

Northampton Borough Council – Northampton Disabled People's Forum

Tuesday, 22 July 2014

Present: Cllr. Larratt (Co-chair), Martin De Rosario (Community Co-chair), Christine Woodhams (Individual), Barbara Barber (Individual), Larry Barber (Individual), Keith Goodwin (Northampton Door to Door service), Simon Burgess (Individual), Eisa Bassett (Individual), Alan Jones (Bus Users UK), Adore Perrie (Individual), Mike Barlow (Bus Users UK), Graeme Wilson (Northamptonshire Sport), John Wood (Northamptonshire Association for the Blind), Hugh Spence (Northamptonshire Association for the Blind), Dawn Watkins (London Midland), Peter Tilley (London Midland), John Ellerby (Highways), Steve Burd (Stagecoach).

1. WELCOMES, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Matthew Toresen (Voluntary Impact Northamptonshire), and Samantha Lavender (Autism Concern).

Cllr. Larratt gave his apologies, as he had to leave at 6:00pm for a Planning Committee meeting.

2. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

Rashmi Shah and Simon Burgess were not on minutes as attending the last meeting. This will be corrected.

Other than the above, the minutes were agreed as a true record.

3. LONDON MIDLAND - DAWN WATKINS (STATION MANAGER)

Councillor Larratt discussed that a number of 'operational' questions were asked at the last meeting with Network Rail that could not be answered and were referred to London Midland. These questions are outlined below (followed by answers from DW and PT):

a) What alternative access will be provided if the lift breaks down?

White light crossing to the other platforms is the only option, as happens currently. If this crossing fails, the individual would need to travel to the next station – London Midland would provide a taxi for this.

b) Will there be 'assistance points' in the station and on the platform?

Platforms are not changing at all; canopies and help points will still be the same.

RS asked what would happen if there are not any staff members around to assist disabled people. DW advised that the Customer Information Point is manned with 2 members of staff from 4:45am -12:15am. Any breakages in staff are covered by management. It would be unlikely that there will not be staff around to assist those who need extra assistance.

c) Accessibility issues

HS said that he and SW spoke to Network Rail regarding accessible signage at the last forum meeting, who agreed that they would liaise with London Midland to contact NAB to discuss further. HS asked whether London Midland would be contacting NAB. DW advised that she invited SW from NAB to a meeting last week, but unfortunately she was unable to make it. London Midland is keen to work with NAB. However, in reference to signage, London Midland has to work to a standard with signs – these meet standards of 2011. JW said that although the signage meets standards, it is also important to look at the location of signs.

JW said that a meeting was offered last year for NAB to be involved at a very early stage with Network Rail and London midland, and until last week they had not had any contact. NAB would like to work with London Midland to publicise the changes. DW advised that until the last meeting with Network Rail, she had not been made aware of any requests to meet and to have input. DW asked that NAB and London Midland make an appointment for a meeting together in order to work together.

MB asked whether there will be signage directing people to bus stops. DW said that this would be dealt with by the project manager who is organising the signage. DW has not personally seen the signage designs yet, however she will follow this up with the relevant staff and will come back with a response.

Wider accessibility issues were also discussed, including whether there will be material available on the opening date about lifts, buttons, and how to access. A further question was asked about the accessibility of the ramp. DW advised that the plan is that there will be a graduated walk way which will be accessible from the front of the building. A question was asked as to whether this would be safe for disabled people with guide dogs – **ACTION:** DW will take this back to Network Rail for an answer.

Other questions:

Cllr. Larratt asked how the next stage of the development will work. Key elements of this were the car park, how this will link across to the station, where taxis will be able to drop off, and whether disabled parking would be in the vicinity of access to bridge. DW advised that this would be a Network Rail development. However, whole heartedly support the points about accessibility and ensuring disabled parking is in an accessible space.

AP raised concerns about the temporary access and wheelchair access, and felt that this is currently dangerous. AP suggested that signage may be useful as she did not think that there is any signage from path to stairs. AP also claimed that there were holes in the ground unmarked on the site which may be dangerous for a wheelchair. PT apologised for the holes in the ground – these would be checked first thing in the morning. If holes are on site, caused by contractors, they will be asked to fill in and make good.

DW asked that if anyone has any further questions or queries regarding the project that is best to direct these to the project manager and management team.

DW advised that the actual opening date on the station is Monday 1st September, rather than Sunday 24th August – as advised by Network Rail at the last meeting.

4. NORTHAMPTON BUS SERVICES - STEVE BURD (STAGECOACH) & JOHN ELLERBY (HIGHWAYS AUTHORITY)

JE explained that this agenda item is regarding the bus services provided around Northampton. Any specific points about the bus station should be directed to NBC – AM will take back for feedback at the next meeting.

The Highways authority's role in public transport covers the management of the concessionary fare scheme and grant funding along with NBC the door-to-door service. In conjunction with bus services, they advertise bus services, timetables, maps, and leaflets. Also maintains the highways across borough and county.

SB advised the forum that Stagecoach have heavily invested in accessible buses, and are trying to improve availability of transport to all communities. Last year there were 61 new buses – 46 of these allocated to Northampton Area. As a consequence of the investment, in Northampton depot at present there is a total of 120 vehicles and 116 of these are wheelchair accessible. For the company as a whole, 97% of buses are wheelchair accessible. They are working hard to replace old buses that are not accessible – well ahead of deadline of Jan 2017. Every mini bus and single deck is wheelchair accessible. The company assist wherever they can with details and large print timetable etc. – all available through customer services department. Particularly in Warwickshire and Rugby, Stagecoach meets with disabled groups to update on investment and timetables etc. Stagecoach works closely in partnership with the local authority. Stagecoach worked closely with NCC, who has responsibility for road side infrastructure, when budget cuts came to minimise impact.

CW raised concerns over bus routes, specifically the Southfields bus (No. 5) and not having a bus service on Sundays. SB advised that Stagecoach is currently looking at putting on an hourly service on Sundays and there is a possibility that this could happen later in the year. However, historically Southfields has not been a heavily patronised in past. This may be due to the design of estate, as half of Southfields cannot be served due to design of roads.

BB raised concerns over the issue of push chairs dominating the space on buses. SB advised that if wheelchair space is occupied, have to ask person with pushchair to make room for wheelchair. If this person does not move pushchair, ask again, then contact depot. If this happens on a high frequency bus the wheelchair user would need to catch the next bus. On a low frequency bus, the driver will contact depot, and depot will organise a taxi to take the disabled person to the bus stop that they would have got off at.

EB – issues with Standens Barn bus service, due to the service split to S16 and S17. EB felt that when the bus gets to Standens Barn there is often great difficulty with getting on the bus if disabled. SB advised that the reason that the reason this change was made to the service is that there is a new housing estate on 17 route. SB had not had any complaints about over loading on this service. However, if there are any specific problems bus users need to complain – if issues are not brought to Stagecoach’s attention, action cannot be taken.

On this issue, JE advised that concessions bus passes are funded by central government for after 9:30am. Many buses are filling up at this point. If concessionary users can, please delay journey to 10/11 am to avoid the congestion.

AP suggested that a solution to overcrowding issues may be for signage to be in place on all buses to alert users to disabled people’s and the elderly’s rights of priority over space. AP raised concerns over a lack of safe turning space on buses. SB advised that the design of wheel chair spaces in all vehicles is not designed by companies, but instead the Department of Transport – there is a national standard. This has possibly not been looked at since the 1980s, however all new vehicle design has to be type approved, and approved by Department of Transport. Also a guide has been produced by the Department of Transport which details which wheelchairs etc. are accepted onto buses – criteria of what the buses can safely take on board.

BB commented that the use of Door-to-door is available if wheelchair users do not feel safe on a bus.

CW asked whether ramps could be installed into the middle of buses for wheelchair users. SB advised that this style of bus is rarely used outside of London, as they tend to be seen as dangerous, there is less seating and more standing space, which is not preferred.

HS told the forum about a positive experience with Stagecoach, stagecoach bus staff was very understanding. HS felt that issues with pushchairs dominating disabled people’s allocated spaces are not Stagecoach’s fault, instead general public.

5. ACTION PLANS

VR gave an explanation about the work of VR and AM to get the forum to be more representative and action focused. Other forums do have main agenda items for discussion but also specific action plans that members are working towards. LB suggested that in order to increase forum in size, NBC should advertise the forums on the Radio. A lot of disabled people may be listening during the day, good opportunity for wider publicity.

Forum members raised the following issues for actions to be focused on:

1. SB – sheltered bungalow. 8 week wait for occupational therapy – standard waiting times. Difficulties with different service providers not communicating. VR advised that OT may come under NHFT. **ACTION:** AM to invite representative from NHFT to give an update.

2. Engaging with community – possibility of asking someone from the ALMO to link through to the forum. **ACTION:** AM to look into whether there is anyone who could specifically attend the forum to discuss issues.
3. AP - Nene Commissioning

6. COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE

MDR went through the request from Vickie Maloney, park ranger, asking for feedback around accessibility of parks, specifically Delapre Park. Attendees were asked to share their thoughts, along with any community information they would like to share.

AP - Delapre events, issues with accessibility – felt that there was no safe access to the pathways. AP felt that Becket's park is a good example of accessibility. Another issue is that at events, access for wheelchair users is right near the stage, which can be problematic due to the high volume. LB suggested that boards are laid down at events which then make paths accessible for wheelchairs. **ACTION:** AM to pass this feedback on to the events team.

HS – would like to forward through the request for further information around accessibility of parks to service users, and will forward through in the long term on their viewpoint newsletter.

GW

- FOOTBALL FUN DAY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY at Moulton College on Tuesday 12 August russell.lewis@ntfc.tv
- Overstone Park Disability Golf Coaching Programme - 2 programmes of coaching aimed at attracting adults and young people with disabilities/impairments who would like to try golf or return to the sport having tried it previously. Each of the 2 programmes comprises of a free taster session followed by 4 one hour group lessons for just £20. For dates and details please contact growgolfcoaching@btinternet.com
- AK4A Inclusive Community training course Thursday 25th September 6-9pm £10 per person. Training to improve skills, know-how and confidence in delivering sports-based activities to disabled people. For more information please follow the link: <http://www.northamptonshiresport.org/training-courses/2014/09/active-kids4all---inclusive-community-training1>

RS raised difficulties with transport.

7. AOB

Community Wellbeing – adult prevention. Simon Favell has expressed an interest to speak to forums about where NBC are at as lead provider on the Adult Prevention bid. Detail of this is yet to be explored. Simon will be able to provide some answers around this.

JW asked whether an interpreter would be provided for deaf and hearing impaired people to attend. VR advised that this already happens with other forums and would be arranged for the Disabled People's Forum if needed. The forum raised that the

use of the One Stop Shop as a venue was problematic due to background/surrounding noise from cleaners. AM advised that this was the only room available for this date, but going forward other rooms have been booked.

ACTION: AM to look into a Mobile mic being used at the forum, rather than the individual smaller mics that can be intermittent.

Disabled Facilities Grants. It was agreed that this would be on the agenda for the next meeting. VR provided the forum with some further information, advising that the suggested cut in spending is actually evidence of a backlog being caught up with. It was agreed that a guest would be invited to the next meeting to discuss this as an agenda item.

HS told the forum about the NAB Viewpoint newsletter. HS is happy to get details of the Disabled Peoples forum in this newsletter. Any other issues in Council can go onto newsletter, and social media etc. Try to help all with disabilities, as well as visual impairment.

8. ITEMS FOR NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

- Disabled Facilities Grants
- Simon Favell – Adult Prevention and Community Wellbeing

9. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Tuesday, 23rd September, 5:30-7:30pm

The meeting concluded at 7:30 pm