

Mid Suffolk Disability Forum

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday, 22nd April, 2026,
from 10.30am to 12.30pm, via Zoom**

Present:

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| Linda Hoggarth | - Chair / Resident / Disability Forum for Suffolk / Avenues East |
| Cllr Terence Carter | - Vice Chair / Mid Suffolk District Council / Stowmarket Town Council / Resident |
| Simon Barnett | - Integrated Transport & Enhanced Partnership Manager, Suffolk County Council |
| Alex Bartholomew | - John Peel Centre |
| Cllr Libby Brooks | - Diversity Group, Mid Suffolk Liberal Democrats |
| Jonathan Chew | - Self-Advocacy & Engagement Lead, Ace Anglia |
| Elysa Dale | - Poverty Reduction & Digital Inclusion Lead, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Councils |
| Elizabeth Delaney | - Communications & Engagement Officer, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Councils |
| Anselm Gurney | - Partnership Manager, Everyone Active |
| Paul Hughes | - Head of Service – Building Control & Access Officer, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Councils |
| Steven Largent | - Resident / ACE (Anglia) Ltd |
| Cllr Jen Overett | - Mid Suffolk District Council, Access for All Needham Market |
| Ellie Robertshaw | - Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice |
| Claire Smith | - Chair of Operations, Suffolk Parent Carer Forum |
| Esme Smith | - Project on Rural Communities, Community Action Suffolk |
| Elizabeth Storer | - Community Development Officer, Healthwatch Suffolk, Knowing Works |

Guests:

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| Sonny Baldry | - Wellbeing Walks Co-ordinator, Feel Good Suffolk |
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David Connors - Head of Elections and Land Charges, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Councils

Apologies:

Danny Braverman

Mark Conquer

Wendy Johns

Samantha Lake

Cllr John Matthissen

Archie Merritt

Gareth Moir

Richard Platt

Miles Row

Christine Steward

Helen Toffanello

Sarah Wilkin

- Resident / ACE (Anglia) Ltd
- Communications & Engagement Officer, Suffolk Sight
- Director – Customers, Vulnerabilities & Governance, Mid Suffolk & Babergh District Councils
- Mid Suffolk District Council
- Customer Engagement Lead, Regal Theatre
- Integration & Partnership Manager, Suffolk County Council
- Chair, Ipswich Deaf Children’s Society
- Suffolk Artlink
- Resident
- Secretary / Resident
- John Peel Centre

1. Welcome and Introductions

Linda welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

Chewy and Ace Anglia were thanked for hosting this meeting on Zoom.

2. Apologies

The above apologies were noted.

3. Feel Good Suffolk – Wellbeing Walks

3.1 Sonny Baldry, Wellbeing Walks Co-ordinator, Feel Good Suffolk was welcomed to the meeting and invited to talk to members about Wellbeing Walks in Suffolk.

3.2 Sonny said that, last year, over 1,160 walks took place, with over 12,000 walkers and 134 registered walk leaders. He then shared a presentation which covered:

- How walks are graded, from 1 (Easy Access) to 5 (Challenging)
- The role of the Wellbeing Walk Co-ordinator:
 - Keeps walk information up to date on line
 - Helps set up new walks
 - Reports statistics about who takes part
 - Supports and trains new walk leaders
 - Promotes the walks
- The role of the Walk Leader
 - Help create friendly, welcoming walks
 - Supporting walkers whatever their ability, health or confidence
 - Walk leaders are part of a team
- Key considerations for planning accessible walks
 - Walks are planned with accessibility and flexibility
 - No one is left behind
 - Choosing the right route with easy start and finish points
 - Giving walkers clear and honest information

3.3 Sonny then invited members to suggest other factors that should be considered when planning walks and the following suggestions were made.

- Ensuring the walk surface was suitable (e.g. not gravel)
- Information on path width for turning circles and accessibility
- Timing for walks to provide opportunities for parents, carers or those in employment
- Consider shade/respice from direct sunlight or weather risks e.g. the route becomes muddy and inaccessible in wet weather
- Ability for a walker to be assisted if emergency services are required or their mobility equipment breaks down
- Age considerations, could the walk be suitable for children
- Ability for walk leaders to be able to communicate in non-verbal ways
- Alternative equipment availability e.g. loan of power wheelchair
- Route maps/signage in accessible formats in case they get split up and for pre-published walking routes
- Consideration of toilet facilities, are they fully accessible, is there a Changing Places toilet
- Consider how people get to the start point e.g. availability of accessible transport

- Work with the Rural Coffee Caravan if provision of refreshments is an issue
- Hire accessible toilets from an organisation such as Mobiloo
- Have photos/videos available to show any areas that may not be accessible.

3.4 Members also suggested that Sonny could make contact with Lesley Rayner, Community Rail Partnership Officer in Simon Barnetts' team, regarding routes that connect railway stations to walks.

3.5 Sonny would be keen to recruit more walk leaders and would be pleased for members to contact him. He was especially keen to have more walk leaders in Mid Suffolk and Babergh.

3.6 Linda would provide Sonny with information on the Easy Access Trails pack which is still available on the Discover Suffolk website <https://www.discoversuffolk.org.uk/easygoing-trails/>.

3.7 Sonny was thanked for his presentation and his presentation slides will be attached to the minutes.

4. Local Government Review

4.1 Unfortunately, Sara Wilcock, Director for Corporate Services, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils, was unable to join the meeting. However, she had provided an update which Elysa gave on her behalf.

4.2 Local government is about to go through its biggest change for 50 years. The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government recently announced that three new unitary councils will be created in the county on 1st April, 2028.

4.3 These will cover Western Suffolk, Ipswich and Southern Suffolk, and Central and Eastern Suffolk.

4.4 The full overview will be attached to the minutes and covers the details of what this change means, what happens next and the key milestones. New councils will not take over until April, 2028.

4.5 Members flagged the need to manage the amount of communication and the timing of it to prevent residents becoming overwhelmed with the changes.

4.6 At this point, it is not known what effect this will have on this Mid Suffolk Disability Forum or the other Disability Forums in the county. Parts of Mid Suffolk are likely to be in each of the three new council areas so a rebrand may be a possibility. Elysa said that the current Mid Suffolk District Council will support the Forum during the changes.

4.7 Members noted residents' concerns about the new waste recycling collections beginning in June, 2026 and the need for the Council to be clear about bin collection days. Advice was required for families who require larger food waste caddies due to their children's needs generating additional waste. Elysa would follow this up.

Action: Elysa Dale

5. Update on Accessible Voting

5.1 David Connors, Head of Elections and Land Services, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils was welcomed to the meeting to provide an update on the work to make voting as accessible as possible.

5.2 David reminded members that there are now two weeks remaining until the Suffolk County Council elections on the 7th May.

5.3 Three accessible voting guides have been produced in collaboration with ACE – including an accessible video for completing postal votes. The resources have been well received and other Councils have approached ACE to take on these resources too. These resources are available on line as well as at the polling stations.

[Easy read guide to voting](#)

[Video guide to postal voting](#)

5.4 Within all polling stations, coloured acetate sheets will be available to overlay the ballot paper which helps some people process the information – available in 10 different colours.

5.5 Audio tactile devices – after working with Suffolk Sight to test options, a device was selected – if someone requests the McGonagle®Reader it will be available at the polling station, or staff are available to deliver the device to a polling station if someone arrives who needs it.

5.6 David confirmed polling station staff are receiving training to make the process as accessible as possible, and reassured members

that there is no rush in the polling stations, people should be able to take their time to cast their vote as they wish to do so. Suffolk Sight have been promoting reasonable adjustments in polling stations too.

5.7 As yet, the councils have not received any requests for reasonable adjustments at a polling station – **Forum members are asked to encourage people to ask for any reasonable adjustments they need.** People can also bring their own equipment to the polling station if needed, for example if they use their mobile phone to access a text to speech app, they can use this, and writing aids/pens/magnifying glasses can all be used.

5.8 A query had been received about using a power of attorney. However, voting does not cover using power of attorney. If a member of the public wants to support someone (e.g. family members) at the polling station there is a declaration they have to read and sign - the polling station staff will have this, so they just need to make staff aware and they will advise them accordingly.

5.9 David has also been encouraging candidates to provide information in accessible formats and has pressed upon political parties that their information should be accessible to enable voters to confidently transfer their informed decision to the ballot paper.

5.10 David was thanked for this very positive update regarding enabling people with disabilities to cast their vote in elections. He will return after the upcoming elections to share outcomes and learnings and to hear members' feedback.

Action: David Connors

6. Minutes from the Meeting held on the 21st January, 2026

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record.

7. Matters Arising

7.1 Item 8.3 Greater Anglia:

7.1.1 Alan Neville had provided an update regarding the lift installation at Stowmarket Railway Station. He advised that the first phase opened on the 8th April, opening the bridge to pedestrians, the

temporary bridge was to be removed on the 11th April, and the platforms retarmacked. Greater Anglia is on target for the full opening of the bridge and lifts in late spring and the date is to be advised to the Forum.

Action: Alan Neville

7.1.2 Some residents had expressed concern that the opening to the bridge and lifts was phased with the bridge opening before the lifts were ready. However, Greater Anglia was pleased that it had been possible to remove the temporary structures and feedback from their customers on the use of the new bridge had been positive. It was necessary to ensure that all necessary checks were taken on the lift access so that it was in 100% working order.

7.1.3 It was agreed to contact Rebecca Richardson, Accessibility and Inclusion Manager, Greater Anglia, to invite her to a meeting of the Forum to have a broader discussion regarding access and involvement of disabled people when changes are made to Railway Stations. For example, the black tarmacking of platforms was a concern as people with dementia could be confused into thinking that the platform was a hole.

Action: Cllr Overett / Linda Hoggarth

7.1.4 Members noted the difficulties for people with disabilities when using bus replacement services resulting in journeys being more complicated with a number of changes causing delays. It was noted that Greater Anglia has a responsibility to provide suitable transport and passengers should explain they need simple routes or accessible transport because of disability. If this cannot be achieved, then a taxi should be provided.

Post Meeting Note from Alan Neville, Stakeholder, Community and Customer Engagement Manager, Greater Anglia

Regarding 7.1.3 “We have our accessibility panel within GA and have had for a long time. The details are available on our site. This panel represents the needs of people throughout our region and meets four times a year. This is a forum where many issues are discussed including access and involvement of people when changes are made to stations. Are your members aware of this body? I am sure you are aware that we are fully compliant in all aspects of the work we do on stations, adhering to national rail and Built Environment Accessibility

Panel (BEAP) standards. Therefore, the tarmacking for example adheres to standards for rail stations.”

Regarding 7.1.4 “Again, our rail replacement policy for periods when Network Rail are doing work, is fully compliant and Rebecca works closely with the team. People requiring additional needs are of course catered for under our accessibility policy. Routing is kept simple but of course dependent on many things such as highway issues, low bridges etc.”

7.2 Item 8.8 Community Rail Partnership: Helen attended the launch of the Community Rail Partnership for the St Edmunds Line on the 31st March. Helen reported that it was an interesting event and looks to become a force for good. She felt that the Forum could play an important part in shaping their exciting plans for the future and they are keen for the Forum to be involved.

7.3 Item 12.1 Summer Meeting:

7.3.1 The Planning Group has met to progress the arrangements for this event.

- The date is Wednesday, 8th July, 2026, from 2pm to 4pm.
- The venue will be Red Gables, Stowmarket
- It will be a social event as members have not met face to face for a very long time, with possibly an opportunity to try boccia and also to have a quiz
- Tea and cake will be provided with time for members to chat and socialise.

7.3.2 Members approved the plans thus far and were asked to save the date. As yes, a name for the event has not been decided and suggestions from members would be welcome.

7.3.3 Anselm will consider whether a trial boccia session can be organised providing the flooring in Red Gables was suitable.

7.3.4 Elysa will check with the venue regarding the flooring and whether a boccia session would be permitted.

7.3.5 It is understood that Red Gables does have a boccia set that can be hired.

Action: Elysa Dale / Anselm Gurney

7.4 Forum Publicity Materials: Elizabeth D gave an update on the Forum branding and shared 3 example posters that can be used in leaflets or to promote the summer event. Members are asked to vote for their preferred design of the three options by the 29th April – the focus on the graphics / shapes / elements, not the wording or colours. Of those voting at the meeting, 11 voted for Option 1, 1 voted for Option 2.

Action: All

8. Updates, Issues, Concerns and News from Members

8.1 Accessible Playgrounds: Terence has asked planners to approach the Forum when playgrounds are being updated or are new developments. Two recent playgrounds have been made more accessible but are not inclusive and more could be done. It was noted that the Forum always includes comments about accessibility and inclusivity when being consulted on specific planning applications that include playgrounds. However, it is clear that not all such planning applications reach the Forum for comment.

9. Access Issues

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

DC/26/00155 – Land adjacent to Donard Back Lane, Badwell Ash – Application under S73 for Removal or Variation of Condition 1, following grant of Planning Permission DC/21/01823 dated 23/06/2021, to accommodate changes to the access to plots 7 and 8 to allow extra storage of vehicles off the highway.

DC/26/01140 – Land west of Willowmere, Garden House Lane, Rickinghall Superior – Application for the erection of 10 dwellings, associated garages and hardstanding (following demolition of existing stores associated with builders' yard).

DC/25/03044 – Port One Business and Logistics Park Bramford Road Little Blakenham – Application for Approval of Reserved Matters. following approval of Outline ((Hybrid) Planning Application DC/22/06288 dated 09/05/2024, details to be considered for Appearance Scale and Layout for Units 14 and 15.

9.2 Other Access Issues: None were raised.

10. Health and Social Care

10.1 Knowing Works CIC: Elizabeth S advised that Knowing Works CIC has been set up and now holds the contract for Healthwatch Suffolk. She provided the following update:

“Our latest My Health, Our Future (MHoF) survey results have been published, highlighting how young people’s wellbeing differs across the county – and the key factors influencing those differences. Just a few findings (based on nearly 10,000 responses) included:

- On average, young people in Suffolk had lower levels of happiness and higher levels of anxiety than young people aged 16 to 24 across the UK.
- More than two in five students had seen or heard at least one form of potential sexual harassment in their school or college.
- Just over half of students failed to get their recommended levels of sleep, and levels of sleep may be at the lowest we have recorded in our surveys. Students who get more sleep have higher average wellbeing scores.
- Bullying remains a primary concern of many young people, affecting their feelings of safety in communities.
- 1 in 10 felt they had little or no control at all over their futures.

The full report with much more information and detail is available at <https://healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/mhof-reports/mhof-phase9/>

My Health Our Future – Are you aged between 11 – 19 (or up to 25 with special educational needs or disabilities), and educated at home? Young people who are educated at home (homeschooled) can take part in Suffolk’s biggest annual survey of young people’s wellbeing. To take part visit [Our wellbeing survey for young people educated at home](#).

3. Have you experienced an infection that was resistant to antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals or antiparasitics (antimicrobial resistance)? Please share your story with us.

Email our team at info@healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk, or call us for free on 0800 448 8234. You can also use our contact form at <https://healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/contact>.

4. The NHS Norfolk and Suffolk Integrated Care Board (ICB) are looking for people to help shape the future of heart failure care in

Ipswich and East Suffolk. [You can register your interest by clicking here. This will take you to a sign up form.](#) You can also call 01473 770261 to get in touch with the team. You will then be contacted with more information and an invite to take part.

5. Have you moved into a care home in Suffolk within the last two years or have you supported someone? Knowing Works CIC are helping Suffolk County Council to explore people's experiences of making choices about care homes. Our work is helping the Council to think about how well people are supported into residential care, and what could be different about their experiences. We want to hear from you if you have contacted Suffolk County Council about moving into a care home in the last two years, are currently making decisions about a care home for yourself or a family member or are a family carer of someone who moved into a care home within two years. By taking part in our project, you will help Suffolk County Council to know what is helping people and what could be different to make the process of moving into residential care easier for everyone involved. Sign up at: <https://healthwatchesuffolk.co.uk/carehomechoices/> or call 0800 448 8234.

If you have any questions or need any further information, please contact elizabeth.storer@knowingworks.co.uk."

11. Future Meetings

11.1 Topics for Discussion: Elysa will check the Forum's Action Plan with Sam in order to provide an update. The Planning Group will then consider topics for discussion at the next meeting.

11.2 Format of Meeting: The next meeting will take place on Zoom.

12. Information Round / Any Other Business

12.1 Everyone Active: Anselm share the following information: New sessions in the Fitness Gym for people with disabilities have started on Wednesdays from 11am to 12pm – for clients from Leading Lives. The sessions will be expanded from 11th June for Phase 2 for members of ACE and from 11th October for referrals from other organisations or individuals. Sessions are free during the funded period – until 9th February 2027. Carers can come along to assist.

Please contact Anselm if more information about taking part is required.

Chair based yoga now takes place at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre on Fridays at a reduced price of £4 per session. Booking can be made by contacting the Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre. Sessions are suitable for anyone with mobility issues.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will be Wednesday, 29th July, 2026, 10.30am to 12.30pm via Zoom.

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