

## DISABILITY AND INCLUSION FORUM

MONDAY, 9 DECEMBER 2019

PRESENT: Angela Clark (Chairman), Lisa Hughes (Vice Chairman), Robin Pemberton, Sharon Carrigan, Peter Haley, Councillors Gurch Singh and David Coppinger

Also in attendance: Jill Caress and Shaqila Ahmed (Housing Solutions).

Officers: Wendy Binmore, Neil Walter, Rachel Kinniburgh, Rebecca Kelly and Charlie Baker.

### WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed Members to the Disability and Inclusion Forum.

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Tim Clare, Sharon Bunce, Claire Watson, Dominic Manley, Councillor Donna Stimson, Barbara Richardson, Tracy Hendren, Emma Congerton, Councillor John Bowden and Councillor Ross McWilliams.

### MINUTES FROM LAST FORUM AND ACTIONS MONITORING

**RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting of the last Access Advisory Forum held on 9 September 2019 were approved.**

### MATTERS ARISING - MAIDENHEAD STATION JUNCTION

The Chairman read out a statement from Ben Smith, Head of Commissioning – Communities which followed up two action points from the last meeting:

**“ACTION: Ben Smith to explore possibility of installing a bus shelter and to take up discussions on connectivity with the west of the borough. This item related to a shelter on the A308 opposite the station – a new shelter will be installed as part of the Maidenhead Station project. In addition, officers are working closely with bus operators and developers to improve bus services and waiting facilities in the town centre area (for example: new, improved bus stops in Broadway providing connectivity to ‘The Landings’ and any development of the Nicholsons centre / car park site).**

**ACTION: Ben Smith to confirm whether flat access to the car park. The route from Maidenhead Station to Stafferton Way car park has been audited in terms of accessibility. The route is largely compliant but additional works will be completed as part of the Maidenhead Station project to deliver further improvements which will provide a fully accessible route between the station and Stafferton Way multi-storey car park. A ‘drop-off’ zone will also be created at the car park.**

Members noted that these developments did not address the issue of people being dropped off and collected by services such as “People to Places”. It was a serious issue as the station forecourt would need reasonable space for access needs. The Parking Principal stated he would take the comments back to the Head of Commissioning – Communities.

**ACTION: Neil Walter to discuss with Ben Smith the provision of reasonable space for access needs as part of station collections/drop-off points**

## MATTERS ARISING - BLUE BADGE PARKING

Neil Walter, Parking Principal, stated the Town Hall car park had been removed to make way for development and that the five blue badge bays attached to that site had now gone. There were to be significant changes to Park Street and St Ives Road that would affect blue badge holders. Phase three of the Chapel Arches scheme next to The Bear pub was underway and the drawing he circulated showed the changes to the Colonnade. All parking bays had been removed except for the loading bay. Parking bays were now being located on the south side, where there was no dropped kerb or access to the pavement and drivers will open their doors onto a highway opposite a loading bay.

Neil Walter advised that whilst colleagues from Highways were involved in these changes he was not and would have expressed concerns regarding the changes which impacted on blue badge holders. Of the new parking bays, two were electric charging points and there was also a taxi rank. The Vice Chairman acknowledged that installing charging points on the footpath would restrict movement on the pavement and therefore the new parking bays would be unviable. The Parking Principal noted that the only viable solution was to use the loading bay on the north side so there would be direct access onto the footpath, however that meant removing the loading bay. He added he would make that suggestion to Highways and that Councillor Stimson had said she would take the comments back to the Highways team and try to find a solution. If the loading bay were to be made into parking bays it would accommodate three cars. The Parking Principal said he was happy to go back to the Highways Team with any suggestions.

The Parking Principal advised that he had asked for changes to the road outside the Town Hall on St Ives Road to make it more accessible. It was acknowledged that disabled parking provision on Park Street is currently inadequate and not user-friendly. People to Places would use the existing bays and if they were full they would have to stop on raised crossings or use the loading bay. The Parking Principal had spoken to Councillor Stimson about use of the crescent outside the Town Hall for drop-offs and pick-ups and Councillor Stimson had said she would take that forward and find out if it could be done.

Disabled bays on St Ives Road would stay and the only ones lost would be the limited waiting bays outside the library. Whilst this was not ideal the Parking Principal could ask for bays to be installed in that area. The Chairman stated resident services were held in the library and people were going into the Town Hall so having adequate provision was necessary as it was a key place in the town centre that disabled people would use. The Parking Principal responded that it might be best to keep the parking on the library side of the street and take the bays away on the Town Hall side and then install a crossing to get across to the Town Hall. The Chairman confirmed access was needed on both sides of the car, so any solution that just protects from the highway in this location was not adequate. The Parking Principal said the kerb could be levelled with the surface on the Town Hall side so drivers were safe exiting and the pavement needed to be flat.

The Chairman asked if there had been a suggestion of using the Town Hall garden for disabled parking. The Parking Principal replied that was not in his remit as it was not on the highway but, Councillor Stimson was going to talk to colleagues about that. He added that using the space outside the Registry Office for disabled parking also needed to be discussed with those colleagues as that was also not in his remit. Councillor Stimson had the plans and he would talk to her to see what progress had been made. It would be ideal to make the changes as the regeneration works were going on, instead of waiting till they were finished and then making the changes.

**ACTION: Neil Walter to discuss blue badge parking provision further with colleagues in Highways Services and liaise with Councillor Stimson on current plans**

Councillor Coppinger stated he was glad Councillor Stimson was taking all the suggestions forward as he did not see why the area around the Town Hall could not be disabled-only parking. The Vice Chairman stated it spoke volumes on issues of access in design and it was disappointing that the professional experts were missing these big things out and ultimately not treating able and disabled people equally. The Vice Chairman acknowledged that existing street furniture did not leave enough space for a mobility scooter and she wondered if any equality impact assessments had been done at the time the Town Hall car park had been sold off.

Robin Pemberton stated there was a prime facility in the Town Hall but there was no parking within 50 metres of the entrance as spaces would be lost and were already limited. The Chairman asked if when schemes were planned all aspects of inclusion were given a fair space. A lot of Councillors were on the Planning Committee but none were dedicated to look at disabled design. There was a strong case to have a Councillor that represents people with disability on the planning committees. Councillor Coppinger responded that he could not involve himself with planning as it was a conflict of interest due to him being a lead member, however he liked the idea and did not disagree as long as what was required sat within planning law. If decisions made were not covered by planning law, the developer could get any decision overturned at appeal. The Chairman stated so many other Local Authorities managed to do so. Councillor Coppinger commented that whilst plans may have been approved, the focus was on the building and not everything else. Robin Pemberton stated it was incumbent for the planning team to look at access and ensure accessibility. Councillor Coppinger replied the design for Maidenhead was for less cars, not more.

The Parking Principal stated Grove Road car park was part of another development scheme and there was no blue badge parking currently part of the scheme. He did not think the developer was starting works until 2021/22 and so he was happy to discuss where blue bays could be located on the site. It could be two areas, one at each end of the car park which would mean the three of four bays lost at the Town Hall car park could be relocated to there. The Vice Chairman said it was a good idea but she did not think it would solve all the problems.

The Parking Principal explained that the North Yard of the Town Hall was used predominantly by the Job Centre staff under lease, so there were currently only two or three spaces for council staff to use. The Chairman asked if the Parking Principal could emphasise to Councillor Stimson that two permanent disabled spaces were required, one at the front and one at the back of the Town Hall.

## MATTERS ARISING - UPDATE ON REGENERATION PROGRAMME

Councillor Coppinger stated the Landing Site had been cleared and a temporary car park established with a number of disabled parking bays. He was not certain when building works would start on that site. Consultations on the Nicholson's Centre were being run and the submission of a planning application was some time away. The owners of the site want a flagship block in the centre of Maidenhead and are looking for something quite high as they feel the Town Centre would cope with 25 storeys. He added that Shanly were at the second stage of the Chapel Arches development and that was going well.

Regarding the redevelopment of Maidenhead Town Centre, Councillor Coppinger said it was unlikely that we would see big shopping centres like Reading and so JTP Architects were looking at creating a "village-feel" with small shops, bars, restaurants.

The Braywick Park Leisure Centre was coming along well, but work could not start on St Cloud Way until the centre was open and so works were unlikely to start there for another 9 months or so. A planning application for the private section of St Cloud Way had been received and that may include a large building.

The Chairman said she was concerned about the doctors and dentist surgeries on St Cloud Way and where patients using the Magnet car park would go during the development. Councillor Coppinger said he had not seen all of the details but parking was to be considered. The Chairman acknowledged that the plans should be considered from a restricted mobility perspective, and she needed to voice that concern regarding parking before it was too late. Councillor Coppinger said it was on the agenda but he would take that point back to the planners. The Chairman added that it was not possible for some people with mobility issues to make it across the footbridge from the Sainsburys car park with a rollator type aide.

Councillor Coppinger explained that it was proposed that Reform Road stayed commercial, in which case medical facilities could be housed there as there was a lot more parking available. He had not seen the planning application yet but he was expecting one for two new blocks at the entrance to the station - one office block and one accommodation block - so will provide a good new entrance from the motorway, but this had not reached the planning stage yet.

There had been no movement on the Golf Course site yet. Councillor Stimson was leading on place-making and was looking at things like cycle paths. St Mark's Hospital was developing the site and the CCG had no plans to remove the medical facility on the site, all services there currently would continue. A number of wards had been derelict for some time and office areas were not suitable for medical use. The office areas would become accommodation and the medical facility would stay. Councillor Coppinger had seen draft plans of a two-storey hospital block and it would increase services at the site compared to what was there at present.

The football pitch was due to be discussed on the week commencing the 16 December 2019 and a proposal had been made. The council will discuss that in 2020. The Chairman suggested that having a football pitch in the centre of Town was madness. Councillor Coppinger stated that he expected the site to be a mixed development and that whilst the football club had always wanted to stay in the town centre Braywick Park was still pretty much the centre of town.

## MATTERS ARISING - ACCESSIBLE HOMES AND THE BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

Lisa Hughes stated that the deadline for submitting comments on the Borough Local Plan (BLP) was midnight on 15 December 2019. A survey had been commissioned to understand the needs of residents. Lisa Hughes was preparing a comment and the approach taken was to go through all the documents on the portal. There were eight documents she would reference and there were four tests of soundness. The documents referenced in the BLP submission included the Boroughwide Design Guide, the BLP Submission Version, Equality, the SHMA and the Viability Update. Lisa Hughes acknowledged that in the current BLP only 5% of homes would be wheelchair accessible and the documents make misleading statements on categories 1-3. The summarised points raised in the consultation response are as follows:

Referred each point of concern in the documents below to the tests of soundness. Referred to the six local authorities below as evidence that far greater numbers of Accessible & Adaptable and Wheelchair User homes could be specified in adopted local plans.

### **Documents referenced in consultation response**

1. Borough Local Plan (2013-36) Submission Version incorporating proposed changes October 2019
2. Borough Wide Design Guide (Draft)
3. BLPSV-PC Main Proposed Changes Table
4. Equality Impact Assessment
5. Housing Topic Paper
6. Local Development Scheme (LDS) Oct 19
7. Strategic Housing Market Assessment Berkshire (including South Bucks) (2016)
8. Viability Update (2019)

### **NPPF Tests of soundness:**

1. Positively prepared: Objective assessment of needs
2. Justified: Based on a robust and credible evidence base
3. Effective: Deliverable over its period based on effective joint working on cross-boundary strategic priorities *not included in the D&IF response*
4. Consistent with National Policy: Either accords with NPPF and other policies or demonstrates clear and convincing reasons for varying from these

**Examples of recently adopted Local Plans** – to show that with an “objective assessment of needs” and a “robust and credible evidence base”, including viability testing, local authorities can produce sound housing policies that meet the needs of their older residents and residents with disabilities.

Local Authority	Date Plan Adopted	% Cat 2 Homes	Development Size for Cat 2	% Cat 3 Homes	Development Type for Cat 3
City of Lincoln	Apr 17	30%	6 or more		
Canterbury City	Jul 17	20%	All major		
Mid-Sussex	Mar 18	20%	5 or more AND	4%	Affordable Homes
West Oxfordshire	Sep 18	Minimum 25%	50 or more	5%	Counts towards 25% Cat 2
Poole	Nov 18	20%	11 or more		
South Hams	Mar 19	20%	5 or more	2%	50 or more

## ITEM - HOUSING FOR ALL WITH DISABILITIES

Jill Caress, Housing Solutions, explained that Housing Solutions bought the housing stock in Maidenhead from the Council and had just over 3,000 properties in their portfolio. Some had been adapted, and in the last 20 years or so they had been building new homes which were a combination of adapted houses for various disabilities and specific units for older people. Newer housing, where Housing Solutions had some control, was being built for lifetime needs but some units were acquired from developers so some new stock had suitable access for disabled visitors but not all. Jill Caress acknowledged that Housing Solutions tries to adapt their housing stock and applies for grants or funds up to £10,000 for adaptations themselves. They have adapted a lot of housing stock into wheelchair accessible units.

Jill Caress confirmed that Housing Solutions does not have inhouse occupational therapists and so work with the council's therapists or private occupational therapists if they are employed by the resident directly. The reason for this is because Housing Solutions works across several local authorities and some of those LAs did not accept recommendations from the inhouse occupational therapists, and so whilst having that inhouse resource had been useful they have discontinued it and the process is quite long as a result. Some of the new-build housing is disabled-friendly, however the communal areas were not and parking is an issue.

The Chairman said it appeared that disabled access seemed to be an afterthought. Jill Caress said there was a need for casual parking for carers and medical staff, and that needed addressing. The Chairman asked who kept the list of people requiring adapted housing. Shaqila Ahmed, Housing Solutions, confirmed they kept their own list for transferring tenants, however if a homeless person was referred by the council then the council would hold that list.

Charlie Baker, RBWM Housing Services, confirmed that the council held the list for those over the age of 18 years. The council also received referrals from Optalis and then a joint assessment was carried out. The service was going online and so that would help to find suitable properties where adaptations were needed. The Housing Team also worked with Achieving for Children to support care-leavers. The council received applications from

individuals as well as referrals and the Team would be made aware of someone requiring housing through referring agents. The council was always open to adapting and improving the process for a system that made it better. Robin Pemberton enquired if disability adaptation grants were still available and Charlie Baker confirmed the council still dealt with those.

Jill Caress acknowledged that the issue was when a property, previously adapted for use by a disabled tenant, became vacant but there was no one at the time on the housing list who could make use of the adaptations. In these instances the property had to then be allocated to someone without those particular needs.

Jill Caress explained that they were unable to house mobility-restricted people on upper floors in flats or apartments in case there was a fire or the lifts were out of service. She also had to ensure the whole building was user-friendly, not just the flat. Jill Caress stated they always tried to house people on the ground floor, particularly if there was only one lift. The Chairman commented that the whole of the Nicholson's site was to be retail on the ground floor so that would prevent disabled people from being housed there. Jill Caress responded there would need to be an evacuation plan for disabled people before it could be considered.

Shaqila Ahmed, Housing Solutions, acknowledged that communal doors were heavy so some disabled people were unable to use them, so even a ground floor flat may not be suitable. The Chairman asked if there was any way that the Housing Solutions team could meet with the council's Planning team to try and overcome some of the issues. Jill Caress responded that with developer-led schemes they already had planning consent, meaning that Housing Solutions had very little influence. A lot was done when Housing Solutions developed their own schemes but they were very happy to work with the council to try and improve things. Housing Solutions had just received planning consent for Harrow Lane and that would be built to lifetime homes standard and would be 23 flats in two blocks. Regarding private-led developments, the Chairman queried if there was a way council Planning services could influence what was provided by the development. Councillor Coppinger confirmed they could only make developers do what planning law dictates. The council could influence as much as it could and some developers were more approachable than others. The Chairman stated that the fundamental problem was ensuring facilities allowed carers and medical staff access to their clients. Jill Caress agreed and added it was a very difficult area, especially in the Town Centre.

Councillor Coppinger acknowledged that the work Housing Solutions had done with families on the Brill House development made the scheme work. The scheme was designed so that people who wanted to stay together could live on the ground floor together, and upstairs there were five self-contained flats for people with learning difficulties. Two shared-ownership units were also on the site. By the time the people had moved in they knew the place quite well and it was what they wanted.

## ITEM - MAIDENHEAD TOWN CENTRE

The Chairman acknowledged that she had attended a community planning day in November hosted by JTP Architects who are responsible for the development of the Nicholsons Community Project. JTP have been soliciting public feedback to help shape proposals ahead of a Maidenhead Vision Report Back presentation to the community in mid-January. The Chairman had advised JTP that engagement with the Forum would be invaluable to ensuring that accessibility is promoted in emerging proposals and that a meeting to go through the proposals together would be welcomed.

The Chairman noted that when you looked at artist impressions of how the development would look there were little alleyways and street furniture and that people with disabilities trying to navigate these public realms would find it difficult as a result. Furthermore, in the impressions of exposed areas it was never raining, whereas currently in the frequent inclement weather Nicholson's Walk is a sanctuary for people with disabilities as it is sheltered, warm and shops are all on one level. All that was to be lost, which would mean a

loss of potential shoppers. The Chairman queried what, if all were to be demolished at the same time, would happen to the post office located in WH Smith's and other retailers. Councillor Coppinger responded that any empty units on the High Street would house all of the shops from the Nicholson's Centre while it was rebuilt.

The Chairman proposed that an extraordinary meeting of the Forum be scheduled for early January 2020 so that Members could meet with JTP, view the presentation of proposals and have any queries or questions they may have answered. The Chairman requested the additional meeting to be in early January 2020 so that any comments or feedback could be incorporated into the public meeting on the 14 January 2020.

#### DATE FOR FUTURE FORUMS

The dates for future meetings were noted.

Charlie Baker also encouraged Members of the Forum to attend weekly team meetings with the Housing Team as all were welcome.

The meeting, which began at 11.00 am, finished at 12.50 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....