

DISABILITY AND INCLUSION FORUM

Monday 12 June 2023

Present: Lisa Hughes (Vice-Chair), Sharon Carrigan, Dominic Manley and Steve Sansom

Present virtually: Peter Haley and Jatinder Singh

Also in attendance: Councillors Jack Douglas and Helen Price

Also in attendance virtually: Councillor Bond

Officers in attendance: Ellen McManus-Fry and Robyn Bunyan

Welcome and Introductions

The Vice-Chair was in the Chair for the meeting and welcomed all to the Forum.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Sharon Bunce, Tim Clare, Angela Clark and Vicky Holt.

Minutes from the Last Forum

AGREED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting on 13 March 2023 be a true and accurate record.

The Vice-Chair thanked Sharon Bunce for following up the outstanding issue of accessibility of some regenerated parts of Maidenhead. The outdoor accessible lift in the Waterside Quarter at Chapel Arches although early the previous week it had not been working it was operational by Friday. Staff in the Shanly office report that the lift is well used and have confirmed that Shanly are contracted to maintain it. The Vice-Chair queried how easy it was for users to report problems with the lift and how quickly Shanly were required to solve any issues.

Regarding the new footpath from York Road to the library along York stream, it was noted that while the sales office was in situ the pathway only led to a set of steps up to St. Ives Road but now a slope was being built around the eastern edge of the library to create an accessible footpath. The Vice-Chair confirmed that whilst this was not yet open construction was underway.

Replacing the blue badge and shopmobility parking spaces lost with the closure of Nicholsons Car Park

The Vice-Chair thanked Ian Brazier-Dubber, Managing Director of RBWM Property Company for the written update that was circulated. The Vice-Chair queried that the update only mentioned Shopmobility and wondered whether the plan would also relocate the other lost car parking spaces. The Vice-Chair added that there had been suggestions on social media about another potential temporary location noting that this location came with its own set of challenges. She advised the meeting that she would be joining lead councillors and, Peter Haley from People to Places to conduct a site visit later in the week.

Councillor Price commented that the alternative location would not be suitable for residents from rural locations and raised concerns that this would undermine the Mayor's initiative to 'Buy Borough' and felt like a significant compromise.

Peter Haley commented that although he had not been able to attend the recent Maidenhead Town Forum meeting but Angela Clark had advised him that there were various decision deadlines around the Broadway Car Park and Shopmobility would be transferred in November/December. He advised that People to Places had not actively sought alternative locations after being advised that West Street had been identified. He noted that West Street was very busy and could foresee that his colleagues would have to have the same intense discussions with non-Shopmobility car users as they do in Windsor.

The Vice-Chair reflected that the restrictions of who could park in West Street and how that would be enforced would be a critical part of the planning if this is the temporary location solution. The absence of timelines and a plan were disappointing. An indication had been given of 18 months for the demolition and construction of a new car park but this would be followed this up.

ACTION: Ellen McManus-Fry would raise the concerns about how busy parking was at West Street with colleagues in Parking.

Peter Haley reported that over the last financial year between April and December Shopmobility usage was increasing but since January to May their membership had gone down by 7% so the upward trend had been reversed. He advised that Shopmobility was operating at 40% of pre-covid levels. He was worried that residents were finding different locations or not going out at all.

ACTION: Ellen McManus-Fry would raise with Public Health colleagues the links between the parking issues with the Isolation and Loneliness project.

Councillor Douglas queried where the authority to identify a suitable location currently sat and encouraged Peter Haley to engage with the new portfolio holder, Councillor Hill, about this issue and to ensure the people who were best placed to understand suitability were not excluded from the process. It was confirmed that Councillor Hill was part of the site visit that was being undertaken and it would be raised with him then.

The Vice-Chair concluded the item by advising that proposals would be reported to a future Cabinet meeting.

2023 Local elections feedback

Kirsty Hunt, Service Lead: Electoral and Democratic Services gave a presentation to the meeting regarding the Elections held in May 2023. In particular she highlighted that:

- despite increased salaries there had been a higher turnover of the casual staff recruited to support the day
- this had been a national issue for electoral administrators and research was ongoing to see if this was directly related to the introduction of the responsibilities of Elections Act 2022
- venue costs had increased significantly
- no complaints had been received relating to the new locations used
- one accessibility issue had been reported at Dedworth Middle School as due to safeguarding concerns the access to the site was restricted which increased the distance from available parking. Staff had been deployed to open the gates as requested for those unable to walk the longer distance.
- additional accessibility devices had been issued to all stations and no issues were reported about assistance or support to vote
- 137 Voter Authority Certificates were applied for before the deadline
- 11 applications were refused due to unacceptable photographs being submitted and this was only after individuals chose not to resubmit an alternative
- seven people were assisted in the office

- on election day 127 were initially turned away for not having voter identification but of those 94 returned and successfully voted which equated to 99.9% of people being given a ballot paper who attended a polling station

Arising from the discussion it was noted that:

- turnout was consistent with previous years across both attendance and postal voting
- no metrics were available to understand why people did not vote
- the Electoral Commission's data collection reflected the use of greeters or interaction with tellers outside of polling stations
- the Electoral Commission's report on voter ID would hopefully provide more insight into the impact on voting patterns and when the team had capacity this would be explored at a local level
- future elections would incorporate face to face training to emphasise the importance of removing accessibility issues at venue issues
- the upcoming polling station review would invite the Forum to help assess locations to provide insights on access issues

Parallel Windsor

The Vice-Chair explained that Parallel Windsor was a festival of inclusivity which includes with a range of challenge events across a range of distances including 100m, 1k, 5k, 10k & the Super Sensory1K. The event would be held on the Windsor Long Walk with 1,500 people expected to participate in the challenges and up to four thousand attendees to view the festival. The festival brought together a number of zones and the Chair would circulate the update to members of the Forum but included Active Lifestyle, Storytelling, Arts & Crafts, Play, Community, Mind sports, Mindfulness and Skills & Careers. There was also food and drink, a sensory space and a quiet zone. Accessible features include medical support, mobility aids and 3 mobile loos and onsite parking.

Over 40 charities would be taking part and the organisers wanted to thank the organisations within the borough who were supporting the event including:

- People to Places who are supplying shuttles from train stations and mobility aids
- Windsor & Eton Brewery who were providing a bar
- Leisure Focus, Maidenhead Football Club and HealthWatch
- Chris Miller would be taking photos of support dogs and their owners
- Windsor Forest Group
- Marketing support from Visit Windsor and My Royal Borough
- RBWM town managers
- the Library service who were supporting story telling

It was clarified that the festival itself was free to attend on Sunday 2nd July 2023 but there were fees to participate in challenge events.

AccessAble in Maidenhead and Ascot

Robyn Bunyan, Maidenhead Town Manager attended the meeting to provide an update on the development of the AccessAble guides across Maidenhead and Ascot. Following the successful launch in Windsor it was explained that funding had been secured to include 25 guides in addition to basic ones for transport hubs, toilets and parks. The guides will cover a range of restaurants, local theatre, cinema, supermarkets and independent stores. The guides are designed to make sure visitors have all the information needed to have a positive experience and are expected to be launched towards the end of the year. She reported that the businesses that had been approached were excited about being involved. A launch event would be arranged. Initially up to 12 surveys will be conducted for facilities in Ascot.

It was explained that AccessAble had surveyors that go out to venues and take photos and take measurements, template of questions, what facilities are there and full range.

Opportunities for improvement were shared. It was a collaborative approach to help visitors be fully informed before setting off. The details would be recorded against a venue and displayed on the website but a printed copy would also be created. The Vice-Chair highlighted that the mobile app was really comprehensive and could filter to personal choices.

Robyn Bunyan also explained that work was beginning to upgrade and enhance wayfinding within Maidenhead including finger posts, monoliths and directional signage. A lot had changed in the last ten years, so information was out of date and some signage were broken. She was working with wayfinding specialists to have that signage updated, including redeveloped areas and routes of interest. Robyn Bunyan was keen to discuss Wayfinding with the Forum and ensure that any new Wayfinding was following industry standards, ensure that signage symbols were suitable and accessible, and that the signage was highlighting step free routes for example.

ACTION: The Vice-Chair encouraged Robyn Bunyan to notify the Local Access Forum about the work to improve wayfinding.

It was discussed that although the initial number was 25 guides this was an evolving process as businesses realised the opportunity to promote especially as the cost to businesses was not prohibitive. Robyn Bunyan added that accessibility ELearning courses were also available to businesses in the borough.

It was queried whether dementia friendly link could be made in the activities and Robyn Bunyan was keen to pursue this with Age UK.

It was discussed that whilst promotion had occurred when the guides were initially launched more frequent reminders could be shared to encourage residents to use them and help prevent isolation.

ACTION: Robyn Bunyan to confirm if the ELearning course was available for Voluntary Community Services to access.

In response to a query about extending the guides to Polling Stations it was discussed that it may be possible to use the framework of the survey to expand information shared in relation to polling stations.

ACTION: Kirsty Hunt to explore the range of information that could be gathered and shared about polling stations.

Peter Haley requested that due to the temporary relocation of Shopmobility Maidenhead their survey be delayed and Robyn Bunyan confirmed that suitable timing for the survey and inclusion in the guide would be agreed.

Lift access at Maidenhead train station

The Vice-Chair advised the meeting that she was a member of Great Western Railway Access Network and had recently been contacted by Radio Berkshire as a full-time wheelchair user had raised the issue. Operational data had been provided by Network Rail which showed that the Maidenhead station lifts were out of action more frequently e.g. 10% of the time which equated to 17 hours per week. It was not clear from the data whether this was one long issue or several instances. Workarounds when a lift was out of order included the network organising a taxi and although this was helpful it was noted it would involve additional time and stress. It was reported that Network Rail had agreed to funding for lift replacement however this was in the medium term e.g. a number of years away. The Vice-Chair asked Forum colleagues to join her in lobbying them to bring this timing forward.

It was noted that lifts were only really accessible to users when station was staffed as there were issues when remotely operated and difficulties communicating with a remote location. Lift maintenance was undertaken by another third party.

The Vice-Chair advised that the Great Western Railway (GWR) had an Accessibility Panel and have disability support staff so took the issue very seriously by providing high quality disability awareness training for their staff. She reflected that she wished other operators treated disabled and older passengers as seriously as GWR did.

A number of members of the Forum indicated support and the Vice-Chair reiterated that the Forum members and passengers could all contribute to lobbying Network rail to bring the timescales forward.

Any Other Business

The Vice-Chair asked that Supported Living and Supported Housing be included on a future Forum agenda later in the year to incorporate discussion on housing and improving number of supporting living housing units to understand what was in the plan and further specific details on the number to be provided.

The Forum discussed the issue of the impact of the deteriorating condition of pavements and absence of dropped kerbs on accessibility and isolation. It was noted that the functionality was there to report specific sites of issues but that there may not be budget available to maintain it all. It was reported that on slight inclines, areas where there were no lowered kerbs and poor conditions residents had to travel very carefully on certain routes or were unable to travel. The Forum agreed that residents with cognitive and visual impairment were being impacted by the built environment. Ellen McManus-Fry reflected that equality objectives should be built into town planning design and accessibility issues in terms of streetscapes had been discussed before but a mechanism to identify which areas were a priority had not been resolved.

ACTION: Vice-Chair to raise the issue with Councillor Hill as part of the active travel plan.

ACTION: Ellen McManus-Fry to discuss with colleagues in Public Health whether there was capacity to explore capturing positive benefits of improving streetscapes for inclusion in the isolation and loneliness project.

Ellen McManus-Fry referred back to Shopmobility issue that was discussed earlier in the agenda. She confirmed that the issue had been discussed at the Maidenhead Town Forum and further information had been provided and reported in an article in the Maidenhead Advertiser. It had been reported that a Cabinet paper on the Broadway car park would be considered at the meeting in July outlining the strategy and costs around that. Further discussion was had in relation to the relocation of Shopmobility explaining that other locations were considered such as Hines Meadow and why not taken forward. There was a discussion relating to works outside West Street and that a technical assessment of drainage and electricity to support the charging of electric vehicles had been undertaken. Approval of the project was due to be considered in August or September with Shopmobility due to be functioning by the end of November.

The meeting, which began at 11.00 am, finished at 12.24 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....