

# **Disability Access – East Grinstead Area**

Formerly the East Grinstead & District Access Group  
Charity Number 1079603

## **DECEMBER 2014 NEWSLETTER**

### **Message from the Chairman**

Dear Members,

Thank you to those who have expressed their support for me as I take up the reins following the sad passing of Eric Mackie. I certainly have a hard 'task master' to follow! My aim is to maintain the same degree of pro-activity over the many projects Eric had been promoting for the good of all in the East Grinstead area. To this end I am establishing firm relationships with the various agencies and departments involved. I will use this slot in the newsletter to report any progress on the issues as they occur. Meanwhile, may I wish you all the compliments of the forthcoming season and a better 2015.

Paul Johnson  
Chairman

### **EDITOR'S NOTE.**

So, here we are again at the end of yet another year. Sadly, 2014 will always be remembered as the year that we lost our dedicated and long serving Chairman, Eric Mackie, about whom so many tributes have already been made. But the work of Disability Access must go on and fortunately Paul Johnson, a member of the Executive Committee for many years, stepped up to take on the Chairman's role. Paul has a wealth of experience in local politics and planning matters which will undoubtedly help him in his new position.

Compliments of the season go to all our readers and may next year be a good one for you all. Here then is your newsletter for December.

(Robert Astington, Editor)

### **ANNUAL REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENT FOR 2013/14**

Members are reminded that if required, copies of the above are available from the office.

### **UPDATED BLUE BADGE GUIDANCE TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES**

*(Editor's note. The following is a summarised extract from the November issue of the BISS newsletter a copy of which can be obtained from the Disability Access Office).*

The main update to the guidance now clarifies what has always been included in the regulation. That is, any permanent and substantial disability which causes inability to walk or very considerable difficulty in walking may qualify for a badge regardless of the particular condition, and that each application should be considered against this criterion.

It also states specifically that people with conditions such as autism and other examples of non-physical conditions, may qualify if they have very considerable difficulty walking.

Other revisions have been made to include reference to the Disabled Persons' Parking Badges Act 2013. The Act provides local authorities with new enforcement tools to help them improve their enforcement regime by providing them with the flexibility to address fraud and misuse more effectively at a local level. Amongst other things the Act enables Blue Badge Enforcement Officers to operate in plain clothes. Facilities also exist if appropriately set up for the Enforcement Officer to obtain the badge holder's telephone number from the serial number displayed on the Blue Badge using a hand held iPhone or similar so that the true badge holder can be telephoned if there are suspicions that the Badge is being used fraudulently or in the badge holder's absence. It also allows the Enforcement Team to inspect and retain a Blue Badge without police presence if they have reasonable grounds to do so. However the new power does not mean the Badge can be permanently retained and the rules on withdrawing a person's Badge permanently remain unchanged.

A copy of the revised guidance is available from the Disability Access Office.

### **BLUEBELL RAILWAY and EAST GRINSTEAD STATION**

The Bluebell Railway, which some years ago added a carriage to its rolling stock adapted to facilitate disabled travellers, is now planning to go further to improve the experience for visitors. Subject to raising the £1M+ required, the railway is planning to convert one of its storage sheds into a permanent static museum which will include locomotives and railway memorabilia which will be of interest to all railway enthusiasts. On the 27th August, at the invitation of Ginnie Waddingham, Cliff Barrow and Bob Astington (representing Disability Access) accompanied Ginnie to meet Roger Kelly, who is the Fundraiser for the Bluebell Railway, to discuss features of the future museum which will enhance the visitor experience for those with mobility or sight problems. It is hoped that when planning reaches a more advanced stage Disability Access will be involved to substantiate these ideas.

The Bluebell Railway is still seeking donations from the public towards this project. If you are a railway enthusiast and would like to make a donation, go to the Bluebell Railway website and look under the 'Cash for Cover' appeal. Alternatively, an old fashioned cheque sent to the Bluebell Railway Trust at Sheffield Park would also be welcomed.

As a spin off to our visit, Richard Fearn, Director and Railway Manager for the Bluebell Railway, sent a letter to Disability Access in support of our campaign for lifts at East Grinstead Station to provide access between Platforms 1 and 2. Their support is based on the fact that passenger numbers using the Bluebell Railway have increase substantially since it has been using East

Grinstead Station. Although it is difficult to establish how many enthusiasts arrive by Southern Rail, as opposed to car, it is reasonable to assume that many do. Their letter was forwarded together with further correspondence from Disability Access to the Rt Hon Sir Nicholas Soames MP during late October and he has since responded to say that he will pursue this matter with the commercial Manager for Southern Rail and with the Director of Network Rail. It doesn't pay to raise ones hopes too high in case of disappointment but maybe at last the many years of campaigning for lifts at the station by our late Chairman, Eric Mackie, will come to fruition.

### **PAVEMENTS ARE FOR PEOPLE**

Disability Access started a local campaign concerning the problems caused by vehicles parking on pavements about five years ago. This campaign is still being pursued by the current Disability Access Committee. However, parking on pavements is a national problem and East Grinstead and its surroundings are not the only places that suffer. A second reading of the Pavement Parking Bill will take place in Parliament on the 9<sup>th</sup> January 2015. In recent years the government has made it easier for local authorities to control pavement parking. Any local authority outside of the London area that has taken up civil enforcement powers can introduce a ban on pavement parking where they see fit. In 2011 the government gave authority to local councils to place notices banning pavement parking without having to seek permission from Whitehall first. In some streets a ban on pavement parking might be impractical as it is necessary to allow the free movement of vehicles and for that reason the government does not want to impose a blanket ban. So all is ongoing and only time will tell how matters develop.

### **RECENT MEETINGS ATTENDED BY DISABILITY ACCESS**

Representatives of Disability Access have attended the following meetings:

1. Carole Steggles attended a meeting at Chequer Mead arranged by the Mid Sussex Older Peoples Council (MSOP). It was entitled 'Are Older People Getting Younger?' The objective of the meeting was to get representatives of older peoples organisations together to get them working on a wider range of activities.
2. On the 13<sup>th</sup> November, Carole Steggles, Paul Johnson and Cliff Barrow attended an event at the Ardingly Showground which was organised by Mid Sussex South CVS and East Grinstead CVS and was entitled 'Challenges and Benefits of Partnership Working'. The meeting provided an opportunity to meet representatives of voluntary groups in the area (many of whom were familiar to the Disability Access Team) and discuss how to develop and get more out of partnership working, and share our experiences. It was a valuable opportunity to tell the other attendees what we do and of some of the local issues we have and there appeared to be genuine interest which can only be helpful to our work.
3. On the 25<sup>th</sup> November, Paul Johnson and Cliff Barrow attended a meeting in Haywards Heath organised by Independent Lives in celebration of 'Disability History Month'. It was a relatively small event

with the main theme being mental health and learning problems, which are outside our area of interest, but there was an opportunity to give representatives of West Sussex County Council some feedback on issues for disabled people, including transport problems.

### **VISUALLY IMPAIRED READERS GROUP**

The group meets on the last Tuesday of every month at the East Grinstead Library from 10:00 am until 11:45 am. The group is very friendly and books are made available as talking books or in large print format. After the group members have read them the books are discussed very informally over a cup of tea or coffee and biscuits. For more details please contact the office on 01342 322242. Please note that the group will not meet in December.

### **MOBILITY EQUIPMENT LOAN SCHEME**

This continues to be a success. If you or anybody you know either has an item of mobility equipment they could donate to Disability Access or alternatively needs something to aid their mobility could you please contact the office on 01342 322242.

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

Sainsbury Store Collection - Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

### **DAWNS (DISABLED ADULTS WEALDEN NORTH SOCIAL)**

DAWNS is a social group open to anybody with any form of disability in North Wealden or its surroundings including East Grinstead. Forthcoming activities:

- New Age Kerling at the Ashurst Wood Village Centre. Kerling will recommence on Tuesday the 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015 and fortnightly thereafter.
- 26<sup>th</sup> January 2015. Social meeting with guest speaker from 10:30am to 12:30 at the Community church hall, Forest Row.
- 23rd February 2015. Come along to the Chequer Mead Arts Centre at 11:00 am for cream tea. Please book in advance for this.
- 16<sup>th</sup> February 2015 (provisional date). First meeting of the direct payments peer support group in Forest Row. This will be supported by East Sussex County Council and all direct payment users are welcome.

For any additional information about DAWNS activities, and if you are interested in joining, please phone Jo Keel on 07759948788, or by email at englishowl@aol.com or go to the DAWNS website at: [www.dawns.org.uk](http://www.dawns.org.uk)

### **AUDIO OR E-NEWSLETTER SERVICE**

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter on CD or tape, or receive it by email, please contact the office.

### **OFFICE CONTACT DETAILS**

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