

TAUNTON DEANE DISABILITY DISCUSSION GROUP

ACCESS AND TRANSPORT

25TH MARCH 2008

Group Facilitated by Mandy Seaman – Compass Disability Services, SAIN Project Coordinator.

Those Present;

Mark Leeman – Forward Plan Unit, Taunton Deane Borough Council
Lucy Bath – Accessibility Planning Team Leader, Somerset County Council.

Lucy Ball – Town Centre Chief Executive was not able to attend on the day.

Taunton Town Centre Access and Mobility Audit.

M Leeman updated the group on the Taunton Town Centre Access and Mobility Audit and explained that as this is a rather lengthy document it is available to view at Taunton Deane Reception, Taunton Library, Compass Disability Offices plus a CD copy can be requested by contacting the Council directly.

Following this a presentation was given (copy attached) to update the group on the progress since the last meeting a year ago.

The High Street Management Group which consists of Borough Council, Somerset County Council, Police, Fire and the Taunton Town Centre Company are currently looking at the following areas;

Increasing loading time bans from 12-2 to 9-4. Priority to improve paving conditions, seating which can be removed or collapsed in High Street. The aim is to create more of a shopping area leading up to Vivary park to join up the town by also removing trees, some commented that trees provide good shade and oxygen and that the stall holders on a Saturday cover up seating in this area. The new proposed shopping development at the back of old market centre will also give an opportunity to review the high street.

Internal layout of shops; Lucy Ball (Town Centre Chief Executive) considered sending leaflets to shop owners about layouts but has decided its best to wait until they carry out a re-fit to advise best practice. Lucy is happy to develop best practise advice in association with disability groups.

On the subject of A Boards, it was confirmed that SCC are now taking enforcement action concerning this. Current policy allows one 'A' board at

certain locations. If you wish to report information concerning the misuse of A boards please contact the Ann Dunford, Enforcement Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council on 01823 356479.

The subject of the fruit shop in St James Street was mentioned and the issues concerning goods on the pavement when it was very windy. There is now a BID (see below) funded grant scheme in place to assist redecoration and refurbishment of shop fronts. The maximum amount is £3000 per property. For the new financial year and for next 5 years, however it is a limited pot of funding aiming to improve approaches to the town centre.

The Taunton Town Centre Company now has BID status – which is a Business Improvement District where traders pay extra business rates to go towards improving the town centre. This funding will also provide 3 Police Community Support Officers and 1 regular police officer on patrol during the day. Interviews are currently taking place for the officers. It is recommended that, once in place, they will come along to engage with local disability groups such as ours. The fact that the officers will only be in place during the day was discussed and the fear some people have of going out at night time. The aim is that officers will be able to help with problems such as cycling on pavements.

The subject of Skateboarding on pavements was discussed and the fact it is not a public offence (although skateboarding in such a way that can cause injury is an offence). As part of Project Taunton which is looking at regeneration in Taunton Town Centre, representatives met with local Secondary schools concerning skateboarding who have challenged them to provide somewhere close to town centre for skateboarding. The group noted that there is also similar concerns with wheelies (shoes with hidden wheels).

It was commented that the Cycle path over silk mills is very good and that they are trying to deliver more around the area. There is now a cycle officer at County Council and a smarter choice team looking at alternative modes of transport.

East Street, improvements needed where narrow pavements exist, plus there is a lack of crossings in this area, ideally want to widen pavements to give more priority to pedestrians. Removing parking is one option, retailers are happy with this suggestion. The costs to improve the whole area are in excess of £1m, it is unlikely to happen before 2011.

The group were asked about any concerns they have about the loss of parking along East Street. The group suggested mobility bays near Sainsburys, up to the traffic lights, possibly situated at an angle near pavement. Consultation will

take place at a point in future. Need to restrict crossing in between crossings, plus need another crossing in between.

One member expressed a view that more bus stops in the town are needed and connectivity between them, plus there are no buses to Galmington after 6pm. Also noted that a better service is need to Musgrove Park Hospital – should be every 20mins from the town centre.

Consultants are putting together a signage strategy, looking at information points and improving signage for pedestrians and cyclists.

Footways and Dropped Kerbs.

Trip Hazards over 20mm. Inspections occur every month in town centre. If you have identified a trip hazard it needs reporting to Somerset County Council on the general enquiry number 0845 3459155.

Dropped kerbs - County Council will consider written requests, however there is a small budget for this and highways obligations need to be considered. The area between the Police Station and Vivary park was mentioned as a problem for dropped kerbs. It was suggested that SCC should involve disability groups when planning dropped kerbs.

The group noted that there are maintenance issues in front of Monsoon (drainage tiles missing and enough depth to tip a wheelchair) and on East Reach.

Town Centre Improvements

Planning application submitted for the Third Way (new road linking Castle Street with Bridge Street) which will enable the potential closure of the town centre to traffic during the day (off peak hours). TDBC, SCC and Project Taunton currently pulling together ideas. Consultation with the community will follow, to discuss scheme design, times for closure etc. Taxi access was noted as important to participants if looking to restrict vehicle access to town centre in future.

The Third Way will open during 2010. This will involve a new bridge over the River Tone and works to bridge street junction. Funding has been provided by Central government. Would we get more if we got City status?

Other Comments

Public Toilets – some are going – redevelopment schemes are requiring those that are being taken out to be put back. There was general concern that public toilets were not clean and that there are not enough of them.

More clocks in town centre required. Map where to find places being addressed, idea to locate at Train and Bus Station.

Concern that concessionary travel scheme applies to buses, but not to Taxis! Many people are not within a convenient walk of a bus stop (also issues with disabled access on buses). Is there potential to improve the current scheme, to give more benefits for those reliant on taxis?

One member noted that he was recently given a parking ticket on Hammet Street. He displayed his badge, but not his clock! This was just an error – how ridged are TDBC in applying the rules? Is there room for discussion / waiving of fines?

Taxis – one member raised a particular issue with taxi services (one particular service is refusing to collect). This to be considered by TDBC (licensing authority) and a response provided.

Other Comments raised from Taunton Deane Members not at this meeting;

Gardening Care – now need to pay £7 per hour for a service that was previously free, tax on disability, no explanation.