

Unrestricted

**BRACKNELL FOREST ACCESS GROUP  
10 NOVEMBER 2015  
4.00 - 5.45 PM**



**Present:**

Councillors Finnie (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair) and Ms Merry  
Alan Dale, Be Heard in Bracknell  
Jane Figg, Macular Support Group  
Sarah Gaitely, Konnections  
Fiona Goodhand, Older People and Long Term Conditions  
Geoff Hallett, BADHOGS  
Muriel Rawsthorne, Bracknell Forest Homes Tenants and Leasholders Panel  
Mary Waight, Community Learning Disability Services, BFC

**In Attendance:**

Abby Thomas, Head of Community Engagement & Equalities  
Darren Burgess  
Bobby Mulheir, Bracknell Forest Council  
Simon Russian, Legal & General

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Councillor Clifton Thompson  
Councillor Mrs Jan Angell  
David Ariss  
Tom Conlin, The Berkshire County Blind Society  
Geraldine Edmond  
Ray Edwards MBE, Limbcare  
Mira Haynes, Bracknell Forest Council  
Andrea McCombie-Parker, The Ark  
Mrs Isabel Mattick, Triple A  
Alison Sanders, Director of Corporate Services

**42. Tour of Bracknell Library**

Fiona Atkinson, Community Services Manager, gave a guided tour of Bracknell Library to highlight the access improvements that had been made to the facility.

**43. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the Bracknell Forest Access Group meeting held on 22 April were agreed as a correct record.

**44. Bracknell Town Centre Regeneration Update**

Simon Russian, Legal and General, gave a presentation on the regeneration of Bracknell town centre and the work taking place to make the regenerated town centre as accessible as possible.

The Group was informed that most of the steelwork for the two main buildings was now complete and work had started on the new cinema and multi-storey car park. Work on the development of the new public realm was expected to start in December.

The new multi-storey car park would be entered from Millennium Way and have 68 disabled parking spaces distributed across its six floors. All the disabled spaces would be located around the central core of the building in close proximity to the lifts. Each floor of the car park would have direct level access to the Marks and Spencer and Fenwicks stores. The car park would be height restricted although four by four vehicles without roof boxes would be able to access the multi-storey car park. To ensure that taller vehicles were able to access the town centre a new 35 space surface car park with 8 disabled spaces would be created next to the multi-storey car park.

The Group expressed concern that many people found it either difficult or impossible to take tickets from car park barriers. It was agreed that these concerns would be raised with the developers so that appropriate entry and payment systems could be considered.

The Council would be responsible for deciding the parking charges levied. It was not clear whether disabled parking would be free and Councillor Finnie agreed to follow this up with the Council.

To minimise the significant gradient across the town centre the developers were working on a number of solutions including installing lifts to negate the four metre gradient between Waitrose and the rest of the development and breaking up sloping walkways with flat walkways. Where stairs and steps were necessary then these would have visibility strips installed in them and the handrails would be made of wood.

The Shopmobility service was operating successfully from its current location in Princess Square and would remain there after the redevelopment was completed. To improve access to Shopmobility a new layby would be created near to the lifts and the bridges across The Ring into Princess Square would be refurbished.

There would be new toilet facilities in the core area of the multi-storey car park and these would include disabled toilets that had been designed according to Changing Places specifications. There would also be two family changing rooms. It was questioned whether the disabled toilets would be locked to all those without a RADAR key and it was agreed that this would be followed up with the developers.

Work on the Way Finding Strategy for the new public realm would be completed in the new year. It was envisaged that a variety of way-finding tools, including powered computer terminals, would be used throughout the town centre

Rough granite block paving would be used throughout the redeveloped town centre. Extensive testing had confirmed that it would not be slippery in wet weather. The material to be used was similar to that used outside to that used outside the Shard and Smithfield Market in London

It was reported that the unevenness of the pathways through the temporary hoardings made the paths difficult to negotiate if you were visually impaired and this needed to be looked at.

The Group thanked Simon Russian for his update and requested that further updates be given as work progressed.

45. **Access Improvement Programme**

Darren Burgess, Principal Building Surveyor, presented a report providing an update on the progress being made to improve accessibility of the Council's public buildings.

During 2014/15, the Council had completed a wide range of improvements to Bracknell Leisure Centre. An offer from the RNIB to assist with this work had been taken up and a number of the RNIB's suggestions had been incorporated into this work and it was hoped that this would improve the experience of visually impaired visitors to the Leisure Centre. Improvements had also been made at a number of the Council's operational buildings including the Bracknell Family Centre at Wick Hill and the Children's Respite Centre at Larchwood.

Work planned for 2015/16 included improving access at North Ascot Library, the youth service accommodation at Portman Close, Bracknell Open Learning Centre, Sandhurst Youth Centre and The Willows Children's Centre in Priestwood.

Work to improve the accessibility of the Charles Square and High Street Car Parks would be completed in tandem with the wider town centre regeneration works. It was questioned whether it would be possible to replace the barrier systems with a ticketless system and it was agreed that this possibility would be explored.

Although a number of the Council's public buildings were still not fully accessible, the work required to make them fully accessible could only realistically be done as part of wider refurbishment work to the buildings. Consequently it was envisaged that 2015/16 would be the last year with a dedicated Access Improvement Programme.

It was clarified that the accessibility of any commercial property leased from the Council was the responsibility of the leaseholder.

The Group thanked Darren Burgess for his update.

46. **Bracknell Forest Council Website Redevelopment**

Bobby Mulheir, Chief Officer: Customer Services, gave a presentation in respect of the work taking place to redevelop the Council's website.

The Council's website was in the process of being completely redeveloped to make it simpler, clearer, faster and more secure. Works was also underway to make the site recognise what sort of device that it was being viewed on and then automatically adapting its format to suit the platform.

The Council's current website was considered to be fully accessible with the highest AA rating possible under the Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 and it was intended that this rating would be maintained with the new website. The Council commissioned the Shaw Trust to assess the accessibility of its website on an annual basis and any issues that arose as a result of this testing were addressed.

A key task in improving the accessibility of the new website would be the development of alternative content formats for example easy read, text to speech and British Sign Language. It was noted that a programme that converted text to an avatar using British Sign Language was available and it was agreed that this would be followed up.

Work was also underway to expand the self-service offer available so that residents were able to do as much as possible for themselves for example booking services, reporting problems and paying bills. Residents would also have the opportunity to create a personal account that would automatically pre-populate forms saving them time, enable them to easily submit photographs to report problems and track progress online.

A beta version of the new website was under development and this would be tested by members of the public before it went live. Volunteers to help with this process would be welcome.

It was agreed that the presentation would be circulated.

The Group thanked Bobby Mulheir for her update.

**47. Disabled Go Access Guide**

It was reported that funding had been secured to fund the Disabled Go programme for a further three years with Bracknell Regeneration Partnership agreeing to contribute 50% of the funding. Updates would be given at future meetings.

**48. Items for Future Meetings**

It was agreed that the meeting scheduled for 2 December 2015 would be cancelled as it was unnecessary. The Group's next scheduled meeting would take place on Wednesday 20 April 2016 at 7.30pm.