

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

NORTHAMPTON DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM

Wednesday, 16 October 2013

Attendees Cllr Larratt (Co-Chair*), Martin De Rosario (Co-Chair), Cllr Mennell, Madeline Boys, Larry Barber, Barbara Barber, Adore Perrie and Mark Unwin

**chaired the meeting*

Officers: Alice Morgan and Nathan Birch (both Northampton Borough Council); Graeme Wilson (Northampton Leisure Trust)

Apologies: Christine Woodhams

1. WELCOMES AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced Alice Morgan, Community Development Officer, and wished her well in her new role.

2. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 19TH FEBRUARY 2013

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th February were **AGREED** as a true record.

Matters Arising: It was reported that there was no further update on the proposed disabled access and the number of lifts to the new railway station. It was **AGREED** that the Community Development Officer would bring an update to the next meeting.

3. TERMS OF REFERENCE - DISCUSSION

The Chair invited comment on the current Terms of Reference contained within the agenda papers.

The issues raised by the Group included:

- Acting as a voice for Disabled People in the Borough
- Including relevant speakers to meetings from outside bodies
- Promoting and acting as an advocate for disability issues

The Chair reminded members that this was the Northampton Borough Council Disabled Peoples Forum. As such, meetings with outside bodies could be facilitated, but direct influence on policy would be contained to Borough Council matters, such as parks.

The Group was advised that the Terms of Reference (ToR) are reviewed for the Council by the Constitution Working Party (CWP). The CWP is made up of senior

councillors from the three main political parties. The ToR were last approved in February 2013 and the current membership of the working party is Councillors Malpas (Chair); Capstick; Conroy; Hill; Meredith and Wire.

The Group **AGREED** that any member with suggestions to amend the ToR could bring them to future meetings.

4. **CONSULTATIONS - IMPROVING THE TOWN'S PARKS: CLLR PHIL LARRATT**

The Chair explained that the Council had formed a Scrutiny Panel to consider the future development of the town's parks. The aim of this Scrutiny Panel was to look at potential improvements to meet the needs of the whole community and maximise the potential of each park. To help with this the Scrutiny Panel wished to consult with a wide range of current and potential users, including the Disabled Peoples Forum. All responses would be collated and the report completed by the end of November. The Cabinet would then consider any recommendations shortly after that.

The Group had a wide ranging discussion on the parks within Northampton. The spaces discussed ranged from the large maintained parks, such as Abington Park and The Racecourse, to open spaces on housing estates to wildlife areas and linear parks. The Group recognised that there are many types of parks and that all parks are different, but that in the main park use was facilities driven.

Access

- Entrances to park areas should be suitable to encourage access from the whole community, including those with disabilities
- Improved pathways within the parks for those with mobility issues or in wheelchairs, including powered wheelchairs.
- All pathways to be accessible to those with mobility issues, including appropriate dropped kerbs.
- Appropriate facilities should always include disabled toilets and appropriate access to and then within public buildings.
- Appropriate signage to facilities within the parks. This signage should be accessible to those with Learning Difficulties.
- Locate sports facilities so they are available to all potential users, including wheelchair users.
- Consider access to grassed areas, particularly during events, for those with mobility issues, including wheelchair users.

Facilities

- Improvements in the range of sports available for those with disabilities.
- Improve and add to the current fitness equipment in the parks to make them available to people with disabilities, including wheelchair users.

- Suitable and adequate seating for those with mobility issues.
- Current facilities, such as the sensory garden and boating lake within Abington Park should be utilised or brought back into use to encourage a wider range of users.
- If a café facility does not exist then disability friendly mobile operators could be encouraged to operate in the specific park.

Financial Barriers

- Charges to participate in public events, such as the Abington Park Art Exhibition, discourage users from the whole community, but may affect those with disabilities and a limited income more disproportionately.
- Adequate investment and the on-going maintenance in access and facilities within the parks is a key issue.
- Revenue generating from hire of open spaces would be encouraged if the income is ring fenced to maintain and improve that open space.

Park Management Committees

- Each committee should contain a representative(s) with an understanding of disabled people's needs.
- Publicity material for the PMC's should also be directed at user groups, including disability groups.

Safety

- Higher profile for Park Rangers to encourage a sense of safety within the parks.

Communications

- Promote the parks, their facilities and events to disability groups in a timely manner.
- Work with Northampton Leisure Trust to promote the fitness opportunities for those with disabilities within the parks.

Specific Issues

The Group discussed a range of specific issues these included:

Abington Park

- Access to grassed areas, including around the bandstand very limited
- Costs of entering the annual art exhibition
- The sensory garden and boating lack falling into disrepair
- Poor signage
- Narrow paths in some areas

Becket's Park

- Poorly maintained footpaths
- Unsuitable crossover from Becket's Park to Midsummer Meadow at Nunn Mills Road
- Inaccessible sports equipment
- Poor signage
- No accessible toilet or café facility in the main park

Delapre Abbey

- Unsafe access at the main entrance
- Poor access to grassed areas
- Poor signage

The Racecourse

- Further seating required in a very large park
- Facilities are limited in some areas of the park
- Lack of dog bins

Bellinge Woodland Area

- Rubbish dumped and not cleared
- Poor access to paths as fallen braches/trees not cleared

Blackthorn and other estate open spaces

- Underutilised and poorly maintained

The Group **AGREED** to forward these comments to the Scrutiny Panel for their consideration in the final report.

5. **DISCUSSIONS/EVENT PLANNING**

This item was taken together with Item 6 on the agenda.

6. **PLANNING THE WORK OF THE FORUM FOR 2013/14 INCL ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION AT THE NEXT MEETING**

The Chair invited members of the Group to suggest ideas for speakers and/or discussions at future meetings. The following suggestions were made:

- Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)– to explain the effects of the current economic climate on their service demand and provision.
- Northamptonshire County Council – pot hole and footpath maintenance across the town.
- Northampton Borough Council – discussion on access issues in the cultural mile and town centre.

- Northampton General Hospital – current funding within Accident and Emergency and its effect on access to the service
- Northampton General Hospital – the use of agency staff and training issues when dealing with people with disabilities
- Nene Commissioning Group – future service provision
- Taxi Operators – procedures when dealing with disability passengers and wheelchair users
- St Johns Ambulance – River cruiser service
- Northampton Borough Council – future provision of Disability Facility Grants

The Group **AGREED** to delegate to the Co-Chairs and Community Development Officer to make arrangements for future speakers from this list.

7. **COMMUNITY INFORMATION EXCHANGE**

Graham Wilson, Northampton Leisure Trust (NLT), advised the Group of a new round of grant funding available from Sport England. This is the *Inclusive Sport Fund* which is designed to increase the number of disabled young people (aged 14+) and adults regularly playing sport as part of Sport England's wider commitment to increasing regular sport participation by disabled people. In the first round of Inclusive Sport 44 projects benefited from over £10 million of National Lottery investment. This time £7 million is available in the *Inclusive Sport Fund* and £1 million in *Get Equipped*, a new disability equipment fund. Applications close on 2nd December 2013. The NLT team are keen to hear from anyone who has ideas for funding. They are currently working on a proposal to widen disability participation in cycling and there will be further consultation on this issue. Funding from the *Get Equipped* fund may be available to enhance the disability fitness equipment in the local parks.

Alice Morgan, Community Development Officer, advised the Group of the Transitions event being held on 11th November at The Park Inn, Northampton. This was aimed at young people aged 14-25, with disabilities, and would offer advice on services and support.

Graham Wilson also advised the Group of the Rights Charter for Disabled People recently launched in Kettering by the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board. The Charter had been widened to include all disability groups and local authorities were being encouraged to sign up to demonstrate their support. The Charter is now also available at the Learning Disabilities Partnership Board website <http://www.northantsldpb.org.uk/>

8. **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

The dates of future meetings were **AGREED** as:

2013

Tuesday 19th November, 5.30pm

2014

Tuesday 21st January, 5.30pm

Tuesday 18th February, 5.30pm

The meeting concluded at 7:08 pm