

Access and Disabilities Working Group - Thursday 25 November 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

Cllr Gul Khan
Clare Muir
Nigel and Barbara McAlister
Brian Oatway
Nina Crispin

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

(unfortunately I missed the first 20 minutes of the recording; I have presentations from Jo Anderson and Sam Shean, though)

4. COMMUNITY SAFETY SURVEY JO ANDERSON - NEIGHBOURHOOD INITIATIVES TEAM MANAGER

Jo Anderson gave a presentation regarding the Community Safety Survey. There was a discussion around cars parking on pavements which caused a lot of problems for people. Stu Pearce said that he felt that he should give up walking on the pavement and walk in the road because there were so many cars blocking the footways. He understood that parking on the pavement was not yet illegal, but that driving onto the pavement was.

Jo said that it was an issue that came up a lot at the Safer Neighbourhood Forums, but the police had to witness the car being driven onto the pavement in order to enforce it. Parking on double yellow lines and so on was Reading Borough Council enforcement. There were vans that could take pictures.

Stu Pearce said that there had been an incident when a car had started to reverse towards him and his guide dog. When he shouted and put his hand on the car the driver abused him verbally, which was anti-social behaviour. It was often parents who are picking up or dropping off their children at school. Some protection was needed when schools let their students out.

Sam Shean said that it was not an isolated problem, especially in terraced streets, but also emergency services found that it helped them to get their vehicles through quickly and easily. He said that he knew that there was a White Paper on the issue and that councils had commented. Stu Pearce said that he had been involved in campaigns with the Government for several years. Disabled people struggled to get past the cars. There was a van in Tilehurst because of the works for telecom cables which had parked over the whole pavement. The driver said that he would guide Stu round - but Stu refused because he was not qualified. Stu said that he would have to move his van. People needed to be educated.

Councillor James said that she thought that cars could have flyers or stickers put on them if they are parked badly, although some people parked on pavements to avoid having their wing mirrors damaged by other drivers. The problem was made worse when bins were left out. It came up a lot for wheelchair users, guide dog users, parents with prams and others. Councillor James said that she would be interested to know the progress of the White Paper.

Councillor James apologised for interrupting Jo's presentation. Jo said that the survey was open until 3 December and the views of the group would be very useful, as would any feedback. Helen Bryant said that she had already shared the survey link with the Group.

Jo was happy to share the results. Councillor James asked if the results were broken down by the disabilities of the respondents or any intersecting groups. Jo said that that would not be available, as the monitoring question was not on the survey. Helen said that she hoped that people who would respond would mention that they were disabled as part of their response, as she had done. Councillor James said that one aspect might be safety at various times of the day or night for disabled people. Women might, for example say that they might feel less safe at night. Stu said that walking the streets at night was a terror for him, because he had no idea who might be there and whether they might be armed. He did not like going out after 4pm in winter.

Helen said that with all the high-profile attacks on women in the news, she would not be surprised if there was an upsurge in women feeling unsafe. Jo said that she would expect an increase in perception of crime going up - and for people reporting that they felt less safe at all times of the day.

Councillor James thanked Jo for her presentation and said that she would be welcome to come back at any time.

5. HIGHWAYS - SAM SHEAN - STREETCARE SERVICES MANAGER

Sam Shean shared his presentation and said that Helen would share it with the group.

The Council had £9m to spend on highways maintenance over 3 years to repair pavements and roads. Potholes were a problem for every council. Year 1 was last year. Because of the pandemic the programme was curtailed and so the spending was less than the planned £3m. Micro-asphalt had been used in lots of places, and there were patches in many roads. 57 roads had been repaired.

Footway improvement - 17 pavement and footway programmes. Cars caused damage and the footways needed to be repaired and strengthened.

Year 2 - this year - £7.5m. Pavement upgrades were being carried out. 94 roads had been resurfaced. 39 main roads had been resurfaced.

Letters and other information had been sent out and daily updates were showing the progress made.

Footway programme - 18 schemes were being worked on. Some of the pedestrian crossings and dropped kerbs were being improved. Residents were being offered a discount for vehicle crossings outside their properties.

Additional pedestrian crossings at junctions had also been installed.

Trees were also being planted.

Large areas of blocked paving were being relaid where they had been damaged.

The step in the central seating area in Broad Street had been removed, and so it was no longer a trip hazard.

A disabled parking bay in Kings Road which had a problem with a trip hazard has been fixed. It was now flush.

Over 400 roads and 20 more pavement schemes would be done in the next financial year. The potholes would also be attended to. Sam said that he was still looking for funding opportunities to continue repairs after the 3 years were over.

Cllr James said that the presentation was very helpful and invited questions.

Bob Bristow asked if tactile crossings were to be put in on road junctions where kerbs were to be dropped. Sam said that manhole covers were a problem, but tactile paving should be installed where it was possible to put them in. Bob said that Katesgrove Lane was very rough. Sam said that it was an unclassified road - it would be assessed every 18 months.

Helen said thank you to Sam and the team for making the step in the centre of Broad Street flush, because she had been trying to get something done for many years, and she knew someone who had been hurt as a result of it. She asked if any work was to be done around Craven Road. The footpaths were not good, and they were very bumpy and uncomfortable, especially for wheelchair users. As some of the problems were near the hospital it could cause problems for people. Sam explained that scoring pavements for repairs was not a straightforward process. Helen said that marks had been put on the pavements, but no work had been done - possibly because of the pandemic.

The main problems were tree-roots and dropped kerbs that had sunk - the roads and pavements were very old. She offered to accompany officers. Sam said that some of the roads had very thin layers of tarmac on them. Some roads were not straightforward to mend because of their age and the way they were made. The roads would need to be reconstructed which was not a good use of the budget. Sam said that the roads could be sealed, which was a good solution and would increase the lifespan and skid resistance of them. He said that he would like to take the whole of the pavement in Craven Road and repair it, but the worst areas needed to be repaired. After every programme there was a discussion about lessons that could be learned.

Helen said that she was concerned about people with walking difficulties, among others, because it was outside the hospital. There was also a lot of leaves on the pavements which meant that people could not always see where the dropped kerbs were, or how steep they are. Sam said that there was a programme for leaf-clearance but if there was a sudden fall of leaves this could happen all year long. Sometimes the team had cleared leaves but by the time they had got to the other end of the road it was difficult to see what had been done, as more leaves had fallen. Over 250 tonnes of leaves were collected, which were composted. It was an ongoing problem with no simple solution.

Jo asked if the problems with tree roots in pavements had been counteracted in any way in terms of the new planting. Sam said that trees were needed for various reasons, including for carbon reduction. The right trees needed to be planted, with the right "foundation" and there would need to be barriers around to contain the roots.

Marisa [unfortunately I missed the introductions off the recording and I can't find her name] said that she lived in Cumberland Road and that the footpaths were quite bumpy. It was near a mosque and a gurdwara. She asked how long it would take to repair the footpath. Sam said that the priority would be for the most badly damaged pavements because of cars. They were the worst trip hazards. He explained that the borough was old and there were a lot of trees. The cheapest solution would not be the best for the problem of rutted pavements. He would look at where Cumberland Road was on the schedule. Marisa asked if the seal was temporary on the pavements and roads and how long does the seal stay. Sam said that the road was very old but the surfacing would add to its life - a decade or more for each road. By sealing the road the water was kept in. Water was the worst problem because of ice.

Helen said the Group used to have useful visits around the town and it would be useful to do so again. Sam said that there were bigger budgets in the past. But if the Group wanted to talk about access issues that he was the officer who we should ask. Funding was available and ward Members were able to request money to create dropped crossings, for example. Stu asked about overhanging branches and hedges and if could he report them if they were a hazard. Sam

said that anything to do with any problems on the highway could be sent to highway.inspectors@reading.gov.uk

Cllr James said that there were some questions at the last meeting about disabled access during roadworks in Tilehurst. She asked what kind of messaging was sent to residents to let them know of road closures. Sam said that a letter drop was planned, social media was used and yellow warning signs were put up. An area map was sent to the contractors, but sometimes they could not get access to blocks of flats and so they had to put the letters on the front doors. Some roads had many residents and some might be missed in the letter drop.

Cllr James asked if someone was disabled and roadworks had started, how they could contact the Council to find out about access. Sam said that they could telephone the Council or send a message to the team inbox, but on the day team members were available onsite, and the contractors would also be happy to be approached. People should ask for the site foreman. In emergencies emergency services vehicles had precedence, if residents needed to get out for an appointment arrangements could be made for vehicle access if the Council knew in advance. One of the lessons that had been learned was to add a line in the letters explaining that if access was needed, residents should talk to the people onsite and access would be given when it was safe to do so.

Helen said that she wanted to make a belated vote of thanks and recognised that the team probably did not get enough thanks. When London Road had been refurbished it was very difficult to cross the road, but the men onsite had been very kind and helpful and had provided assistance. Sam said that most of the time people wanted to help and often had time and capacity to help. It was in the interest of companies to show that they were a good company. Installation of cables had been causing problems, especially in Tilehurst, but the Council was putting pressure on companies to improve the way that they worked.

Stu said that the works had caused chaos in Tilehurst and had made it impossible to get to the bus stop. Sam said that Cllr Page had intervened, and this had meant that there had been improving. Traffic management and communication had improved.

Bob said that he was still receiving letters that he could not read, even though he had requested email communication. Sam said that when a letter drop to thousands of homes it wasn't clear who needed information in different languages, different formats and so on. There were other methods of communication such as the website and social media. This was a challenge and he would welcome a discussion with the Group as to how this could be improved. Cllr James asked Helen Bryant where this information was held.

She said that she was unsure and that communications had been discussed at length within the Council. Work was being done around accessible communications. She said that she would make enquiries. Bob said that he did not wish to click the email button on the website to request information every time. Bob said that it would be useful for Reading Association for the Blind among others. Bob said that he once found that a letter had been sent about a road closure for resurfacing and so he had had to contact his friend to tell him that he would not be able to visit that day. Cllr James said that it would be useful to feed this information back to the team.

Cllr James thanked Sam for his presentation.

6. THE ORACLE - DEAF AWARENESS, QUIET SHOPPING HOUR, WEBSITE, SUBTITLING IN VUE CINEMA

Councillor James said that this had come up as a result of lobbying about subtitles in cinemas. There was an ongoing campaign by www.yourlocalcinema.com and other groups for sign language showings of films to be at accessible times, especially for people who would be working during the day, and not just at random times or at the end of screenings. There had been a marked difference between the Biscuit Factory which had had shown, for example, the latest Bond film at 7pm which was a very easy time for people to go, and The Oracle's screenings at Vue, although Vue had screenings for autistic people.

She asked if any of the members of the Group had anything to share.

Helen said that she had wanted to bring up the subject originally because there had been a wheelchair user on the website.

Stu said that he found The Oracle confusing and so he didn't go there on his own. Bob said that he found it hard to get around. Stu said that he did not find the Oracle as user friendly as Festival Place in Basingstoke; it was on a grid, and there was a basic two-level system. He would rather go there to shop which was disheartening. Helen said that she had been to Festival Place and found it very disorientating; she got to another level in the centre but could not work out how she got there. Stu said that it was much easier than Reading. He said that there was also a problem with rubbish in the street, which was very difficult with a guide dog.

Cllr James asked what would make things easier. Stu said that there was no crossing from Queen Victoria Street to where O'Neill's was, and buses made it very difficult. The crossing between where the Metro Bank was and Caffè Nero (now Black Sheep) was almost impossible when you were alone. You could not rely on drivers slowing down for you. He said that he had been told by a bus driver that he would have to walk all the way to the end of West

Street. Bob said that the crossing at the end of West Street near Friar Street was difficult because it was not a straight crossing, it was on a corner. People using white canes had to work out the angles and use two sets of lights. Kerbs were non-existent in that area. Bob had found himself in the middle of the road rather than on the pavement on occasion. There needed to be a crossing from somewhere near Metro Bank to where Caffè Nero (now Black Sheep) was. Councillor James said that there had been a crossing but it had been taken away. Stu said that he had been part of a campaign against the decision, and Bob said that he had brought the issue up several times at the Access and Disabilities Working Group. Stu said that Minster Street was even worse because of bad state of the surfaces. He said that he had no faith in bus drivers to slow down for him.

Cllr Rowland said that it was disturbing that people still struggled with access to the town centre, and it was something that needed to be addressed.

Sam said that it was good that these issues were being raised. Money was available and there was still a long way to go. Members of the Group needed to let him know of any issues.

Stu said that he was very happy to meet in the town centre to discuss the problems.

Helen said that she felt that people had been treated badly when they went to meetings regarding, for example, Target Junction. That crossing was very scary to use. Wheelchair users who were low down found it very hard to see when it was safe to cross. She avoided using the junction whenever she could. People did not know when who was going to drive over it and when. Sam said that it could be looked at. Cllr James said that she thought that she had protested about Target Junction at the time.

Another area that was a problem was by o'Neill's near to the Town Hall - it was a blind spot. Stu agreed and said that if people were trying to cross from the shop on the corner, near where the 33, 15 and 16 buses stopped, the engine noise from the buses meant that other buses could not be heard. Sighted people could not see round the buses and if you could not see you would not know when to cross.

Cllr Rowland said that work was being done on a revised town centre strategy and the Group should be involved.

Stu said that wayfinding needed to be improved in The Oracle.

Bob said that he had not heard anything when he asked if he could be shown around what was happening for Purple Tuesday at The Oracle. Helen said that she thought that it had not been well publicised this time.

Helen said that she wanted to let people know that deaf awareness had been featured on the website.

There was a quiet time for shopping, which might have been as a result of Purple Tuesday one year. This was for people who might find shopping at busy times difficult.

Cllr James said that she hoped that features that were advertised at The Oracle were delivered well and consistently.

Stu said that one thing that could be done would be to have greeters for disabled people and welcome them and ask if there was anything that they needed.

Cllr Rowland said that it was like the Assisted Travel Lounge at Reading Station that the Group had been involved in; if you did need help you could go.

Cllr James said that support on arrival would be very useful.

7. ACTIVE TRAVEL FUND TRANCHE 2 SCHEME

www.reading.gov.uk/activetravel

Cllr James read from the statement on the Website:

In May 2020, the Government launched a £2billion package to create a new era for cycling and walking in the UK. As part of this, a new Active Travel Fund was released, consisting of two tranches:

- [Tranche 1](#) - supported the installation of temporary projects for the COVID-19 pandemic
- [Tranche 2](#) - supported the creation of longer-term projects

There was a consultation which was due to close on 6 December. This focussed on Shinfield Road. She urged members of the Group to respond.

Helen said that she had explained in her response to the consultation that disabled people did not like sharing spaces with bicycles for many reasons. She knew someone who had been injured by a cyclist. Cyclists and pedestrians needed to be separated.

Stu pointed out that if the space between cyclists and pedestrians was only a line, he could not tell his guide dog where to go and to stay on one side of the line.

Bob said that he could not find a line with his white cane, it needed to be identifiable.

Stu said that he agreed with Helen. Bob said that it appeared to be separate lanes.

8. DISABILITY HISTORY MONTH - 18 NOVEMBER - 20 DECEMBER

www.ukdhm.com

Cllr James explained when the month ran from and to, and the theme of the month, which this time was relationships, sex and hidden disabilities. She asked for ideas of how people could be better allies.

As far as Helen knew there was nothing happening locally and Helen said that she had just wanted to bring the event to the Group's attention. She said that maybe next year something could be done to mark it locally. It would be easier after the pandemic. She said that the perception seemed to be, among the general public, that disabled people did not want to have relationships or to become parents, and it was even worse if a disability or impairment was not visible.

Just that morning Helen had watched This Morning and there was a participant who said that she had been born with "a visible difference" who had gone on a date, and the man had left after 20 minutes of talking, having made an excuse. She was distraught and upset. All in the studio were very upset themselves, and very sympathetic. Helen also knew someone who had had a similar experience on a dating app. She said that people did not treat disabled people with respect.

Stu said that it was very difficult, especially for young people and it needed to be out in the open.

Cllr James said that it was difficult to talk about relationships generally openly. Disability added another element which made it harder. Disabled people were routinely asked inappropriate questions about their abilities.

Members of the Group confirmed this. People thought that disabled people were not entitled to a private life. Cllr James said that she had a hidden impairment which had caused issues for her in professional environments. Her partner was also profoundly Deaf. Information at school for Deaf people was sometimes missed There was a website called www.signhealth.org.uk which explained things well. The subject did need to be explored.

Cllr James wondered if there could be events as part of Disability History Month. Black History Month was celebrated in Reading, and this should be too.

Helen said that she had been trying to get Disability Pride established in Reading for a long time. It had been done very successfully in Brighton and all over the world. Disability Pride was held in the summer, which was a better time than that dedicated to Disability History Month. Helen proposed that we try to establish it in the town. Helen said that she was willing to help establish an event.

Cllr James said that a Disability Pride day was a good idea, and it could expand over the years.

Stu said that many disabled people were not getting the help or community spirit that they were entitled to. He was in favour of the idea.

Helen said that the Physical Disabilities Sensory Needs Network at the Council had had several awareness raising events in the town, but she wanted this to be a pride event, which was very different. The Chair had stepped down and she was not aware of the status of the Network.

Communications would need to be involved, and there was a lot to decide.

Cllr James said that there should be a planning meeting.

Helen said that an outdoor event would be better for an event. Disability History Month was not an appropriate time.

Cllr James said that Cllrs Rowland and Barnett-Ward should be involved and that she was very much in favour of the idea. Cllr Rowland was Lead Councillor for Recreation and Cllr Barnett-Ward was Lead Councillor for Neighbourhoods & Communities.

9. DISABILITY NEWS

Helen said that Leicester City Council had installed some illustrated crossings which were not disability friendly, especially for people who were visually impaired.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-58653989>

They had flowers and lots of decoration. It might not be recognised as a crossing by some people. Reading had its own rainbow crossing, but if there were any plans for any others care needed to be taken to ensure that crossings were accessible.

Sam said he was aware of that crossing in Leicester. A hold had been put on any other colourful crossings in Reading that would not comply with the law. The rainbow crossing was straight lines, which was less confusing. He said that the Transport Research Laboratory had been commissioned by Transport for London for research.

There was a Thank You to NHS Staff sign on one of the roads near to the hospital, which had not caused any problems for pedestrians or drivers. No further colourful crossings would be installed in Reading without proper guidance.

Helen said that there had been a problem in Reading in Rupert Square with some of the parking spaces; they were too small, they were used by drivers without Blue Badges and they were not fit for purpose. Sam said that most parking spaces in residential areas were not enforceable.

[Severely disabled Reading woman battles council over 'nightmare' parking - Berkshire Live \(getreading.co.uk\)](https://www.getreading.co.uk/news/2019/05/20/severely-disabled-reading-woman-battles-council-over-nightmare-parking-berkshire-live)

There had been a problem with Reading Buses where 4 buses had gone past a disabled young boy and did not let him on because there were people in the spaces. Helen said that she had had problems in the past. People put their luggage in the way and other things. Cllr James said that the Council could talk about this. Cllr Williams was on the board of Reading Buses. Bob said that drivers were sometimes abused by people when they were asked to move.

[Four Reading Buses 'did not let on boy with a wheelchair because there wasn't any space' - Berkshire Live \(getreading.co.uk\)](https://www.getreading.co.uk/news/2019/05/20/four-reading-buses-did-not-let-on-boy-with-a-wheelchair-because-there-wasnt-any-space-berkshire-live)

The Government could be forced to re-write the National Disability Strategy because it was unlawful, according to campaigners. Thérèse Coffey, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, said that she did not have a legal duty to consult with disabled people on the Strategy before it was published and had chosen not to do so. Stu said that she had a moral duty.

[Government must rewrite its National Disability Strategy, court is told - Disability News Service](https://www.disabilitynews.org/2019/05/20/government-must-rewrite-its-national-disability-strategy-court-is-told)

The Government was considering merging Personal Independence Payment and Universal Credit. Helen said that this was worrying because she had failed to get Universal Credit.

[THE GOVERNMENT IS CONSIDERING MERGING 'PIP' & 'UC' | Disability Talk](https://www.disabilitytalk.org.uk/news/2019/05/20/the-government-is-considering-merging-pip-uc)

Helen said that she thought that PIP was a good system. Cllr James said that any system that has 2 thirds of appeals upheld was not a functional one. It took Stu 9 months, 2 appeals and a tribunal to get PIP. The hearing took 5 minutes. Bob said that the cost was more than was saved. Stu said that when people filled out the form, they needed to remember to imagine how they functioned on their worst day. Bob agreed. It was unpleasant but was a necessity. People should not give up.

[THE GOVERNMENT IS CONSIDERING MERGING 'PIP' & 'UC' | Disability Talk](#)

Helen then explained that there had been problems in York. An umbrella group, Local Disabled People's Organisations (DPO), was formally objecting to the footstreet extensions being made permanent. There was no access through and no parking close by.

[York council 'breaching human rights' over 'devastating' footstreets ruling | YorkMix](#)

AOB

Sam answered a question from the last meeting about the width of pavements. 2m was the starting point and 1.4m as an absolute minimum. Any crossing put in had to be flush with a rounded kerb (bullnose). 6mm was the highest that was allowed from being flush to the road.

It was difficult living in an old town - some footpaths were less than one meter wide, but they could not be changed.

Cllr James thanked everyone, especially Sam and Jo for their presentations.

Bob remarked that it was a shame that more of the regular attenders of the Group were not present.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

3 March - on Teams.