

DISABILITY AND INCLUSION FORUM

MONDAY, 21 JUNE 2021

PRESENT: Angela Clark (Chairman), Lisa Hughes (Vice-Chairman), Sharon Bunce, Sharon Carrigan, Tim Clare, Peter Haley, Dominic Manley and Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra

Also in attendance: Councillors Simon Bond, Maureen Hunt, Samantha Rayner, Gurch Singh and Donna Stimson

Officers: Shilpa Manek, Helen Preedy, Melissa Whitley and Helen Woodland

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting.

The Chairman commented on the demise of SportsAble and what a loss this was for the borough. It was hoped that something new and exciting came to replace it.

Councillor Rayner informed the Forum that the building was currently with the property team to decide the future of it. The Council had worked very closely with SportsAble but finally the decision was made that it was not the right sustainable model for the future. The Braywick Leisure Centre had worked closely with SportsAble to offer all facilities to all members. All of the needs from SportsAble had been found a new home. This was a strong change.

Councillor Rayner informed the Forum at the end of the meeting that the building had been offered to the Maidenhead Heritage Centre and the report was being presented to Cabinet later in the week for approval.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies had been received from Councillor Carole Da Costa, Robin Pemberton and Claire Watson.

MINUTES FROM THE LAST FORUM AND ACTIONS MONITORING

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2021 were a true and accurate record.

This was proposed by Lisa Hughes and seconded by Dominic Manley.

MATTERS ARISING - A308 TOUCAN CROSSING, SURROUNDING PAVEMENTS AND CYCLE RACK

Helen Preedy, Equalities and Community Engagement Officer read out an update from Sarah Plowman. It read that both trees had now been removed and had been fully paved.

The railings to stop people walking into the cycle racks have been partially completed. Two further railings needed to be installed where the station hoarding was erected, and this is due to be completed tomorrow once the hoarding had been removed.

All works were on track for the phased reopening.

MATTERS ARISING - BLUE BADGE PARKING

The Chairman commented on the table that there were 49 blue badge bays in Maidenhead. Windsor now needed to be looked at.

Lisa Hughes thanked Neil Walter and his team. The bays were well placed, all over Maidenhead. This had really moved Maidenhead closer to the average number of bays for town centres. Other town centres now needed to be looked at.

Dominic Manley echoed Lisa's comments. The distribution of the accessible spaces around the town centre was excellent. Dominic Manley also congratulated Neil Walter and his team.

Councillor Singh also thanked Neil Walter and his team for working with him to get the bays put in on Bridge Avenue.

MATTERS ARISING - BOROUGH LOCAL PLAN

The Chairman informed the Forum the Lisa Hughes had put in so much work into campaigning, since 2017 to change policy. And finally, good news was in sight. The Chairman thanked Lisa Hughes for her continual hard work.

Lisa Hughes started by informing the Forum Why the BLP was important, the Borough Local Plan (BLP) set out a comprehensive vision and framework for the future development of RBWM in relation to;

- housing,
- infrastructure,
- the economy,
- community facilities,
- good design of the built environment,
- planning for the impact of climate change
- protecting the natural and historic environment.

The last plan was adopted in 1999 with an update in 2003. The emerging BLP covered the years 2013 to 2033. RBWM submitted the BLP to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government in January 2018 and there had been two subsequent examinations of the plan by the Planning Inspector.

The 2015 Technical Standards (Accessibility for People with Disabilities (PwD)) applied to building new homes. There were mandatory and optional technical standards relating to accessibility for PwD applied to building new homes. The mandatory level, M4(1) would allow most people with a disability to enter a new home and use the facilities on the main floor. It was aimed at allowing most PwD to visit a new home. Two higher optional standards were; M4(2) Accessible & Adaptable Homes and M4(3) Wheelchair User Dwellings. These would allow PwD to live in these homes. M4(2) home cost only slightly more to build than a M4(1) but M4(3) homes

needed more square metres as well as additional features such as strengthened ceilings and bathroom specification.

Since 2017, Lisa Hughes, with the Forum's input and support had sought to have Housing Mix policy (HO2) amended before the BLP is adopted. Policy HO2 in the submitted BLP contained a tiny percentage of M4(2) homes and no M4(3) homes. We contended that it wasn't based on solid estimates of need. This mattered because it failed to address the current and future needs of residents with disabilities and our aging population and its lack of evidence needed could allow developers to challenge whether any homes were needed to be built to higher than mandatory standards.

Lisa Hughes appeared at two sessions of the Inspector's hearings last Autumn and subsequently had positive meetings with Ian Gillespie, a consultant appointed by RBWM to progress the BLP. The following points were discussed:

- The data that was submitted by Lisa Hughes in the consultations to support the need for some M4(3) dwellings and a much higher % of M4(2) homes than in the submitted BLP.
- Why there was such a huge reduction between the 2016 and 2017 BLP versions for M4(2) and M4(3) homes. Was the 2017 viability update the root cause?
- Whether the extra costs included in the 2017 Viability Update for building M4(2) and (3) homes were correct and could be substantiated.

RBWM then carried out more work on evidencing the need for M4(2) and M4(3) homes as well as another viability update. These formed the basis of a document RBWM submitted to the Inspector in March 2021, explaining RBWM's new proposal.

The Inspector wrote to RBWM on March 24th 2021. On Housing Policy HO2 M4(2) and M4(3) she said the following:

10. The M4(2) and M4(3) accessibility and wheelchair housing standards are part of the suite of "optional technical standards" available for local planning authorities to set if they can show evidence of a need for them in their area. Policy HO2 of the PC Plan requires 5% of dwellings on developments of 20 or more to meet the M4(2) standard, but it sets no requirement for M4(3) provision. Neither the specific M4(2) requirement, nor the lack of an M4(3) requirement are clearly supported by the evidence base for the Plan, while the totality of the demographic and viability evidence available indicates that the Plan should be more ambitious.

11. The Council has reviewed the evidence in consultation with relevant participants (see document WK2-02) and now proposes that 30% of dwellings on developments of 20 or more should meet the M4(2) standard, and 5% of dwellings on sites of this size should meet the M4(3) standard. These higher requirements would better reflect the need for accessible accommodation in the Borough, and viability testing indicates that they would be unlikely to have a significant impact upon development viability. Policy HO2 should be modified accordingly to achieve justification and effectiveness.

*the M4(3) homes are subject to site-specific specific viability, topography and site configuration considerations.

This was great news and a big step forward but, as the BLP had not yet been adopted by RBWM, this was not yet the end of the Forum's scrutiny and campaign.

The current status of the BLP and next steps from Cllr Coppinger on 14th June 2021 were that:

- RBWM had received all the feedback from the Inspector regarding changes that she wanted made to the Plan.
- Officers were currently preparing these major modifications.
- The next step would be a consultation, over an extended period because of the holiday season.
- It was expected that the final plan would be taken to Council in November 2021.

Councillor Rayner thanked Lisa Hughes and the Forum for their input into the BLP.

ACTION: Keep on Agenda for next meeting

MATTERS ARISING - CHANGES TO SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Melissa Whitley, Team Lead of Supported Employment Service, introduced Helen Woodland, Head of Team. Melissa Whitley then gave a presentation to the Forum (this had been included in the agenda pack).

The Chairman asked of the twenty-five clients that had transferred from Ways Into Work, how many had found work? Melissa Whitley informed the Forum that there had been no employment opportunities yet, but many voluntary positions had been found and that it was still early days. The Chairman commented that being employed made a big difference for benefits. Melissa Whitley commented that as a result of Covid, it had been a difficult year. She had helped clients to look into e learning to gain additional knowledge and skills whilst they were looking for work.

Lisa Hughes stated that in February 2020 there were 240 people who were being supported or waiting to be supported and around 80 of them were to be retained by Ways Into Work. Optalis are only supporting 25 people, what has happened to the support for the other 135 people? And if Optalis was assisting people with learning disabilities and autism, what about other disabilities? Melissa Whitley informed the Forum that Ways Into Work were still operating and there were other funding streams available too. Melissa Whitley explained that conversations were still taking place about what support was required for other disabilities. The Wokingham strand was still operating, that could provide individual support for people.

Councillor Stimson commented that there was a KickStart Campaign and could this assist as she was on the executive. Melissa Whitley commented that this discussion could be had after the meeting. There had been initial problems with the KickStart Campaign.

Melissa Whitley informed the Forum that not everyone went straight into employment, others had work experience before going into employment.

A short discussion took place about self-referrals and that people could refer themselves through the website, this would then be discussed and taken forward.

ACTION: Invite to Spring meeting for an update

ITEM - WEBSITE IMPROVEMENT AND PANEL OF RESIDENTS UPDATE

Helen Preedy read out an update from Dan Brookman. It was reported that there was now a new search engine, new postcode searcher and the accessibility issue was ongoing. There was now a resident working group in place.

Lisa Hughes commented that thanks to Councillor Samantha Rayner, the first meeting of the working group had taken place where specifics and wider issues were considered.

ACTION: Invite for update at September meeting

ITEM - COMMUNITY HUB PROJECT UPDATE

The Chairman advised Forum Members to channel all question to Helen Preedy who would liaise with Officers to get responses.

Lisa Hughes commented that she had watched the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel and was very pleased to see that the older people in the community had been included, Lisa Hughes wanted to see disability groups also included in the projects.

ACTION: Invite for update at next meeting

ITEM - PEDESTRIAN STRATEGY UPDATE

Sharon Bunce, Forum Member was now working with Lisa Hughes on issues relating to pedestrian safety, parking and public transport with a view to eventually leading on this for the Forum.

To date, Sharon Bunce had been involved with four pedestrian safety items that had arisen across the borough. There were as follows:

1. The pedestrianisation project on Castle Hill in Windsor: Lisa Hughes, Angela Clark, and Sharon Bunce had attended a Zoom meeting with Engineers at Project Centre and RBWM officers to discuss how to maximise safety and inclusivity for the project. The recommendations relating to dropped kerbs, adequate turning spaces and footway widths and tactile paving were positively received.

2. Uncontrolled pedestrian crossing at Bridge Road (Housing Sites Enabling Project: Lisa Hughes made a submission in November 2020 to the consultation on proposed plans for the Bridge Road crossing which was one section of the Housing Enabling Sites Project. The proposal was to reduce the width of the pedestrian refuge at Maidenhead Bridge and add another traffic lane at the roundabout. Lisa Hughes had provided very detailed information from the Department for Transport Traffic Signs Manual (2019) chapter 6 regarding refuge dimensions to enable safe crossing for people with wheelchairs, rollators, pushchairs etc., dropped kerbs and tactile paving for pedestrians with visual impairments.

Since this work had completed, Lisa Hughes and Sharon Bunce had met at the crossing on 17 May to test out how safe or unsafe they felt in using the crossing. There were various aspects of the crossing that had serious safety concerns about:

- The A4 was a very busy road, used by lots of commercial vehicles as well as cars.

- Crossing towards Boulter's Lock involved going across two lanes of traffic. Sight of pedestrians by vehicles in the inner lane could be blocked by vehicles in the inner lane.
- The tactile paving and dropped kerb were very close to the roundabout so it only took two cars or one van/lorry queueing at the roundabout to block the pedestrian crossing point.
- The tapering refuge was now very narrow, even at its widest point.
- The tactile paving on the refuge had been installed with a strange camber and potential trip hazard where two pavers were not level with each other.
- The tactile paving ran in two different directions and they only met for 20cm or so in the middle of the refuge.

Crossing from the refuge onto the Boulter's side of the bridge, pedestrians needed to watch traffic coming from two directions - Ray Mead Road and Bridge Road. It was even worse when you were crossing from the Boulter's side as you had to look 180 degrees behind you to see traffic coming from Ray Mead Road.

Sharon Bunce was in the process of writing to Tim Golabek, RBWM Service Lead – Transport and Infrastructure, to raise the concerns and would update the Forum at the next meeting.

3. Gardener Road:

Some service user feedback had been received about safety issues in Furze Platt due to the lack of dropped kerb crossings for almost three-quarters of a mile along Gardner Road and Switchback Road South. This affected many people using the Chemist, Post Office or Co-op at Shifford Crescent. There were also no dropped kerbs at the junction of Harrow Lane and Queensway – a busy junction close to Furze Platt train station.

Sharon Bunce had attended a site visit on 24 May with Lisa Hughes, Councillors Clark and Del Campo and two engineers from Project Centre.

The outcome of the visit was agreement that a dropped kerb would be installed between Queensway and the Switchback Road North roundabout near the bus stop. A dropped kerb crossing was already scheduled to be installed across Switchback Road North close to the Shifford Crescent shops. Councillor Clark advised that other dropped kerbs across Gardner Road and Switchback Road South would be prioritised as the budget allowed and he would ensure that a bin obstructing the crossing at the traffic light near Furze Platt senior school would be removed.

4. Town centre crossings at the Queen Street/Broadway/Nicholson Walk junctions

Lisa Hughes and Sharon Bunce had recently reviewed the three crossing areas at this junction and believed that there were several safety issues with them including uneven pavements, unaligned tactile paving and some bike racks which may cause a turning obstruction. Sharon Bunce was co-ordinating a site visit with Councillors Singh and Stimson and Lisa Hughes and would report back to the forum at the next meeting.

And finally, Sharon Bunce urged people to get in touch with any concerns that they heard of or observed in relation to pedestrian safety, parking or public transport which impacts on safety and inclusivity for people with additional needs.

Sharon Bunce would also have a look at social media to enable people to raise any matters.

Councillor Stimson commented that information had to be documented correctly so that this could be improved going forward.

ACTION: Update to be provided at next Forum

ITEM - HOUSING STRATEGY UPDATE

The Housing Strategy Update was sent to Forum members in advance of the meeting. The Chairman asked all Members to send any question or points to Helen Preedy who would liaise with Officers.

ITEM - CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE IMPACT ON DISABLED PEOPLE

Councillor Stimson gave a verbal report to the Forum. The update included the following points:

The Climate Change Strategy had had input right from the start from Lisa Hughes. Lisa Hughes had been involved with developing the vision and overall strategy at the onset. There had been good input from the public consultation to the strategy too. The strategy was divided into four areas, Natural Environment, tried to make parks and countryside as accessible as possible. An example is Battlemead Common where four of the fourteen parking spaces will be disabled parking spaces. Also, many benches will be placed there. The most fundamental thing was to have spaces where people could go to be with nature. Other things that were being looked at were having more spaces where people can grow their own vegetables, have things at the right height, have got things which are more tactile and working with schools. There is also a borough biodiversity action plan that is looking at all sorts of habitats. The second of the four areas was Energy, some people with disabilities were more vulnerable to fuel poverty, so by improving the energy efficiency and encouraging people to switch to different energy suppliers, people could be moved out of fuel poverty. Councillor Stimson asked the Forum for how best to communicate this to people who may be in that situation. The third area was Transport, there were appalling public transport routes in the borough. These need to be improved. In the circle economy, the fourth area, an issue was that of waste disposal especially of care items. The borough needed to ensure that everyone had the right waste facilities at home to deal with care waste. Councillor Stimson commented on changing people behaviour and getting people involved in reusing and reinventing and not throwing away. Two new people had joined the circular economy team, one for projects and the other for engagement. Councillor Stimson welcomed any comments and ideas and asked members to email her.

The Chairman commented that one of her worries was the regeneration of the town and the high density of the blocks of flats. Was there anything that could be done to ensure that people living in these areas before they were built or before planning was agreed, that they be reduced and people could be given garden space. Councillor Stimson commented that this could not be done because, in order to increase sustainability, more sustainable cities need to be built, these were more dense and high, in the middle of towns to ensure that the open spaces around them stayed. Roof gardens or balconies could be included and parks. It was not possible to do anything else in order to fulfil the housing numbers.

Lisa Hughes thanked Councillor Stimson and commented that it was good to overshare and the more that hidden disabilities were revealed, the more it helped as a

society and a borough in making it somewhere that's good for all to live in. Lisa Hughes continued and commented on the importance of green and blue spaces, green being kind of woods and fields and the blue being the waterways. With all the tall buildings in the town centre, it is known that from a health point and also in addressing the rise in temperatures caused by climate change, it was a well-known fact that green walls had a significant positive impact. It would be great to be able to influence the design of these tall buildings to include green walls and roof gardens. Lisa Hughes commented on fuel poverty and people with disabilities and it being dangerous as a result of overheating and inadequate ventilation and improper insulation. It was important to incentivise and advertise this to private owners, private renters and registered housing providers to ensure that the insulation was improved. Lisa Hughes commented that there needed to be a review of how highways money was allocated and spent. There needed to be some rebalancing of it. A high percentage was spent on roads and a tiny bit on everything else. More needed to be spent on widening pavements and helping people to get around easier.

Peter Hayley commented that we needed to try and move people away from using cars and onto public transport and community transport. The borough were at the bottom of the list of public transport usage across the whole of England. Also most buses were diesel and it was crucial to move away from that too.

Councillor Stimson informed the Forum that as we were a wealthy borough, we were not entitled to any funding to assist with this so we had to start generating the funding from our businesses and other ways and persuade the government to assist.

The Chairman commented that we were lucky to have such an incredible service as People to Places to get disabled people out of their homes and out and about. It was a great service.

Dominic Manley commented that with respect to the green spaces and the dense developments, vertical gardening and farming was quite established concept at present. Councillor Stimson commented that there had not been much call for this but that could change. The Chairman commented that this would enhance the 'cube-like' new builds.

Lisa Hughes suggested putting planting at low level between the road edge and the pavement to absorb the particulates from exhausts on our busy roads.

Councillor Rayner commented that there would be soft landscaping around the York Road development.

ACTION: Update again after couple of meetings

ITEM - REGENERATION UPDATE

Barbara Richardson had sent around a very brief presentation which had been circulated to Forum Members to look at and channel questions directly to Barbara Richardson.

ACTION: Update at next meeting from Barbara Richardson's replacement

Peter Hayley commented that he had received no further communication on the temporary location for ShopMobility.

Lisa Hughes informed the Forum that there were many open gardens in association with the rotary club. A majority of these gardens were accessible. For more information, visit Maidenhead open gardens website.

Dominic Manley requested that Norden Farm Arts Centre be briefly discussed especially in the light of the SportsAble news. Norden Farm was a very attractive place to go to for disabled people with its large car park, sloped outside, easy access and ramp inside and three wheelchair accessible toilets. Norden Farm was a great location to see shows and attend classes. It would be a tragedy to lose this venue. Dominic Manley raised a question to the council to ask if they were aware of the danger that it was presumably in. Was it on the radar? Were there any support mechanisms in place to support and retain it. The clerk informed the Forum that Norden Farm gave regular updates at the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel where they presented their annual report, funding, difficulties and assistance. The borough was aware and had set a budget aside for Norden Farm and The Old Court in Windsor and were working on a match funding scheme. Councillor Bhangra informed the Forum that both he and Councillor Stuart Carroll had been working closely with Norden Farm and had been lobbying the MPs for funding. Norden Farm had also been doing a lot of work to raise funds too.

Sharon Bunce highlighted the consultation on the future use of day services for people with dementia, learning disabilities and additional complex needs, which was open till the 29 August and it was encouraged that people to participate.

Councillor Singh mentioned the cycle racks but Helen Preedy commended that this had been addressed earlier and it was in hand. Councillor Singh also commented that he was concerned about the Norden Farm funding.

Tim Clare commented that Windsor Arts Centre had struggled for years with its wheelchair accessibility from the front and back doors. About fifteen years ago, shafts were put into the building for lifts but this was never finished.

ACTION: Could Councillor Rayner comment on this

The clerk thanked Lisa Hughes for sending out questions on how the Forum felt about virtual meetings. The clerk commented that everyone liked virtual meetings because of ease but also missed the face to face interactions. The clerk suggested that the next meetings be virtual and have a face to face meeting in March 2022. The Forum agreed.

DATE OF NEXT FORUM

The Forum noted that the next meeting was on Monday 13th September, next meeting.

The meeting, which began at 11.00 am, finished at 1.00 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....