

**TO: BRACKNELL FOREST ACCESS GROUP
02 OCTOBER 2013**

**ACCESS CONFERENCE FEEDBACK
Director of Corporate Services**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide the Bracknell Forest Access Group with feedback from the Bracknell Forest Access Group Conference held on the morning of 19 July 2013 at Easthampstead Baptist Church and to agree the way forward. This paper provides a post-event summary including details of the scale and take-up of the event, feedback received and thoughts for the future.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Bracknell Forest Access Group:

- i. Note the contents of the report and approves it use as the basis for the production of a conference report for delegates**
- ii. Delegate authority to develop and finalise the format and content of a Retailer Guide to a small working group**
- iii. Approve the development of an action plan to incorporate other key actions suggested at the conference.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The proposed way forward would if implemented help to improve and enhance the experience of everyone who makes use of the Borough's shops and services and help contribute towards achieving the Borough Council's vision "To make Bracknell Forest a place where all people can thrive; living, learning and working in a clean, safe and healthy environment."

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 None at this time.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Event details, scale and take-up

- 5.1 A review of the Bracknell Forest Access Group (formerly the Access Advisory Panel) carried out in the latter part of 2012 highlighted that a number of people thought that an annual half day conference with speakers and workshops focusing on issues and concerns from a disabled persons perspective could be a productive way forward for the Panel. It was subsequently agreed that the Access Group would host a half day conference in July 2013.

- 5.2 Initial discussions over the content of the event highlighted the Group's view that it should provide both networking opportunities and the opportunity to gather views from a wider audience which could then be used to drive the agenda of future Group meetings. It was also agreed that the conference would be organised in partnership with the Council's Adult Social Care, Health and Housing (ASCH&H) Department.
- 5.3 It was agreed that the main intention aim of the event would be two fold; firstly to showcase the regeneration of Bracknell town centre and look at ways in which it could be made as accessible as possible and secondly to ascertain the extent of support for the development of a guide to help retailers and service providers improve the experience of disabled residents and visitors to Bracknell Forest. It was also hoped that the event could be used to shape the future priorities and work of the Bracknell Forest Access Group. A range of information stands including: Disabled Go, Bracknell Forest Voluntary Action, Forest Care and Bracknell Forest Council Housing Adaption support were also made available during the day
- 5.4 In terms of attendance it was initially envisaged that 50 people would be the optimum number of delegates to enable active and engaged discussion from a range of people whilst still being manageable. Following extensive marketing through press releases, direct targeting of known groups and poster distribution 71 people attended the event which took place on the morning of 19 July 2013 at Easthampstead Baptist Church.
- 5.5 The Event was chaired by the Chairman of the Bracknell Forest Access Group and opened by the Mayor and Leader of Bracknell Forest Council. During the first session the team of Consultants working for the Bracknell Regeneration Partnership on the design of the regenerated town centre were invited to give a presentation on the design work for the regenerated town centre so far and to explain the work that was taking place to ensure that the regenerated town centre was as accessible as possible to all residents. This was followed by a question and answer session when attendees were able to raise concerns and ideas for further development with the Regeneration Team.
- 5.6 Key features of the regenerated town centre would include the installation of new lifts and inclined walkways to help those with mobility problems negotiate the incline changes through the town centre, more fully accessible toilets designed to disability standards and with alarms that were both visual and audible, the installation of directional totem poles displaying a range of information in a range of formats including Braille and a range of outdoor seating would be spread throughout the town centre. There would be permanent outdoor seating areas outside cafes and restaurants which would be clearly demarcated. At all times there would be a 4 metre wide clear route running through the town centre to enable emergency access and a 'silver thread' would be introduced into paths to indicate fully accessible routes through the town centre. A summary of the feedback received from the Question and Answer session can be found in Annex 1.
- 5.7 In his opening address, the Leader of Bracknell Forest Council expressed the aspiration that the whole of the Borough was a beacon for disability access and it was around this vision that the second session was based. John Piasecki, former Chairman of the Wokingham Area Access Group, was invited to talk about the work that had taken place in Wokingham to develop a booklet and DVD that could be used by retailers to make their premises more disability friendly. Attendees were then asked to work in groups to consider the following three questions:

- i. If Bracknell Forest was to produce a guide similar to Wokingham's, what should be included?
- ii. Can you give examples of good customer service you or others have experienced that you think that retailers or service providers could adopt or could be included in the guide?
- iii. can you give any examples of barriers to access that you, or people you know, have experienced? How have these been overcome? What tips could be included in the guide?

5.8 Delegates were broadly supportive of plans to develop a retailer guide for Bracknell Forest and a wide range of ideas and suggestions were put forward for consideration including:

Ideas for inclusion in the guide

- Advice to retailers on shop layout for example ensuring aisles are wide enough to enable wheelchair users to manoeuvre without difficulty and that goods are placed in easy to reach locations
- Ensuring that music was played at a level that did not cause problems for those with a hearing impairment
- Encouraging retailers to use a range of disabled groups and individuals to scrutinise ideas and products and to assist with staff training
- Encouraging staff to develop specialist skills for example sign language
- Developing staff mentoring schemes so that part time and temporary staff have a more experienced colleague who can provide advice and guidance when dealing with difficult situations
- Encouraging greater corporate social responsibility by freeing up staff to help in resource centres to help develop a greater understanding of the needs and wants of disabled people
- Using clear visual signs to signpost services for example pictures of cups and saucers to indicate refreshment facilities

Examples of good customer service

- Shops providing help with shopping and packing for example Sainsbury provide a guided shopping service and will help carry shopping to cars if requested
- Morrisons, Specsavers and Next provide greeters at the entrance to their stores to help with sign post customers
- Staff at a local sandwich shop come out to serve disabled customers at a pre-arranged table.

Examples of barriers to access

- Shops being too cluttered to get around easily with fragile goods displayed precariously
- It was reported that the ticket barriers at the entrance to Waitrose's car park were challenging for some people with physical disabilities to use.

5.9 Full feedback from session 2 can be found in Annex 2. However, it was noticeable that many of the suggestions and ideas put forward would, if implemented, help to improve and enhance the experience of everyone who makes use of the Borough's shops and services.

Feedback and Learning from the Event

- 5.10 Delegates were asked to complete feedback forms and analysis of the 36 forms that were completed show that on the Event was well received. Everyone who completed a feedback form stated that they thought the venue was appropriate and that the catering provided was good.
- 5.11 With regard to the individual sessions, 35 of the 36 respondents felt that the Regeneration presentation was clear and all felt that the presentation was interesting and engaging. However, there was feedback that some of the language used by the Regeneration Team was too technical at times. 35 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop on the development of a Retailer Guide was interesting and thought provoking. 35 respondents felt engaged in the discussions and felt that they were able to have their say.
- 5.12 Following the Event, the working group that organised the event met to discuss its successes and identify any learning points that might be applied to future events. It was considered that the event had been well organised and that attendance levels had been good with a wide range of disabilities represented. It was also felt that the presentations had been well received and that the discussions had been lively with good engagement from all attendees.
- 5.13 The majority of the learning points identified related to minor administrative matters for example ensuring that water jugs were placed on group tables rather than being left at the back of the room, including a list of delegates in the delegate pack, introducing all participants on the question panel before the start of any question and answer sessions, ensuring that handouts were clear when printed in black and white and actively asking people if they needed any presentations and handouts in an alternative format. Alternative formats were available however they were placed on a table at the back of the room however no pro-active attempt was made to draw attention to their availability. The language used by speakers also needs to be made more accessible at any future events, although this is challenging when talking about some topics.
- 5.14 Notwithstanding these points, the working group agreed that the topics discussed were a major factor in the success of the event and that future events should only be held if it could be guaranteed that there were appropriate subjects to discuss and that the Bracknell Forest Access Group had a clear idea and understanding of what it wanted to achieve from a conference.

Way Forward

- 5.15 There was clear support at the Event for the development and introduction of a Bracknell Forest Retailer Guide. Bracknell Regeneration Partnership has indicated that they would be supportive of the project. Initial discussion of the idea has identified the following points that would require consideration if the project was to go forward:
- It would be vital to have the support of retailers and to involve them in the development of a Retailer Guide
 - Any guide needs to take into account a wide range of disabilities

- What form should a Retailer Guide take? Should it be a booklet only or should a DVD be produced?

It is therefore recommended that the Bracknell Forest Access Group delegate authority to develop and finalise the content and format of a Retailer Guide to a small working group, made up of Council officers and two or three volunteers from the Bracknell Forest Access Group. Bracknell Regeneration Partnership has briefed the Town Centre Retailer Forum on the production of the guide and has offered to engage retailers and find out what they would like to see in the guide.

- 5.16 It is envisaged that the guide would be ready for distribution by the end of the current financial year (31 March 2014). Updates on its development would be given to future meetings of the Bracknell Forest Access Group.
- 5.17 A number specific issues were raised at the Event that will require consideration and input from either the Borough Council or Bracknell Regeneration Partnership and the groups is asked to approve officers developing an action plan with each action assigned a clear owner to ensure that these are addressed. The Regeneration Team would also be bringing further updates to future meetings of the Bracknell Forest Access Group as the regeneration of Bracknell town centre progresses.

Budget and resourcing

- 5.18 A budget of £4000 was available for both the event and any follow up work that the Bracknell Forest Access Group might want to take forward. A breakdown of spend to date is set out below:

Venue hire	£662.50
Catering	£440.00
Signers	£545
Printing/Publicity	£170
Transport	£75
Total Spend	£1892.50

This leaves £2107 to cover the cost of developing a Retailer Guide.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 Nothing to add to the report.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 Nothing to add to the report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 Not applicable.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 None at this time.

Other Officers

6.5 Not applicable

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 It is expected that retailers, service providers and representatives from disability groups will be consulted during the development of a Retailer Guide.

Background Papers

None applicable

Contact for further information

Katharine Simpson

Democratic Services Officer

01344 352308

Katharine.simpson@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Abby Thomas

Head of Community Engagement and Equalities

01344 353307

Abby.thomas@bracknell-forest.gov.uk