uttley, Town Centres Lead, Economy and Business, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, was welcomed to the meeting.

4.2 Luke explained that consultants were commissioned to do a study of Stowmarket and found that wayfinding could be improved such as the signage from the Railway Station. There is no advertising of attractions or signposts around the town and more could be made of the River Gipping.

4.3 An expert has been funded to work on the Wayfinding project with the aim of improving navigation around Stowmarket centre e.g. from the Railway Station and car parks to the Food Museum, the Mix, Regal Theatre, the John Peel Centre and Red Gables.

4.4 The expert is currently looking at signage, and information boards and plaques to highlight local historic events. The colour of the background, height and typeface are being looked at so that disabled and visually impaired people can read them easily. Luke will return to a future meeting with visuals for members to assess.

4.5 Signing at the Railway Station is poor. This will be raised with Greater Anglia.

4.6 A member noted that it was impossible for a wheelchair user to use the level crossing to Cardinals Road in Stowmarket. This crossing does not sit on Greater Anglia land. Simon will check with Highways to see if any improvements can be made.

Action: Simon Barnett

4.7 A member reported that the standard of the pavements is too poor for a disabled person to access the routes given.

4.8 Luke asked Members to email him if they had any stories or contacts that could add to the historical information for the plaques and boards. Luke.Uttley@baberghmidsuffolk.gov.uk

Action: All

5. Minutes from the Meeting held on the 17th July, 2024

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

6. Matters Arising

6.1 Item 3 Integrated Neighbourhood Team Delivery Plans:

6.1.1 Item 3.8 Standard of Trans Care: Gareth Moir had been asked if the inconsistent care for the Trans community could be addressed as there had been cases reported where hormone treatment had been stopped for no apparent reason. He will continue to research this area.

Action: Gareth Moir

6.1.2 Item 3.9 Hip Protectors: Gareth had reported back that hip protectors are not used in Suffolk to help prevent injury during falls.

6.2 Item 4 Accessible Voting:

6.2.1 Item 4.5 Public Transport to Polling Stations: Simon Barnett and David Connors have discussed adding a link to Suffolkonboard on polling cards which could be helpful for people who need public transport to access their polling station. Simon has not heard back from David and will contact him.

Action: Simon Barnett

6.2.2 Item 4.7 Accessible Voting for those with Learning Disabilities and Visual Impairments: David Connors and members of ACE Anglia will share the outcome of their discussions at the next meeting of the Forum.

6.3 Item 6.1 Misuse of Blue Badges: Sam reported back that there was no data available on misuse of Blue Badges in the Mid Suffolk area. She will contact Suffolk County Council to see what further information can be provided.

Action: Sam Lake

7. Issues, Concerns and News from Members:

7.1 Bus Service Improvement Plan Funding: Simon reported that Suffolk County Council has been allocated £2.9 million for 2025-2026 from the fund to improve services as well as £5 million for capital

projects. A survey of bus stops will be initiated to check the accessibility for disabled people. Simon asked members to keep note of any access issues and to advise him accordingly at upcoming meetings.

Action: All

7.2 Greater Anglia:

7.2.1 Stowmarket Railway Station: Alan Neville said there will be a mini stakeholders' meeting at Stowmarket Railway Station on Friday, 31st January, at 11.30am, meeting outside the front entrance to the Station. Cllr Matthissen will be present, and Helen will attend on behalf of the Forum. This meeting will look at ways of improving the car park for blue badge holders and the accessibility of routes between the Station and the Town Centre.

Foundations are being laid for the new lifts and passenger footbridge. A temporary bridge is in place. An AVA bridge will be lifted in by crane in a few months. It is the first time in the UK that a complete bridge of this type has been craned in in this way.

Forum members should be able to view the new lifts and passenger footbridge prior to this being open for public use.

A member of the Forum had tripped over the temporary fencing at the Station. Alan will raise this at the upcoming site meeting.

Action: Alan Neville

7.2.2 Cambridge Ipswich Community Rail Partnership: This has been launched and held its first two meetings. Ideas like 'Try a Train' events have been discussed. Recruitment is underway to find a paid officer to manage the Partnership who will be part of Simon's team at the County Council.

7.2.3 Needham Market Railway Station: No funding has been identified to improve the accessibility of Needham Market Railway Station.

8 Access Issues

8.1 Planning Applications: Comments have been made on the following Planning Applications:

DC/23/02439 – Land at Norton Road and at Barrells Road, Thurston – Revised application for 10 dwellings in total. 2 of these are large four bedroomed single storey dwellings.

DC/24/05268 – Land at Shreeves Farm Piggeries, Denham Road, Heckfield Green, Hoxne – Planning Application for a residential development of 40 dwellings, some of which will meet Part M4(2) and includes one bungalow.

DC/23/05929 – Land south of Eye Airfield and Castleton Way, Eye – Application for approval of reserved matters regarding a development of 127 dwellings.

DC/24/04451 – Land east of Ixworth Road, Thurston – 2 separate applications for approval of reserved matters regarding 210 dwellings.

DC/24/05456 – Land on the south side of Bury Road, Beyton – Application for reserved matters regarding 13 dwellings.

8.2 Other Access Issues:

8.2.1 Walnut Tree Pub, Stowmarket: It is understood that the pub is under new management and the owners have no plans to install a ramp. Chewy will follow up with Emile as to whether he has been able to check the access.

Action: Chewy / Emile

8.2.2 Starbucks, Stowmarket: Members reported that the entrance door is too heavy for a wheelchair user to open. The Planning Group will follow this up.

Action: Planning Group

8.2.3 Post Office, Stowmarket: Members continue to report difficulties with the entrance door. This has been reported to the Post Office on numerous occasions. However, the Forum will continue to raise this as an issue with the Post Office.

Post Meeting Note: It was confirmed that the Forum was advised in June, 2022, by Post Office Limited, that the door complied with the Equality Act 2010. The Postmaster was looking into what could be done to improve access subject to the configuration of the building.

8.2.4 Table Service in Cafés: Members noted that fewer cafés provide table service and are now self-service causing difficulties for many disabled and older people. It is a growing trend, however, members reported that staff in many cafés will assist disabled and older people. Miles commented that the café at the Regal Theatre is also difficult as there is no lower section of the counter. He will take this up with Stowmarket Town Council.

Action: Miles Row

9. Health and Social Care

9.1 Healthwatch Suffolk:

9.1.1 Elizabeth reminded members that Healthwatch Suffolk is always keen to receive feedback on services received from the NHS or Social Care.

9.1.2 Current projects include:

- Survey on back, neck and spinal issues
- Latest My Health, Our Future survey
- Learning about the Menopause and HRT
- Feedback on cancer services
- Workshop for deaf and hearing impaired people being held on 12th February to have their say on a 10 year health plan, at the Ipswich Deaf Society, 2 Wharfdale Road, Ipswich.

9.1.3 Attention was drawn to the work undertaken by Trudie Harkin and the Co-production Team regarding the contribution made by their Ambassadors, usually people with lived experience of particular issues. Trudie would be keen to discuss this further with Forum members.

9.1.4 Elizabeth's detailed update would be distributed with the minutes.

10. Future Meetings

10.1 Topics for Discussion:

- Development of Stowmarket Library
- Accessible voting

Action: Planning Group

10.2 Format of Meeting: It was agreed that the next meeting in April will be held on Zoom. Chewy is checking out a hybrid venue for ACE Anglia. He will try it out, check on the facilities, and report back as to whether it would be a suitable venue for future Hybrid Meetings.

Action: Chewy

11. Information Round / Any Other Business

11.1 Suffolk Archives: An exhibition and events programme is being developed entitled 'Beyond Labels' Celebrating people living with disabilities in Suffolk. This is planned from February 2026 to showcase and celebrate the lived experiences of people living with disabilities in Suffolk. Further information will be available in due course. It will be held at the Hold in Ipswich.

11.2 Felixstowe Pride: Suffolk Mobility Events is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to hosting inclusive, meaningful events in Suffolk, and their inaugural event will be Felixstowe Disability Pride 2025 on Friday 11th July 2025. This will be a celebration along Felixstowe's promenade and is all about celebrating individuals for who they are—not their limitations.

11.3 Integrated National Transport Strategy for England: The Department for Transport is developing a strategy which will set the high-level direction for how transport should be designed, built and operated in England over the next 10 years. It will set out a single national vision which will put people who use transport and their needs at its heart and empower local leaders to deliver integrated transport solutions that meet the needs of their local communities. To help create the strategy, the Department of Transport is now asking people about their experience of transport in England and what can be done to make it better. This call for evidence closes on the 20th February, 2025. For further information and to respond on line, go to <https://www.gov.uk/government/calls-for-evidence/integrated-national-transport-strategy-a-call-for-ideas/integrated-national-transport-strategy-a-call-for-ideas> (Item advised via the Chat function on Zoom)

12. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday, 30th April, 2025, 10.30am to 12.30pm, via Zoom.

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