

DISABILITY ACCESS – EAST GRINSTEAD AREA

Charity Number 1079603

DECEMBER 2020 NEWSLETTER

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Dear Friends,

For most of us 2020 will not be remembered as a joyous year. We have all been affected and had our lives restricted in some measure by Covid-19, in many instances so much so that we have missed marking an occasion. For families and friends these have been trying times. We can only hope that there will be 'light at the end of the tunnel' and our lives will return to a kind of 'normality'.

Yes, and I am also guilty of having missed marking a special occasion – 2020 has marked the 25th anniversary of the passing of the DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT 1995. It is important to recognise that it was the arrival of this legislation that brought about the founding of the East Grinstead Access Group the former title of your present DISABILITY ACCESS – EAST GRINSTEAD AREA. The Act has a history of very slow progress over the past 25 years with very little by way of achievement of better conditions for the mobility impaired up to the following EQUALITIES ACT of 2010, and though there is better understanding of the plight of the disabled now, we still have to fight very hard for the improvements we all want to see.

To mark this occasion, I feel I must commend the sterling work of our predecessors over the past 25 years, in particular Eric Mackie MBE, who was Chairman for many years during that time, and also our present small team, who are providing a service in which we all can take pride even in these most challenging times.

My best wishes for maybe a 'different' Christmas and New Year, with hopes for better in 2021,

Sincerely,
Paul

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Due to Covid 19 restrictions, we were forced to take unprecedented action and cancel the AGM that had been advertised as an open meeting on the 17th September. It was rescheduled for the 8th September with only authorised attendance by our President, Cllr Danny Favor, and members of the Executive Committee. A full copy of the minutes and the Financial Statement for 2019/20 can be obtained on request from the office.

For the purposes of this newsletter, the following officers were nominated and elected on bloc to the Executive Committee: Chairman. Paul Johnson; Secretary. Rosemary Rowe; Treasurer. Olive Harper; Fundraising/Publicity & Promotions Officer. Cliff Barrow; VIP Readers Group/Newsletter. Bob Astington; Executive Members. Eddie Harper and Gordon Hyde (Mobility Equipment), Andrew Brock, Carole Steggles, Kathy Mackie-Clark, and Cllr. Christine Mainstone (EGTC representative).

On closing the meeting Cllr Danny Favor wished the committee better times ahead when hopefully we will return to normality.

NEW TOWN MAYOR

Disability Access wish to thank the outgoing mayor Cllr Danny Favor for all his support during his extended term of office and welcome the new mayor, Cllr John Dabell, with whom we look forward to working with over the next eighteen months.

WAITROSE CHARITY INITIATIVE

During October, Disability Access was one of three charities selected by Waitrose to participate in their 'in-branch' Community Matters Charity Initiative. To prevent spreading coronavirus the use of green tokens to determine how much each charity should receive was dropped and replaced by an equal share of the prize fund. Our share was the sum of £333 and our thanks go to Waitrose for selecting Disability Access to be a participant on this occasion.

CHANGES TO THE CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL SCHEME IN WEST SUSSEX

From the 31 October 2020, the concessionary travel scheme offered by the West Sussex County Council has changed. From that date, the WSCC no longer offer a free Senior Railcard as an alternative to the Older Person's Bus Pass. There are no changes to the free Disabled Person's Railcard alternative to the Disabled Person's Bus Pass, which will remain as an option for anyone with a qualifying disability in West Sussex.

You can find out more in the news release below:

<https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/news/a-change-ahead-for-concessionary-travel-in-west-sussex/>

Please note: all Railcards are still available to purchase independently from railway stations and the National Rail website.

CURRENT PROJECTS

Chequer Mead Car Park: We have been in further contact with MSDC. They agree that the situation on the Chequer Mead side of the car park is not satisfactory. A possibility discussed with MSDC is signage directing cars with people who have mobility problems into the Vicarage Car Park. This is not a totally satisfactory solution but may have to suffice for the foreseeable future. There are good disabled spaces there with improved access through to the De La Warr Road pavement and dropped curbs over to Chequer Mead with good visibility for crossing the road.

Crawley Down Road Crossings at Turners Hill Road and Sandy Lane: We have reminded WSCC of this issue by making a further submission on their website including an enquiry regarding the developers' obligations regarding providing infrastructure such as road crossings. Further contact with local residents and the seeking of clarification regarding the new developments and the road crossing provisions will be pursued.

Charlwoods Road and Jubilee Centre: In August we reported the installation of the dropped curbs between the Lingfield Road junction and the Jubilee Centre, for which we have thanked WSCC. We are also committed to make the case for dropped curbs to be provided further down Charlwoods Road towards the Durkins Farm Estate as wheelchair and mobility scooter users from this estate are at present disadvantaged.

Planning: We receive the weekly list of planning applications from WSCC and, where appropriate, make comments and propose access requirements, for example with respect to new shops and restaurants/cafes etc. However, the number of such new applications notified is now very small, partly due to the current reduction in economic activity but also changes to planning regulations which have made it possible to make proposals which would previously need to go through the planning approval process but which now do not. There have been further relaxations to planning regulations, intended to stimulate economic activity in these difficult times and this has attracted some adverse reaction, including consideration of possible effects on access. We will continue to monitor this activity as far as we can and make the appropriate input.

We investigate all comments and observations from our members and those we represent and, if appropriate, take issues forward to authorities and service providers. If you have experience of any access issues please call or email us.

MSDC TAXI REGULATIONS

The MSDC recently published proposed amendments to the taxi licensing regulations. Disability Access submitted comments to the MSDC on those parts of the regulations relevant to our interests concerning elderly and disabled people. Summarising, our comments were:

Section 22 Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Licence

A minimum standard of configuration and equipment should be applied to ensure that the vehicle is suitable for wheelchairs. This would include: ensuring sufficient space to load and unload the vehicle; safety and retention of the wheelchair inside the vehicle; suitable loading facilities by ramp or hoist; seats for the accompanying carers.

Two or more different standards of vehicle may apply. Firstly, vehicles that can only take relatively straightforward manual wheelchairs and secondly, more capable vehicles which can take motorised chairs or mobility scooters. The suitability of the vehicle should be made known to the customer when booking the taxi so that they can feel confident that the vehicle will be suitable for their wheelchair or mobility scooter.

Only vehicles certified to carry wheelchairs or mobility scooters should be used and the driver should be properly trained to operate the access equipment.

Section 25 Mandatory Disability Awareness Training

We supported the mandatory requirement for Disability Awareness Training. Procedures must exist to ensure that drivers maintain their qualification in this respect. In addition to physical disability awareness, visual impairment and deafness must be part of the training, particularly regarding how the driver acts and behaves when picking up the customer.

Taxi operators should conduct customer feedback to ensure that drivers comply with instructions covered during training.

Taxi booking agents should have procedures in place to establish whether customers booking a taxi require special assistance and if so this must be passed on to the driver.

PROBLEM WITH TAXIS FOR OLDER AND DISABLED PASSENGERS

It has been brought to our attention that some people with a disability or mobility problem experience difficulty in getting into the rear of a taxi, only to be told by the driver that they cannot sit in the front due to company regulations during the pandemic. In some instances, this has resulted in passengers being left stranded on the pavement. There is no easy solution to this, but as restrictions are likely to be with us for some time we would advise members who cannot get into the rear of a vehicle, for the reasons mentioned above, to let the taxi company know this when ordering the taxi. This might enable a more suitable vehicle to be used and thus avoid the unpleasantness of refusal when the taxi arrives.

MOBILITY EQUIPMENT LOAN SCHEME

Despite all the problems created by the pandemic we have been able to maintain this service. In this respect, thanks must go to Eddie Harper, Gordon Hyde and Michael Mackie-Clark for keeping things going smoothly.

If you have a mobility problem, we can help you. We have a wide selection of mobility aids such as walking frames, wheelchairs, rollators and trollies that are available on free loan for as long as required. This is not a hire service so we cannot ask for payment but voluntary donations to assist with running costs are always gratefully received.

If you are a member of a group containing elderly or disabled people with mobility problems, one of our committee will be only too pleased to visit your group to tell you more about the mobility support we can offer. All contact details are at the end of this newsletter.

AMAZON SMILE

Disability Access has been selected to be a beneficiary of the Amazon Smile scheme.

Amazon Smile is a website operated by Amazon that allows customers to enjoy the same range and selection of purchases as Amazon.co.uk but the difference is that for every purchase of a qualifying item, Amazon will donate 0.5% of the net purchase price, excluding VAT and shipping costs, to the charity selected by the customer. Prices of goods on both websites are identical and there is no charge to the customer for making the donation.

If you already have an Amazon account and wish to register for Amazon Smile, go to www.smile.amazon.co.uk and log on as you would using your normal Amazon log on details. During registration you can select the charity you wish to support which, hopefully, will be *Disability Access – East Grinstead Area*. When making future purchases you must log on via the smile.amazon.co.uk website otherwise no donations will be made.

To accrue reasonable benefit, it is obvious that spending has to be a collective effort amongst family and friends so please get your family and friends involved and ask them to support our charity.

BEWARE OF THE SCAMMER

We have included an article about scams, as we continually hear about the rising incidents of criminals preying on the lonely, elderly and vulnerable during the pandemic.

Many of you will have received bogus telephone calls purporting to be from British telecom, Amazon, Microsoft and many more, including your own bank or Credit Card Company. People are also reporting scam telephone calls and emails offering medications to combat Covid-19. Occasionally there will be a live person on the line but more often all you hear is a recorded message. If you have any doubts about the call, politely put the receiver down and under no circumstances engage in conversation with a criminal whose sole aim is to relieve you of your money.

Scam emails are known as phishing. If you receive an email and you are suspicious about its content and the sender, double click on the senders email address and a box will open to reveal the senders true email details. The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), part of GCHQ, launched an email reporting service in April 2020 to which anybody can send a suspicious email. The email address to use is report@phishing.gov.uk and because emails are scanned electronically using an algorithm you should receive a rapid reply. If you have been defrauded of money, make an online report to Action Fraud which also deals nationwide with such matters.

If you receive a text message that appears to be a scam, do not reply to it but forward it to 7726 which is also part of the NCSC.

VISUALLY IMPAIRED READERS GROUP

Due to the ongoing pandemic, all meetings of the Visually Impaired Readers Group have been suspended until further notice.

AUDIO OR EMAIL NEWSLETTER SERVICE

Due to the pandemic, Grenestede Talking News are regrettably unable to provide an audio recording of this newsletter.

If you are able to receive this newsletter by email please let us know as it will greatly reduce our production costs.

CONTACT DETAILS

Disability Access – East Grinstead Area, Town Council Offices, East Court, College Lane,
East Grinstead, West Sussex, RH19 3LT

Telephone: 01342 322242 Email: office@egaccess.co.uk