

DISABILITY ADVISORY AND ACCESS FORUM

7th February 2008 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Mr. M. Dillon (Disability Resource Centre)(Chair)
Mrs. S. Fever (Sight Concern)
Mr. P. Gomm (Luton Senior People's Forum)
Mr. D. Gower (Luton Senior People's Forum)
Mr. V. McEvoy (Beds. Tenants Participation Group)
Mr. R. Gerrard (Luton Disabled Sports and social Club)
Mr. B. McPhillips (Bushmead Disabled Bowling Association)
Mrs. V. Harrington (University of Bedfordshire)
Mr, P. Vyas (Milan Day centre Users Group)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs. J. McMillan – Luton Society for the Welfare of the Elderly
Mr P. Curry, Disability Policy and Access Officer, (LBC)
Ms. S. Goldsmith, Children and Learning Department, Luton Borough Council
Ms. S. Legate, Equalities Manager, Housing and Community Living Department, Luton Borough Council
Mr. R. Martin - Town Centre Development Manager, Luton Borough Council
Mr. M. Khan – Head of Engineering & Transportation, Luton Borough Council
Mr. P. Cunningham, Engineering and Transportation, Luton Borough Council
Mr. A. Williams - Assistant Engineer, Luton Borough Council
Mr. K. Toye - Passenger Transport Unit Manager, Luton Borough Council
Mr. M. Hussey, Democratic Services Officer, (LBC)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from, Ms. G. Malins (University of Bedfordshire), Mr. G. Ellis (Luton Shopmobility), Mr. K. Peacock (Luton Disabled Sports and Social Club), Councillors Neale and Worlding.

ACTION BY

2 MINUTES (REF: 2)

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 6th December, 2007 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 ORGANISATIONAL BLUE BADGES (REF: 4)

Mrs. J. McMillan, informed Members that the Luton Society for the Welfare of the Elderly had had difficulty in reapplying for an organisational Blue Badge. She added that the Council had

requested extensive information from clients, of which several had to pay for a Doctors letter to prove their disability. She went on to say that eventually her organisation received a Blue Badge through the post, although they had not signed for it.

Mehmood Khan, Head of Engineering and Transportation replied that the Council issued Blue Badges following guidance from the Department of Transport to prevent abuse. He added that if an applicant at any point in their application had concerns, then they could speak with the Parking Services Manager.

Paul Curry, Disability Policy and Access Officer suggested that a report on Organisational Blue Badges be submitted to a future meeting of the Forum.

Resolved: That the Parking Services Manager submit a report on Organisational Blue Badges be submitted to a future meeting of the Forum. **Mick Dryk**

(Note: The above item was considered by the Committee in pursuance of Sections 1004B(4) and 100E(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair having considered that the item should be dealt with as a matter of urgency in order to enable the Forum to respond to the concerns of the Luton Society for the Welfare of the Elderly.

4 ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT (REF: 6)

The Chair notified the Forum that the Disability Resource Centre had applied to become a Driver Assessment Centre for aids and adaptations to vehicles and awareness. If successful, this would be a major expansion of the Centre.

A Member of the Forum enquired if the Centre would carry out Equality Disability Awareness training for taxi drivers.

The Chair replied that the Driver Assessment Centre would undertake Equality Disability Awareness training for taxi drivers, as they would be approved testers for the area. He added that the Centre would also undertake mobility tests for drivers over 70 years of age.

A Member of the Forum commented that disabled users were still experiencing problems with taxi driver's.

Paul Curry informed Members that the Licensing Department would have to undergo an Impact Equality Assessment where issues around taxi drivers would be scrutinised.

A Member of the Forum commented that because he was disabled, some taxi driver's charged him extra.

Paul Curry replied that this practice was illegal under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Resolved: That the report (Ref: 6) be noted.

5 ACCESS TO COUNCIL BUILDINGS (REF: 7)

Graham Spademan updated the Forum with regard to progress towards ensuring the Council complied with the requirements of Part III: Service Provision of the DDA.

The Chair commented that although access to buildings had been looked at extensively, there were still issues surrounding egress.

Paul Curry replied that he would liaise with Capital and Asset Management in regards to egress from Council buildings.

Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref: 7) be noted.

(ii) That the Disability Policy and Access Officer liaise with Capital and Asset Management in regards to egress from Council buildings.

**Paul
Curry**

6 TOWN CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT (REF: 8)

Mehmood Khan, Head of Engineering and Transportation informed Members that Bus Station Car Park would close on 29th February 2008, which would also involve the closure of the lift and a short section of the associated footbridge. He added that this was necessary as part of the planned demolition of the Bus Station Car Park building. He added that an alternative accessible route would be provided avoiding any stairs, but unfortunately due to the nature of the road layout in the area, the alternative route would be quite long. He went on to say that bus companies had been fully involved in the closure of the bus station and that National Express had decided to relocate their pick up points to the Galaxy Centre and Railway Stations.

He continued that although the redevelopment of the bus station and railway station would cause short-term problems there would be long-term benefits for all users once completed.

A Member of the Forum enquired if the entire bridge would be entirely removed and a flat route provided.

Mehmood Khan replied that it would be highly desirable to have the main footbridge removed completely as this would provide level access between the station and Bute Street and also provide additional retail/residential units and open spaces.

Ken Toye, Passenger Transport Unit Manager informed Members that if necessary, a shuttle bus would be provided during demolition and construction work.

The Chair commented that if the lift and bus station were to be demolished at the same time, better communication with the public and signage would be required.

Richard Martin, Town Centre Development Manager commented that the bus station, car park and lift would be closed to the public completely to allow removal of asbestos before demolition. Signage directing pedestrians to alternative routes would be provided by the Communications Department.

A Member of the Forum suggested that a visually impaired person should be involved in setting up the alternative routes to enable any serious issues to be highlighted.

Mehmood Khan went on to say that for a period of approximately 8 weeks the footbridge between the Station and Hightown would also have to be closed temporarily to assist with the construction of the new car park at Midland Road. He added that the redevelopment of this part of the town would improve Luton and raise its competitiveness. He concluded that it would be beneficial if the Forum supported the demolition of the bus station and lift at the same time and the removal of the footbridge.

A Member of the Forum enquired if there had been any development on the redevelopment of Power Court.

Mehmood Khan replied that there had been little progress on the redevelopment of Power Court.

Phil Cunningham, Traffic and Engineering Consultant commented that the footbridge between the railway station and bus station would be replaced with improved facilities and level pedestrian areas and parking.

The Chair commented that the Forum would support the removal of the footbridge subject to further detail being submitted.

Richard Martin updated Members on the Town Centre Redevelopment. The main objective of the redevelopment was the area around the railway and bus stations as detailed above. He added that the railway station would be upgraded utilising money generated from the sale of surrounding land. He went on to say that the Council and Network Rail had jointly appointed a consultant to design a new station in relation to other developments in the surrounding area. He assured the Forum that once a detailed plan of the new station and

surrounding area was available the Forum would be consulted. At present designs were only at the conceptual stage.

The redevelopment of the area around the station would include a multi storey car park on the High Town side of the railway line, and open spaces, hotels and retail units at ground level leading into the town centre.

Members were informed that the BP Site at the junction of Guildford Street and Hitchen Road would be included in the redevelopment. Due to contamination of the site from leaking petrol tanks, consultants had been appointed to assess the extent of contamination. He added that starting from Monday 11th February 2008, bore holes would be drilled on the site, it was possible that contamination had spread over into the Power Court site. He concluded that it would be beneficial to B.P to carry out these examinations as at present they were paying £250,000 annually in fines for contamination of the site.

Phil Cunningham reported that the Town Centre Transportation Scheme would be submitted to the Executive on 25th February 2008. He added that it was hoped that construction of the new Bus Interchange would commence in early 2009.

A Member of the Forum raised concern at the distance between the Mall and the railway station for disabled users.

Phil Cunningham replied that bus provision would be allocated to the development to serve the town centre. He added that the Mall might also be extended up to Guildford Street.

Resolved: (i) That the Report (Ref: 8) be noted.

(ii) That Sue Fever, Sight concern liaise with the Head of Engineering and Transportation to help establish an alternative route during demolition and construction of the Bus station and Railway station area suitable for the visually impaired.

**Sue
Fever**

(iii) That the Disability Advisory and Access Forum supported the demolition of the bus station and lift, subject to adequate alternative pedestrian routes being established.

(iv) That the Disability Advisory and Access Forum agreed in principal the removal of the footbridge between the Railway Station and Bute Street subject to further detail being submitted to a future meeting.

(v) That the Disability Advisory and Access Forum supported in principal the redevelopment of the Town centre subject to further details being submitted to future meetings.

(vi) That the Town Centre Redevelopment be placed as a standing item on the Disability Advisory and Access Forum Agenda.

7 REVIEW OF PROVISION OF PARKING BAYS FOR BLUE BADGE HOLDERS IN RESIDENTIAL AREAS (REF: 9)

Alan Williams, Assistant Engineer advised the Forum of the review of the criteria for the provision of parking bays for Blue Badge holders in residential areas. He informed Members that bays had been marked out since 1993 without too many problems, and that the majority of the proposed changes confirmed the way the scheme had already been run. The most significant changes proposed:-

- That “close proximity” be replaced by “within 50 metres on the same side of the road”.
- That the driver should live and have their vehicle registered at the same address as the applicant.
- Bays will not be provided for Dial-a-Ride vehicles, taxis, ambulances, hospital drivers, non-disabled visitors or carers,

He concluded that the draft review of provision of parking bays for Blue Badge holders in residential areas would be submitted to the Executive on the 25th March 2008, and requested the Forum to make any comments where applicable.

Members of the Forum had no comments on the draft report for the Executive.

Resolved: (i) That the Report (Ref: 9) be noted.

(ii) That the draft review of provision of parking bays for Blue Badge holders in residential areas as set out in the report to the Executive (attached to the report referred to at (i) above) be noted.

8 DRAFT DEPARTMENTAL EQUALITY SCHEME ACTION PLANS (REF: 10)

Paul Curry, Disability Policy and Access Officer reported on the draft Equality Action Plans for the Chief Executives and housing and Community Living Departments. He added that since writing the report, the Environment and Regeneration Department had also completed its draft Equality Action Plan and would be circulated to Members of the Forum.

Resolved: (i) That the Report (Ref: 9) be noted.

(ii) That the Disability Policy and Access Officer circulate Environment and Regeneration Department draft Equality Action Plan to Members of the Forum.

9 DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME ACTION PLAN (REF: 11)

Paul Curry, Disability Policy and Access Officer reported in regard to progress against the Disability Equality Action Plan (DEAP) for Customer Services, Chief Executives, Environment and Regeneration and Housing and Community Living Developments. He added that since the previous meeting, the Children and Learning and Housing and Community Living had submitted revised actions.

Resolved: (i) That the Report (Ref: 10) be noted.

(ii) That the Disability Advisory and Access Forum agree to the templates produced by Corporate and Customer Services, Chief Executives, Environment and Regeneration and Housing and Community Living Departments showing how outstanding actions from the original Disability Equality Action Plan will be met within the agreed revised deadlines.

(iii) That the Disability Advisory and Access Forum agree to the new actions put forward by Children and Learning and Housing and Community Living Departments for completion by October 2009.

10 FORUM MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS (REF: 12)

The Head of Equalities reported on three applications for Membership on the Disability Advisory and Access Forum that had been received from the following organisation and individuals:

- Ann Farthing, Victim Support
- Syed Abbas
- Third Applicant

Resolved: (i) That Ann Farthing, Victim Support organisation and their representatives be approved as a full Member of the Disability Advisory and Access Forum.

(ii) That Syed Abbas be approved as a full Member of the Disability Advisory and Access Forum.

(iii) That the Head of Equalities be requested to write to the third applicant seeking further information to support their application for Membership on the Disability Advisory and Access Forum.

**Paul
Curry**

11 WORK PROGRAMME (REF: 13)

The Chief Executive (Head of Local Democracy) updated the Committee with the details of the latest version of its work programme.

Resolved: That the following items be added to the Committee's work programme:

- Town Centre Redevelopment
- Milan Day Centre
- Organisational Blue Badges

(The meeting ended at 4.40 p.m.)