

Access and Disabilities Working Group - Thursday, 9 September 2021 2pm

Minutes

Present:

Cllr Sophia James, Chair
Cllr Karen Rowland - Lead Councillor for Culture, Heritage and Recreation
Cllr Jane Stanford-Beale - Autism Berkshire
Cllr Helen Manghnani - Tilehurst Ward
Cllr Rose Williams - Katesgrove Ward - Governor Reading Buses - Trustee Readibus
George Baptiste - Parks and Playgrounds Officer
Bridget Hickey - Parks Contracts Officer
Clare Muir - Policy and Voluntary Sector Manager RBC
Helen Bryant - Access Officer RBC
Mary Juan Pierino - Readibus
Nina Crispin - Information & Engagement Officer - Public Health and Wellbeing Team
RBC/PDSN - Physical Disabilities Sensory Needs Partnership
Isabelle Redfern - Rehabilitation Officer (Visual Impairment) Short Term Team RBC
Bob Bristow - Chair Reading Association for the Blind
Gary Saunders - Member of the Public
Brian Oatway - Member of the Public
Carol Froude - Member of the Public
Victor Koroma - ACRE - Alafia Disability Support

Apologies

Fiona Price - CEO Age UK Berkshire
Cllr Josh Williams
Joel Young - Guide Dogs

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Cllr James welcomed everyone, gave a roundup of what was to be discussed and explained how the online meeting would work. There would be breaks for access.

2. MATTERS ARISING

None

3. COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None

4. PROSPECT PARK PLAY GROUND

Bridget Hickey explained that there had been some discussions with the Play Task and Finish Group about a tender for a playground to make it more accessible. The Council had gone to tender to look at different options that had been requested. Some of the items that had been requested were a double slide, a basket swing, a roundabout, a multi-user see-saw, mirage swings which had seats and back supports. On some of the multi units there had been difficulties with ramp access, but the Task and Finish Group might have some ideas. On the junior units some of them could have ramps, but the units for older children the designs were more bespoke, and ramps needed to be added, they were not easily made wheelchair accessible. The ramp could go up to a slide or a lower tower for an observation area. It would not be possible to put all the necessary play elements in because of the issue of height. A lot of the elements could be covered, such as sensory and texture. The equipment needed to be suitably challenging. Different suppliers had been asked about compatibility and ensure that regulations were covered.

George said that the facility at Palmer Park had been recently been upgraded. There was ramp access to the first level. This meant that a wide range of children had access to that level. Anything above that it would be too difficult to access the next level, without making a large, expensive bespoke piece of equipment. Any designs would have to go through an inspectors' forum to ensure that it was safe and met standards.

The first tier was to be as spacious as possible and to enable children to see out, with barriers - which were needed at a set height, including handrails, etc. Playground equipment companies would be approached to see what could be provided.

Cllr Stanford-Beale said that the Task and Finish Group would be the best place for this, and all the future designs for play were now being looked at in terms of access for all the family, not just disabled children, but also for grandparents and others who may have disabilities or impairments. All the family needed to be involved. The team had done a wonderful job, and the Blgrave Play Area had been very popular with children. Lots of playgrounds had already been upgraded and more were in the pipeline. Developers had to give money to the community, which was being invested in the play parks.

Bridget said that she would be going back to the Task and Finish Group.

5. ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Clare Muir gave a presentation about the Policy, which had been raised in a previous meeting, which was to support the Customer Experience Strategy. Slides were attached.

Cllr James asked if common pieces of information were offered in various languages, including BSL. Clare said that there was a facility to translate on the website, if something was needed as a hard copy it was on an on request basis because of the expense. Nina said that BSL videos had been put on the website since March 2020, Total Communications had provided updates on the COVID-19 monthly, which ended in July at the end of lockdown. This was not supported on a continuous basis, for reasons of expense. Cllr James asked if some funding could possibly be requested that key information could be provided on the website in BSL.

Brian Oatway said that people who were hard of hearing found online meetings were very difficult, and asked if some subtitles were available. Cllr James explained to process to get the transcript, but the function wasn't available to him at present. The web version of Teams did not necessarily support it.

Bob Bristow said that it was all very well to have W3A accessibility, but unless you knew how a person who couldn't see and used a screenreader had to use the website, you could not format a website for their needs.

Gary Saunders said that he had the full version of Teams but he did not have transcription either.

Mary said that it was difficult if people did not have access to the Internet, she had managed to print out papers, but this was not always possible.

Clare said that she apologised that the transcript wasn't available for people outside the organisation, she would look into that. She said that the Shaw Trust was testing the website, with disabled people, and had accredited it. She would ask Adam Bevington to feed back to a future meeting about how the testing was done. She understood that it was being tested by disabled people.

Clare said that papers for the Working Group could be provided as hard copies and if Mary wanted it in the future it could be done.

Helen said that she thought that someone from the Shaw Trust who had been testing the website did have a screenreader. Bob said that it could get tedious trying to find things on the website.

6. NATIONAL DISABILITY STRATEGY

The link to the strategy had been provided for information Cllr James said that she had also looked at some of it, and that it was on the agenda in case anybody had any comments.

Helen said that she was pleased that Deaf people could now do jury duty because if they needed a sign language interpreter, they would not be counted as a jury member, but they would be allowed into the courtroom, which was a step in the right direction.

Cllr James said that there were lots of good intentions and hoped that they would be adequately funded.

7. ACCESS TO THE TOWN CENTRE AND FACILITIES DURING AND POST PANDEMIC

Helen said that she had included this to ask if people had had any issues, such as problems with access to parking spaces, accessible toilets being shut, one way systems on pavements etc.

A lot of the toilets had been shut and it was quite difficult to find them.

Cllr Williams said that her son's mobility scooter had rolled over on the corner of Pell Street; luckily, he had been rescued. Some of the pavements were not fit for purpose and needed to be repaired. Rose said that he had rung the Council. The camber was the problem.

Gary said that cones had been put out and the bottom part of the cones stuck out so that scooters weren't able to get through - the Council was trying to stop people going one way but not the other. Some of the metal signs were also a problem because they also stuck out.

ACTION - Cllr James to talk to Highways about the minimum clearance needed on pavements and other areas.

Gary said that shops had to have a minimum distance for clearance, he said it was a meter but the cones in Broad Street gave less clearance.

Carol Froud said that she agreed that the pavements were dangerous, her balance was poor.

New Lane Hill, Tilehurst had been due to be resurfaced. Letters had been sent out, but they had not mentioned which parts of the road were to be closed. The whole of the road had been closed and people had been trapped in their houses. People in Rowth Lane had not been able to get out either. Where the lane joined The Meadway there were bollards with keys and locks, and they should have been undone. There was someone in a car to stop someone going into or coming out of Rowth Lane. No comment had been made in the letter about access, which was very difficult for disabled people, especially if they relied on a car.

ACTION - Cllr James to follow up.

Bob said that it was difficult to find the buttons to put his hand up and unmute on Teams.

Bob said that street furniture was a problem for blind people - especially where there were too many posts for signs - when posts and street furniture were being planned they should not clutter up the pavement and make life more difficult for blind and visually impaired people. People needed to be told when this will be happening.

Mary said that the pavements in town needed to be checked because some of them are very difficult to manoeuvre around when using a wheelchair.

Cllr James said that it would be better to report issues with their local Councillors rather than waiting until the next meeting - and Helen said that members of the group could also contact her.

Cllr Magnani said that she wanted to reassure Carol that she had asked the Council to explain why the roads had been cut off in Tilehurst.

Gary asked if roads were closed, what would happen with emergency services? Cllr James said that they would have priority.

8. VACCINATIONS

Gary said that he had been trying to get an AstraZeneca vaccine (second dose) but had been unsuccessful. Cllr James said that she had got hers at the Madejski Stadium. There was some uncertainty about what was available and the locations.

9. E-SCOOTERS

No comments

10. HYDROTHERAPY POOL

There was a news item attached to the agenda about the future of the Hydrotherapy pool. Cllr James said that the issue had gone to an Adults Social Care and Children's Services and Education meeting, and the NHS Trust had been invited, but she did not think that there was a chance of it being saved because of the impact on budgets.

AOB

Council Tax Protocol - if anybody had any problems paying the Council Tax Protocol ensured that people were treated in a compassionate manner. Helen asked if the Council was signed up to it, but Cllr James was not sure if we had reached that stage.

Helen said that the Electoral Registration Canvass was imminent, and people would be getting letters to let the Council know who was living at their property so that they could be registered if necessary.

Cllr Mangnani informed the Group of the John Sykes Foundation which was offering cash donations for people in Reading who needed funding. If anybody knew of a group or individual who needed assistance, they could let them know about the Foundation.

[John Sykes Foundation](#)

Cllr Rowland joined the meeting and said that she wanted to ask if there were any issues with parks that she needed to deal with. Helen asked if there was any news about the shop fronts consultation. Cllr Rowland said that there was to be a final meeting that evening if anybody was interested. It was mostly about design but she urged members of the Group to look at the consultation documents and possibly join the meeting remotely. The meeting was mostly about design but accessibility was an issue and Cllr Rowland said that the views of the Group would be very welcome.

Bob said that there was supposed to have been a site visit and wondered what had happened to that. He had indicated that he was interested but had not heard anything more about it. Cllr Rowland said that the best thing to do would be to go online and join the meeting that evening.

Helen said that she would send an email to members about the meeting and also forward some feedback that she had had about the consultation to Cllr Rowland.

Cllr Williams said site visits that members of the Group had been on had been very useful in the past. The Group should think about doing such visits again when the weather improved. There were some parts where the kerbs were non-existent so that blind people could drift into the road. Bob said that Friar Street was still very bad in terms of access for blind people. Mary said that the site visits would be very welcomed. She thanked all who were making disabled people's lives easier, and also for the bus stop for Readibus.

Clare said that Helen had sent an email on behalf of Customer Services to improve Council Tax and Housing Repairs, if anybody was interested in giving feedback they should contact Phillipa Coldham.

Carol said that she was grateful to have the Green Waste collections back again. The collections were cut when everything needed to be pruned. Thank you to whoever made the decision to reinstate the service.

Cllr Williams said that the Council had had to borrow 2 bin lorries from Oxford as there had been some Council lorries which had broken down. Cllr James said that people had either been sick or had been told to self-isolate.

Cllr Rowland asked for Sam Shean to be invited to future meetings to discuss problems that people had in the town with pavements and other things.

Cllr James thanked everybody for an interesting and engaging meeting.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

25 November-time of the meeting to be agreed.