

To: Councillor Hornsby-Smith (Chair)
Councillors Naz, Rowland, Thompson
and Goss

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**NOTICE OF MEETING - ACCESS AND DISABILITIES WORKING GROUP 20
NOVEMBER 2025**

A meeting of the Access and Disabilities Working Group will be held on Thursday, 20 November 2025 from 2.00 pm until 4.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2LU.

The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

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1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS	
2. APOLOGIES	
3. COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS	
4. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2025	3 - 8
5. MATTERS ARISING	
6. PARENTING SPECIAL CHILDREN - ZOBIA KALIM - DIRECTOR OF FAMILY SERVICES, FUNDING & COMMISSIONING MANAGER	
7. ME2 CLUB - RAMONA BRIDGEMAN - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION CO-ORDINATOR	

CIVIC OFFICES EMERGENCY EVACUATION: If an alarm sounds, leave by the nearest fire exit quickly and calmly and assemble on the corner of Bridge Street and Fobney Street. You will be advised when it is safe to re-enter the building.

- 8. PAGES FOR DISABILITY SERVICES ON THE COUNCIL'S WEBSITE**
- 9. DATE OF TOUR OF THE TOWN CENTRE AND STATION HILL**
- 10. COUNCIL SERVICES - BSL INTERPRETATION PROVISION - KERRY WHIFFIN - CO-PRODUCTION AND ENGAGEMENT OFFICER - RBC**
- 11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**
- 12. FUTURE PRESENTATIONS**

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 6 MARCH 2026

Access and Disabilities Working Group – Thursday 11 September 2025

Present

Cllr Andrew Hornsby-Smith – Chair - Church Ward Councillor

Cllr Mamuna Naz – Vice Chair – Norcot Ward Councillor

Cllr Karen Rowland – Lead Councillor for Environmental Services and Community Safety – Abbey Ward Councillor

Cllr Anne Thompson – Tilehurst Ward Councillor

Cllr Will Cross – Redlands Ward Councillor

Alex Wylde - Policy and Performance Manager RBC

Jill Marston – Policy Officer RBC

Helen Bryant – Access Officer RBC

Rose Burgoyne – Architect - Haworth Tompkins

Sarah Cox – Arts and Venues Manager - Reading Arts - RBC

Andy Lockwood - Project Manager - RBC

Bob Bristow – Reading Talking News

Apologies

Sam Rackham - Acting Assistant Director of Infrastructure, Economy and Capital Projects

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr Hornsby-Smith welcomed everyone and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

MINUTES

Approved as a true record with one change; Cllr Rachel McEwan should read Cllr Ruth McEwan.

MATTERS ARISING

Cllr Hornsby-Smith said that he had been impressed by the presentation at the last meeting from Simon Houghton of Unseen Aware and that a report has been sent to the Leader of the Council, Cllr Terry.

COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None

TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

In Sam Rackham's absence, Alex Wylde shared the slides of the presentation and gave an overview of the Strategy.

The latest draft reflects the updated Local Plan feedback, which will be consulted on. The strategy is focussed on the next 20 years, with accessibility being a key consideration.

Reading has been going through changes; the number of dwellings in the town has increased and there has been a significant growth in the population, particularly young adults. There have been new developments, such as Station Hill and Vastern Road.

More GPs are needed to accommodate the people moving to Reading, and it has been suggested that there could be pop-up clinics in streets. Accessible healthcare and transport are important, especially to older people and disabled people.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith said that opposition to sharing Broad Street with cyclists will come out during the consultation. Cllr Thompson said that electric scooters and similar vehicles can also cause problems.

Bob Bristow said that he hoped that visually impaired and blind people would be taken into consideration; he mentioned that he had had difficulties in walking in the new Station Hill area, because of the lack of tactile guidance. There are too many obstacles in Broad Street. Cllr Rowland said that the annual walking tour of the town centre could include Station Hill.

Safe places to play are needed, as are spaces which make it easier for older people to get around, with places to rest. Step-free areas are also helpful for many. Cllr Hornsby-Smith said that recently several play areas designed for all abilities had been created.

The presentation is attached.

THE HEXAGON STUDIO THEATRE

Rose Burgoyne from Haworth Tompkins gave a presentation on the progress of the new Hexagon Studio Theatre.

The rising cost of building materials has meant that the scale of the building has been reduced.

Back of house is being demolished, and the new entrance will be at the rear of the theatre. The entrance will be legible and clear. The Blue Badge parking spaces will be retained. There will be dropped kerbs.

There will be seats in the bar area, both internally and externally. The bar will have a lower area, and a recess so that wheelchair users can get their knees underneath.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith asked whether the entrance required a 90-degree angle between the outer and inner doors. The doors will be automatic.

There will be an accessible WC and shower at back of house, and accessible dressing rooms. All levels will have accessible WCs.

There will be unisex WCs in line with guidelines for theatres, and accessible baby changing facilities.

The passenger lift will be bigger – 1.4m x 1.6m.

Cllr Thompson asked if there will be handrails in the auditorium, and this was confirmed.

There will be 5 spaces for wheelchair users with companion seats, and 2 wheelchair users can sit together.

Bob Bristow asked how big the foyer will be. Rose confirmed that it will be 6m x 10m. The lift will be near to the entrance, and the bar will be at the end of the space.

Access will be step-free. The plan was, originally, to have a rehearsal space and a foyer, but now there will be a multi-use space instead, with a bar and box office.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith thanked Rose for her presentation.

The presentation is attached.

COUNCIL WEBPAGE AUDIT

Cllr Hornsby-Smith asked the members of the Working Group to give any feedback about the disability pages of the Council's website to Helen Bryant by the end of October [Now updated to the date of the next meeting, 20th November.]

Helen.Bryant@reading.gov.uk

Helen Bryant described how to find the disability pages:

- Scroll down to the end of the front page of the website until the “View All Services” link appears.
- Click the link and scroll down to the bottom of the page.
- “Services for Disabled People” will be on the left-hand side.
- Click on that heading, unless the visible sections are what you want to open.

Bob Bristow remarked that it is difficult to find the Services for Disabled People pages if you are using a screenreader, because it is so far down the page. It needs to be moved up.

Cllr Will Cross said that a member of the public had said that they were struggling to hear what was going on at the last Cycle Forum and asked about the loop in the Council Chamber. Bob Bristow said that he can hear clearly with the T-Switch on his hearing aid switched on, provided people use the microphones.

Cllr Hornsby-Smith reminded the members of the Working Group about the Festival of Inclusivity on the Saturday following the meeting.

The Mayor would be present, and there would be prizes of medals and goody bags for all the young people taking part. The Council was having a stall, and we would be running a fun game. Various sports would be available, such as netball, wheelchair rugby, cricket, cycling and boccia.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE TOPICS

The group raised a number of suggestions:

Reading Borough Council Website – Disability Pages
Police – Anti-social behaviour, Safety, Access
Tour of the Town – including Station Hill
Tactile Paving
Unseen Aware – update
Highways – maintenance
Railway Stations – access and how to get assistance
Tilehurst Station lifts
Procurement – BSL live software

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was none.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

20th November 2025

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