

# Access and Disabilities Working Group - Thursday, 4 March 2021 1.30 pm

## Minutes

### Present:

Cllr Rachel Eden, Chair  
Cllr Karen Rowland - Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation  
Cllr Jane Stanford-Beale  
Clare Muir - Policy and Voluntary Sector Manager RBC  
Helen Bryant - Access Officer RBC  
Peter Absolom - General Manager, Readibus  
Chris Wood - Associate Manager, Lead Architect Saunders Boston Architects -  
Paul Shearman - GLL Partnership Manager  
Ben Stanesby - Leisure and Recreation Manager RBC  
Dan Peters - Service Manager Reading Play RBC  
Dominic Bennet - Leisure Contract Manager - RBC  
Nina Crispin - Information & Engagement Officer - Public Health and Wellbeing Team RBC  
Isabelle Redfern - Rehabilitation Officer (Visual Impairment) Short Term Team RBC  
Jenny Hazell - Principal Committee Administrator RBC  
Bob Bristow - Reading Association for the Blind  
Filio Zacharoglov  
Alain Marcos

### Apologies

Fiona Price - CEO Age UK Berkshire  
Brian Oatway - Member of the Public

#### 1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr Eden welcomed everyone, gave a roundup of what was to be discussed and explained how the online meeting would work.

#### 2. MATTERS ARISING

Accessible Communications Policy - on the Agenda

### **3. COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

None

### **4. RIVERMEAD LEISURE CENTRE AND PALMER PARK**

Chris Wood described the new Rivermead Leisure Centre, which was to be built on the site of the existing building. He presented series of slides. He explained that he was leading on designs for both Rivermead and Palmer Park. The new centre was to be built while the existing centre was still in operation and this was to be demolished later once the new one was opened. The new car park was to be located where the bowls court was. There were to be 22 Blue Badge spaces near to the entrance to the centre, and there would be 2 setting down points. The route through the car park was for Blue Badge holders for drop-off for Blue Badge spaces only.

The footpaths would all be suitable for wheelchairs, scooters and so on and would be concrete paved. Coloured tarmac was to be looked at in the next design stage, to differentiate pedestrian routes and car routes, and keep cycle users away from pedestrians for safety reasons.

There was to be a lighting strategy across the scheme.

Trees would have grating over the tree pits, which would be maintained by GLL. New trees were to be in the new scheme. The detailed layout would be looked at again to ensure that the routes were uncluttered and that street furniture would be located in zones away from pedestrian routes.

In the main building the main entrance would have an assistance dog toilet. The location would be reviewed after feedback had been received.

There was a sports wheelchair zone which led into the sports hall. There was to be a number of facilities off the zone including a Changing Places facility accessible for the dry sports area. There would be several storage points for wheelchairs so people could change into sports chairs from their day wheelchairs. Sports England advised on the design. The doors settings were oversized so that sports wheelchairs could get through with their splayed wheels.

There would be several dropped counters and there would be concierge points in the main entrance and kiosks at a suitable height for wheelchair users. There was to be a gate, 1200mm wide for people using sports wheelchairs. There would be a Changing Places facility in the wet change area. There would be accessible showers, WCs and so on. There was a defined route from there to poolside and pool pods were included in both pools. Chris explained how the pool pods worked; they were used to get people in and out of the pools, people would be discreetly lowered into the pool in special wheelchairs, which were adaptable for various disabilities.

There would be 8 person lifts. The routes would be very clearly defined. There would be several changing facilities, serving fitness suites, spin studios, there would be wheelchair refuges and viewing areas overlooking the pool hall.

Stu Pearce said that he would be happy to help with siting the area for assistance dogs.

Ben Stanesby said that there would be a new play area between the demountable pool and the new centre and people would not need to be a member to use the facilities such as the Changing Places WC.

Peter Absolon asked if there was a height barrier for the drop off area for minibuses. Cllr Eden asked if this could be checked.

Chris then went on to talk about the new development at Palmer Park; the existing entrance was off Wokingham Road - this would be widened for coach parking and potentially Readibus also.

There were to be several Blue Badge parking spaces in front of the existing stadium building and a dedicated set of Blue Badge parking spaces were to be placed right by the new entrance. The new entrance would serve both buildings and the parking spaces would be in a zone very close to the main entrance. One zone would be shared with family parking. Everybody who parked in the Blue Badge spaces would have level access to the new building. There were hard surfaces suitable for wheelchair users and the detailed design including colours of tarmac and paving would be looked at to differentiate between all the different areas, including the car park and pedestrian zones. Tree pits were to be covered with grids.

There would be an assistance dog toilet area, close to the Blue Badge parking bays - again there would need to be a discussion about the siting of it.

There was to be a sports wheelchair zone for users who used sports wheelchairs in the athletics area - and there would be a Changing Places facility and a new refurbished accessible change area in the existing stadium. There would be an accessible route through the building to the track and field.

There were dropped counters and signup areas ready for wheelchair users. In the main wet change area, you can either get to the pool pod or get to the existing area where there would be dry side changing facilities for wheelchair users.

On the first floor, there would be a staircase to the main central core, with an 8-person lift, and people could get to the dry change above the pool and the fitness suite or to the stadium, via a series of ramps to access the studios and stadium seating. Wheelchair refuges were included in all the vertical circulation cores. The plan was easily understood and logical and accessible.

Cllr Stanford-Beale asked if there was to be family parking. Chris confirmed that there was a zone within the main carpark layout where the existing Blue Badge parking was - the idea was to have a pedestrian route with larger spaces. Some bays were to be retained as Blue Badge parking, and some for family parking, near to the main footpath.

Chris said that the zoning would be looked at at the next detailed design stage.

Marcos asked about provision for electric charging within the Blue Badge spaces. Chris said that there was a selection of charging spaces in standard parking bays and could consider charging spaces in some of the larger spaces or designated Blue Badge parking. The siting of some of the EV parking spaces was to be discussed. Cllr Eden endorsed the question given the national and local commitments to zero net carbon.

Bob Bristow welcomed the use of colour contrasted tarmac and paving but asked what was being planned for people who were completely blind; was there any way to indicate the way externally? Chris said that internally there would be a radar system. Bob said that the assumption generally was that colour was helpful, but it was not so straightforward. Chris said that they would be limited to the immediate area of the stadium, but that Ben and his colleagues would need to answer. Ben said that Bob would need to have a discussion with him to deliver the best solution. Bob said that he was willing to assist with this, as was Stu. Isobelle said that she was very happy to get involved with this also. It was difficult to get from the bus route to the stadium; Isobelle had already tried this with a service user. Helen Bryant would get a group together.

Cllr Stanford-Beale asked about the surfaces and textures that would be used inside; would surfaces designed to reduce echo and noise be used? It was difficult for people with different impairments, such as autism and hearing impairments. Chris said that the firm followed design guidelines published by Sport England which did consider these issues. This would be looked at at a later stage. Bob said that reflective surfaces were also difficult.

Cllr Eden said that the issue of EV parking and charging was relevant to the Rivermead development as well as Palmer Park. Paul Sherman said GLL worked for years with the Alzheimer's Society and most of the Reading staff had had Dementia Friends awareness training. He hoped that those who had had training would be working in the new leisure centre. Cllr Eden thanked everyone for their contribution.

## **6. PROSPECT PARK PLAY CENTRE**

Ben Stanesby shared the outline proposals for the new play centre in Prospect Park. He said that they were not as developed as those for the sports centres. Ben said that the Play Team functioned throughout the borough and the function was to

provide support for young people, including teaching them how to get to school independently and respite. At Prospect Park there was a pavilion that used to be for grounds maintenance and which was to be converted into a play centre to provide broader facilities.

Ben showed a plan detailing what the centre would look like. There was a large car park which needed to be made more accessible. There was to be a low-ropes course for children under 7 years old, a café and an outdoor education area for archery and other activities. Children who were excluded from school could be accommodated and meeting space for groups. There would be accessible WCs and the plan was being reviewed to find space for a Changing Places facility. There would be mini-golf area, which was accessible to many. Directly opposite the pavilion would be a playground, because the water table was very high at the existing playground which was often unusable.

Accessibility to the building and car park was very important and the car park entrance needed to be reviewed as vehicles over 2m high could not get through the barrier. The surface was grasscrete, which was difficult to move on and the internal layout of the centre also needed to be changed. Ben said that he would come back when the plans were more detailed and asked if there were any questions.

Cllr Eden asked about the use of the Changing Places toilet - would it be for ordinary park users as well as centre users? Would the new surface of the playground be accessible for wheelchair users?

Cllr Stanford-Beale thanked Ben and the Team for all their work. She said that the funding was coming from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The Council had been pressing for an accessible playground for all. It was good to have something within the Borough and within one of the parks. She said that there had been detailed discussions about the centre, including making sure that there was adequate parking for disabled drivers/passengers and that all play areas were accessible. Some surfaces were unsuitable for walking on for those who had walking difficulties. Local groups would like to be able to hire a facility like this which would generate income for the Council.

Helen Bryant said that she was very pleased with this, and especially that there was to be a Changing Places facility.

Ben responded to the questions; there were to be several consultations about the centre, and about the design of the buildings and the provision of parking would be part of it. Ben said that surfaces would be covered. There would be a separate consultation about the design of the play area. Cllr Eden said that the Group very much appreciated the early consultation with the group, and that the Play Task and Finish Group would work with Ben and the team.

## **7. ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY**

Clare Muir said that she had been working on an Accessible Information and Communications Strategy, which was part of the Council's wider Customer Experience Strategy. Clare and Aisling Gill-Docherty had prepared a report which made some recommendations which they wanted to pursue, and to get a decision in June, to consolidate a number of findings of good practice that have come out of the National Health's Information Standards and the web accessibility compliance standard and try to make it more widely spread throughout the Council. Cllr Eden said that there may need to be a special meeting about this as the timing was not corresponding to the Group's normal meeting cycle.

## **8. AOB**

Cllr Eden said that there had been a change in priorities for the vaccination programme; that anybody who was on the learning disability register was being moved up the priority list - it emphasised the importance of being on that register.

Cllr Stanford-Beale said that Reading Mencap had done a lot of work to make sure that people with learning disabilities would be higher up the register, and that some GPs had been letting some parents with a learning-disabled person have the vaccine if there had been a cancellation. However, there had also been a recent incident when the parent of an autistic boy was turned away even though she had had a letter. It had been clarified that if a parent was a main carer for someone with a severe learning disability that they should be able to get a vaccination. Cllr Eden said that she would raise it with Cllr Hoskin as part of the health scrutiny function.

Cllr Eden said that the Active Travel Fund was now open, and Helen had sent a link out cycling, walking and public transport were important, but it was also important that people with access needs should have their voices heard. She urged people to have a look.

Cllr Eden then reported that the Cllr for Health and Cllr Eden had raised the issue of the RBH hydrotherapy pool and was supporting the groups wishing to save it and for the CCG to continue funding.

Stu asked about Reading West Station - without disabled access was it discrimination? It had been fed back from another meeting.

Stu also wanted to know if anybody else had had problems with booking appointments for vaccinations - people who had had problems should feed back to the next meeting.

Cllr Eden said that provision and planning for people who have been shielding when all the town's facilities were open again, from a physical and mental health point of view, was very important and should be addressed at a future meeting.

Mary said that she was representing Readibus and presented some statistics; she said that Readibus had been available locally every day during the pandemic, including during the lockdowns. Procedures and cleaning regimes had been put in place from the outset to make travelling as safe as possible. All requests for journeys had been met from March 2020 - over 18,00 - by Reading Council residents for essential purposes such as attending appointments, respite and food shopping. There had been an abundance of feedback stating that people had felt very safe during all the trips, and that the staff had been very helpful. Readibus was a lifeline in Reading particularly during the lockdowns. Mary had been taken to appointments even out of the borough in Wokingham. Cllr Eden said that a vote of thanks should be extended to all involved at Readibus.

Cllr Eden said that local elections were imminent; they were actually last year's elections that had been postponed. There were not just concerns about physical access, but also about safety because of the pandemic. Cllr Eden said that she was planning to get a postal vote this year. If any members of the Working Group had any feedback, they should contact Electoral Services.

Cllr Eden reported about the issue of motorcycles getting into areas where they should not be; one problem was that barriers that stopped motorcycles often stopped wheelchair and scooter users as well. If anyone had any examples of good practice they should let Helen Bryant know, as the Anti-Social Behaviour Team was eager to make sure that those who need to access paths and so on, can, and those who should not were prevented from doing so.

Bob Bristow said that postal votes were not the answer for people who were totally blind and lived alone or were not in a support bubble. Cllr Eden agreed that all should be able to vote safely. All feedback was welcome. Bob also said that finding the entrance to the Katesgrove Polling Station was still difficult, as there was no definite pathway. Cllr Eden said that this should be reported, which Bob had done previously. Cllr Eden said that she should be copied in to any emails.

Cllr Eden asked that an update to the Council Tax Protocol should be brought to the next meeting, as people who were vulnerable needed to be protected when they were in difficulty.

## **9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

24 June - it was unclear at the time of the meeting as to if the meeting would be on Teams.

