

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

NORTHAMPTON DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM

Tuesday, 19 February 2013

Members: Councillor Larratt (Co-Chair).

Public Members: Martin de Rosario (Co-Chair), Barbara Barber, Larry Barber, Madeline Boys, Rashmi Shah, Ann Timson, John Wood and Chris Woodhams.

Officers/Speakers: Joe Biskupski (NBC), Eric Owens (WNDC), Derek Rowell (NBC Interim Enterprise Zone Co-ordinator), Julia Tinker (NBC Principal Regeneration Officer) and Graeme Wilson (Northamptonshire Sport).

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Co-Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. No apologies for absence had been received.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 12 December 2012 and the NBC Forums Budget Consultation Meeting held on 22 January 2013 were agreed.

Under matters arising the following information was given by the Co-Chair:

- Efforts were still being made to identify an official at the Department of Work and Pensions who could provide further information on the issues relating to the use of St Katharine's House for appeal hearings;
- The Housing Department had discretionary funds available to assist residents affected by the welfare reforms. It was not known how much money was available at this time or how it would be used and discussions were taking place on this subject.

John Wood stated that recently Radio Northampton had reported that the only people who would be affected by the "bedroom tax" would be those under the age of 65. He also stated that Michael Ellis MP had been reported as saying that the Government has set aside £155m to assist in areas where the welfare reforms created particular issues, although no details had been given.

Comments were made about the lack of availability of one bedroomed accommodation. It was noted that developers had the freedom to choose the type of properties they built, although the Council had a Housing Needs Analysis which indicated the types of property required in the Borough. There were also often cost issues regarding brown field development, especially if it was contaminated land that affected the viability and ability for such sites to be used to deliver affordable housing.

Note – some matters arising were taken at the end of the meeting, raised by a Forum member who had not been able to be present at the start of the meeting.

4. PLANS FOR THE RESTORATION OF DELAPRE ABBEY

Julia Tinker (NBC Principal Regeneration Officer) showed plans for the proposed restoration of Delapre Abbey and opening up the building to the public. She stated

that the plans were not public yet and asked Forum members not to share them outside the meeting. It was proposed to submit an application for £3.5m to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in June 2013. If the bid was successful works would start in 2014, with the building being opened up to the public in 2016. This was the timescale for the first phase of the works and the Council was in discussion with partners for a second phase (opening up parts of the first floor) but there was no timescale for this as yet.

Julia Tinker sought the views of the Forum, particularly as the ground floor was on two levels and there would be some accessibility issues between levels and also between the ground and first floors. The first phase includes two lifts, with one being between the different levels on the ground floor and the other being between the ground and first floor. In this phase not all parts of the first floor would be accessible to people with disabilities. It was proposed to include a third lift in the second phase if this went ahead that would allow access to the remainder of the first floor for people with disabilities. Julia Tinker confirmed that the accessibility issues would be highlighted in the promotion of the building when it was opened to the public and discussions were taking place about some concessions related to that. Consideration was also being given as to how local people could be engaged in the project, which would be one of the requirements of the HLF if the funding application was approved.

The Forum supported the provision of two lifts in the plans and hoped that a third lift could be provided as soon as it was reasonably practical, asked that the accessibility issues could be picked up in the business plan for the project and were pleased that arrangements were being considered for tours for people with audio and visual issues.

5. NORTHAMPTON RAILWAY STATION DEVELOPMENT

Eric Owens (WNDC) and Derek Rowell (Interim Enterprise Zone Co-ordinator) displayed plans of the proposed new railway station. The building should be completed in summer 2013, with demolition then starting on the existing station which should be completed by autumn 2014. The passenger facilities would be at first floor level, which would connect to the platforms. The foyer would be at ground floor level and London Midland and Railtrack facilities would be on the second floor. From Black Lion Hill, passengers would have to use stairs to access the first floor or continue round outside the building to the drop off point and bus stops and use the lift there to the first floor. Eric Owens stated that there would only be one lift but if broke down it should be possible to use the goods lift to access the passenger facilities. London Midland had considered installing an escalator as well but had rejected the idea on grounds of maintenance and cleaning. The building had also been configured in such a way that a wheelchair ramp could not be installed in the station. It was proposed that a new multi storey car park could be built when the current station was demolished and there would be a walkway between the car park and the new station. There was no guarantee if or when this phase of development would take place.

Members asked that there be assistance points in the station and on the platforms for passengers and that access arrangements be tested out before the station was opened. Eric Owens said this was standard procedure but he would report those requests to London Midland.

Eric Owens stated that there would be no changes to the existing Railtrack operations and he believed there would be three operational platforms, with a fourth being reinstated once the multi storey car park had been built.

The plans had been shown to the Rail User Group which had raised accessibility issues and advised that the plans should be presented to this Forum.

John Wood handed out cards to Eric Owens and Derek Rowell and stated that he would be happy to convene a meeting between them and disabled users of the current station to discuss the plans and accessibility issues which blind and hearing impaired people have to face.

The Forum considered that there was a need for two lifts in the station and that it would not be appropriate for disabled passengers to have to use the goods lift if the single lift was out of order. It was also noted that there was no guarantee that the multi storey car park and pedestrian walkway to the station would be constructed. If constructed, disabled parking should be created on the first floor of the car park, near the walkway. Members asked that these points be reported back to London Midland and Railtrack.

6. DISABLED-GO OPEN DAY

Joe Biskupski reported that Laura Mead and Rita Cooper from DisabledGo, who had attended the Forum's last meeting, were holding an information day on 13 March between 11.00am and 2.30pm in the Council's One Stop Shop in the Guildhall to promote the Access Guides and to seek suggestions on buildings and facilities which should be included in the guides.

Invitations would be sent, via the Council, to Forum members and a wide range of organisations to drop in on 13 March and engage with Laura Mead and Rita Cooper.

7. PROPOSED DEMOLITION OF PUBLIC TOILETS

Joe Biskupski reported that the LGBT&Q People's Forum had been consulted recently regarding the Council's proposal to demolish the public toilets in Upper Mounts car park (opposite the Police Station) and by the River Nene car park/picnic area, off Bedford Road (opposite the White Water Centre) and had requested that this Forum also be consulted.

It was noted that both sets of toilets had been closed for some time and that there were no plans to re-open them. There were toilets available for activity groups around the White Water Centre and public toilets were due to be constructed at the skate park later this year. The new bus interchange would also contain public toilets. Joe Biskupski stated that he believed the toilets in the Mounts baths were accessible for disabled users but would check that.

The Forum considered that there was a need for public toilets for coach users at the coach boarding/drop off point in Victoria Street and asked that this be brought to the attention of the Council. It was suggested that this issue might be resolved in the longer term through any development of the Grosvenor Centre on the present bus station site.

Members asked that the Council be requested to improve signage to public toilets.

8. PLANNING THE WORK OF DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM FOR 2013

Joe Biskupski suggested that members might wish to consider setting themes for future meetings of the Forum, with the first half of meetings being themed (e.g. housing, benefits, access etc.) and the second half of the meeting being more

general. He suggested that a theme for this meeting could have been transport, with the Forum possibly looking at plans for the bus interchange as well as for the new railway station.

Members supported this idea and it was agreed to include an item on setting a work programme for the Forum at its next meeting (date to be confirmed). It was agreed that the themed meetings be advertised with a view to increasing engagement between the Forum and organisations and individuals.

A suggestion was made that the theme of one meeting could be on volunteers and volunteering. Also, Council officers could be approached about issues which were on-going or forthcoming and these could be used as the themes for particular meetings. Any further ideas should be sent to Joe Biskupski for consideration at the next meeting.

Some concerns had been expressed about the venue for this meeting, with regards to acoustics, disruption as the surrounding area was cleaned and the use of the microphones. The Co-Chairs undertook to consider again the venue for future meetings of the Forum.

9. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

Disability Living Allowance and independent living

Madeline Boys raised issues related to the disability living allowance and expressed concerns about disabled and elderly people being housebound during the winter months. She was also concerned about disabled and elderly people having to go out in the winter, possibly falling and ending up in hospital.

It was noted that volunteers, who might be able to help the housebound, was an area which had been suggested for a themed meeting and also that some supermarkets would deliver shopping.

John Wood suggested that as many of the issues raised fell within the remit of the County Council and the Centre for Independent Living representatives of those organisations could be invited to address the Forum on the issues and on the welfare reforms coming into effect in April 2013.

Joe Biskupski suggested inviting Councillor Markham (as Cabinet Member for Housing) to a future Forum meeting themed around housing.

Sports development

Graeme Wilson reported that:

- Prior to the last meeting a visual impairment sports day had been held. Ten people had attended, of which six had visual impairments. Other similar sports days would be arranged;
- A football club especially for people with visual impairments was being set up. There was already a similar cricket club;
- On 27 and 28 July an event was being organised to mark one year on from the Olympics and Para Olympics. Opportunities would be provided for people with disabilities to take part in the events. He would provide further information when available;
- Northamptonshire Sport were looking to provide opportunities for disabled

people to take part in sports and would welcome comments on issues and barriers disabled people face in participating in sports. Ideas on improving advertising of activities would be welcomed;

- Any feedback on sports taster sessions would also be welcomed.
- A themed meeting on sports for disabled people was also suggested.

It was noted that many of the sports sessions were organised during the daytime because elderly or disabled people did not want to go out in the night time.

10. ITEMS FOR NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

It was noted that no future meetings of the Forum had yet been scheduled but the next meeting was likely to be in May and would consider items for themed meetings.

11. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The date for the next meeting of the Forum would be confirmed as soon as it had been agreed.

The meeting concluded at 7:05 pm.