

Present:

Councillors Eden (Chair), Khan, .

Also in attendance:

Alan Fleming	Enrych Berkshire
Diane Goodlock	Reading MS Society
Helen Bryant	RBC - Access Officer
Nina Crispin	RBC - Information and Engagement Officer
Amy Bryan	RBC - Committee Services
Isabelle Redfern	Rehabilitation Officer (Visual Impairment) Sensory Needs Intermediate Care Team
Jenny Turner	Arthritis Matters
Trish Wright	MS Therapy Centre

Apologies:

Cllr Rose Williams

Liz Johnson

Lisa Bamsey

Sian Hooley

Tisha Buckle

Nigel McAlister

Bob Bristow

Readibus

Readibus and Service User

Berkshire PHAB

Member of the Public

Member of the Public

Reading Association for the Blind

1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2017 were agreed as a correct record.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Further to Minute 12 of the meeting on 9 March 2017 Alan Fleming said that he had been unable to provide Cllr Eden with details of his concerns regarding Green Park Station, but Marian Marsh said that she would be able to assist.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

3.

SIMON Project

Firstly, Marian expressed her thanks for the feedback that she had received. Approximately 20 people gave feedback by email, letters and phonecalls.

Marian said that the project had, technically, ended. It was a Euro-wide project to develop an app for smartphones to enable disabled drivers and passengers to see where parking spaces were free.

Marian reported that some of the sensors in parking spaces had come off. She asked the group to let her know if any were unstuck. A better system was needed.

Marian had had lots of thanks and people had said that they were pleased that someone was doing something to assist with parking in the town.

There had been 60 voluntary testers, 20 of which were from the group, and the television coverage had generated a lot of interest.

25% of the testers used the app for navigation, but people said that they preferred Google.

There had been some confusion regarding the use of passwords, but this had now been reworded on the app. It was thought that a user manual was needed, but this was probably not going to happen.

Some reported that the app had shown free spaces which turned out not to be free on arrival. People had not been parking over the sensors and so the space registered as empty.

Some testers had said that the app reduced the amount of time wasted looking for spaces and almost 80% of respondents had been very pleased with their experience of the app.

Some had reported that by the time they had got to the space it was occupied, so they had had to wait to see if other drivers moved their cars out of the spaces.

There was a discussion around the app and future developments that could be made, including a message telling drivers that the space they were driving towards was full, but there was another nearby. Funding had ended and so funding was not available at present, however, it was possible that other app developers could get involved at a later date. Marian said that there were further uses for the app, other than just for Blue Badge Spaces. It was possible that Microsoft or Oracle might want to get involved. It was reported that the app would continue to function.

It was mentioned that the app was a very good idea but that spaces were not big enough for all vehicles; some needed an extra 3 metres. Longer bays needed to be sought.

Marian said that maintenance of the sensors was within the contract and that the contractor needed to come back. If roads were dug up or sensors got broken they were cheap and easy to replace.

People who exited and entered their vehicles from the rear were finding that some of the spaces were too small. It was mentioned that the parking spaces that had been by the Broad Street entrance to the Oracle had been perfect for this purpose and that more were needed in the town.

Marian said that she would give the group's feedback to the developers of the app.

AGREED:

That Marian Marsh be thanked for her presentation and for keeping the group informed.

4. GREEN PARK STATION

Marian Marsh stated that she might be able to work with the group in order to improve the Green Park Station application.

AGREED:

- (1) That the positions be noted;

5. GENERAL ELECTION

Cllr Eden had stood in the Wantage constituency.

Reading East's MP was now Mr Matt Rodda. Mr Alok Sharma was still the MP for Reading West.

The Working Group had invited both MPs to a previous meeting. As Mr Sharma was the Minister of State for Housing and Planning, he would probably be very busy. Cllr Eden suggested that both MPs be invited to a future meeting, but it was unlikely that they would be able to attend the same meeting.

It was possible that the date of the future meetings with the MPs to Fridays, because that was a day when they would be free.

AGREED:

- (1) That the position be noted

6. DISABILITY FUN DAY

The event was well attended, mainly families. There were 28 information stands. It was the first Disability Awareness Fun Day to be held in Reading, and lots of partnerships were made.

The Oracle gave sponsorship of £300 and Holiday Inn Reading South donated sandwiches.

For the next Fun Day it was suggested that the PDSN and the Working Group work together.

Cllr Eden reported that the Oracle had been delighted to help and were very agreeable to doing so in the future.

Helen Bryant said that she was still determined to have a Disability Pride Day one day.

We need to make Reading a good place to live for everybody and there is a big demand for services and information. We need to ensure that disability is an issue that is important and deserves recognition.

It was reported that feedback was that the event could have been better promoted.

Events such as this needed time to be established; around three years; after this it would become an “institution”.

AGREED:

- (1) That Nina Crispin be thanked for giving feedback
- (2) That Nina pass on thanks to The Oracle, Holiday Inn, Tesco and others

7. ROYAL BERKSHIRE HOSPITAL HYDROTHERAPY POOL

Martin Salter had had a meeting with the Chief Executive of the Foundation Trust. The MS therapy swimming sessions would continue, but a replacement pool had yet to be found, and the nearest one was near Newbury.

There was a Facebook group: “Save The RBH Hydrotherapy Pool Campaign Group”.

The Trust had said that the pool would not be closed until a replacement had been found.

It was considered that the protest against the closure had been a good learning experience for the Trust.

It was a tribute to the campaigners that pressure had led to the pool being saved from closure. It was thought that the fact that MPs had been involved in the campaign and the arrival of a new Chief Executive of the Trust had probably helped to get a positive result.

Diane Goodlock said that she had met lots of people whose conditions would be much worse without hydrotherapy.

The issue would be discussed at future meetings of the Working Group and the members would be kept updated. The Working Group would keep up the pressure on the Trust and would not accept closure unless a local replacement could be found. The Working Group would keep a watching brief.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

8. THAMES PATH CYCLEWAY CONSULTATION REPORT AND EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

There was a problem with a chicane on the pathway, this was to stop unauthorised use of the path by motorcycles and the like, but it also prohibited access to some kinds of wheelchairs, hand-cycles, etc.

The question was asked about what other towns do about such barriers, such as Oxford.

Paths were supposed to be of a certain width but some of the existing paths were already narrower than the standard width, which meant that wheelchair users found it difficult if there was a need to pass another person.

The Working Group could review the widths and report any problems.

AGREED: That the position be noted.

9. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

As mentioned above, a special meeting, or perhaps two, would be held with local MPs in attendance.

Cllr Eden said that premises now required a license from the Council to have A Boards, which was very good news for disabled people. If premises owners were found in breach of their licence they could have it taken away.

The Group members can report unlicensed A Boards and those that are in the way. The Love Clean Reading app was very useful for this.

Disability Pride Day

Disability Awareness Day

Cllr Eden said that she had had contact with a resident regarding accessible play equipment, who had said that it was only in one place. An officer from Parks could be invited to discuss what was already on offer and if there were further plans. Parents and children could also be invited to the meeting. The geographical spread of such equipment could be looked at. It was possible that funding could be found from Section 106 - infrastructure levy

Access to parking

Access to paths and dropped kerbs

AGREED:

(1) That the position be noted.

(2) That members of the Working Group submit any specific examples of problems with dropped kerbs and pavement furniture in advance of the next meeting and the Network & Parking Services Manager be asked to come to a future meeting to address the points raised.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Cllr Eden said that loneliness was being focused on, locally and nationally. Loneliness was a big problem that needed to be ended.

Reading Voluntary Action had a meeting on 13 July - "Champions to End Loneliness Workshop".

Getting out and about was very important to stop people getting lonely. A new steering group on loneliness and isolation had just started, led by Jeannette Searle.

Diane Goodlock said that the MS Society would be interested, as they wanted to set up a befriending service.

The Co Op was making loneliness their focus nationally, and the Jo Cox Foundation was continuing the work of the Loneliness Commission set up by Ms Cox.

In Reading there were many people in single person households and without extended families.

It was mentioned that there were double wheelchair spaces on the 33 bus service, which was very pleasing.

Nina informed the group that if signers were required for future meetings they were available; there was a corporate fund and a request would need to be submitted. It was remarked that we would need to ensure that those who needed sign interpreters would be present at the meeting, as it is very expensive to use them.

It was suggested that, when the minutes were sent out, a note be attached to the effect of "if you require a BSL interpreter, please contact..."

Cllr Eden suggested that, for the present, the meeting dates be kept as they were, but if a response was received from the MP(s) then we would change them when necessary.

There could be a joint meeting with the Older People's Working Group.

AGREED:

- (1) That the positions be noted.**

- (2) That the local MPs be invited to a future meeting, and to inform when they would be able to attend the meeting.**

(The meeting opened at 2.00pm and closed at 3.15pm)

SIMON App Testers Feedback Sept 16 - March 17

Background

The SIMON project was introduced to the Reading local community of the elderly and people with disabilities at a public meeting at the Civic Offices on 15 January 2016. Invitation letters and emails were sent to over 50 organisations representing people with disabilities and over 200 individuals who hold a Blue Badge. Around 20 people representing a variety of disabilities attended and everyone volunteered to help with the testing and giving feedback. The meeting was very positive. Many people said it was very good to have such a hopeful project that should make their journeys and parking in Reading easier.



Further interest from the community came as a result of BBC TV and radio interviews asking for volunteers to test the App in November 2017 and news in Disabled Motoring UK Magazine in December 2016:

<https://www.disabledmotoring.org/news-and-features/news/post/240-smartphone-app-to-detect-blue-badge-spaces>

This resulted in many email and telephone requests for information about how to download and use the App, followed by around 500 downloads and around a further 40 people volunteering to give feedback. This gave a total of 60 volunteer testers.

Collecting feedback

The 20 volunteers from the meeting plus 40 others who had given email addresses were sent a questionnaire on 17 February 2017 to fill in and email back. Many people who were sent the questionnaire preferred to simply email their findings and comments back rather than use the questionnaire. These comments were included in this report. People who contacted the Council and gave comments by letter and phone rather than using the questionnaire were also included in the findings.

Summarising feedback

A total of 39 responses were received by email, phone and letter. A response rate of 65 per cent.

Of those who responded, 76 per cent had used the App for parking information and 25 per cent had used the navigational information. The parking information was regarded the most useful whilst the navigation information was not required by 25 per cent of users because they had local knowledge and a further 10 per cent preferred to use google directions.

The suggestions for improvements covered both the App and the general system. These can be summarised as follows:

Regarding the App, there was initially some confusion about whether a password was needed and as this was only required for Reading's small team of testers for the enforcement team, this was quickly rectified by informing users that they did not need a password to access the parking and navigation information. A small number of these users said that they would like a user manual in preference to the videos on the website. A larger 12 per cent were concerned that GPS was draining the battery.

A small number of users commented that prior knowledge of the area was needed so you knew where to expand the map when looking for parking spaces and that that could be a problem for visitors new to the town. Some users were disappointed that they could not get an update on parking availability as they approached the town centre and felt it an inconvenience to have to pull over and stop to use the App again. One tester commented that a voice telling you if your chosen space was taken while you were driving towards it would be the ideal solution.

By far the most frequent comment cited by nearly a third of testers was regarding the system not providing the correct parking information because in Reading there had been an issue on installation that the spaces vacant or occupied were not shown accurately on the App. This was due to cars not parking over a sensor but avoiding the sensors in unmarked bays. These parking bays have now been white-lined to demarcate where cars should park and the information is now being received accurately on the App.

In conclusion, the parking information was regarded as the most useful by Reading users and this was hugely welcomed by almost every respondent. A

small number also mentioned that they were glad to be able to reduce the time previously spent cruising around looking for a parking space.

There was widespread enthusiasm and praise for the project (79.5%). 28% of respondents found the App very helpful in the information it conveyed and around a quarter of respondents found the App easy to use. Indeed there were no comments on whether the App could be improved so the handling of the App suited their disability.

Future applications

A further wider benefit to Reading Borough Council is that we now have a bank of volunteers we could approach for further feedback and comments on mobility issues.

Also, given the very good response to the SIMON App, Reading hopes to use the potential to provide information on the availability of all public parking spaces and freight loading bays should funding become available in the future.

Marian Marsh, Transport Planner

13 April 2017

Appendix 1 - Data collected on SIMON feedback

General questions:

- Did you download the SIMON App? Yes - 39
- Did you use the parking information? Yes - 30
- Did you use the navigation? Yes - 10, No, as had local knowledge - 9 No, as prefer google directions 4
-

Positive Comments:

- Easy to use - 9
- Welcomes the initiative/general enthusiasm - 31
- Very helpful - 11
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Suggestions for improvement:

- Initial confusion about needing a password (This was later rectified when emailed the council or left a query via the SIMON website) - 7
- Difficulty finding spaces if you don't know where to look on the map - 3
- GPS drains the battery - 5
- A user manual would be helpful - 2
- Pity you cannot get updates on parking spaces while you are on the move - 5
- Sensors are not providing accurate information - 12 *

*NB This problem was due to some bays being unmarked and it was found that parkers avoided parking over the sensors - this has since been rectified by marking the bays with white lines)