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# **Future engagement with accessibility user groups**

Economic Development, Transport and Climate  
Emergency Scrutiny Commission

Date of meeting: 16<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Lead director/officer: Andrew L Smith/Stuart Maxwell

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### **Useful information**

- Ward(s) affected: All
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- Report version number: v1.8

## **1. Summary**

This report outlines how accessibility user groups will be engaged on highways and transport related projects.

## **2. Recommended actions/decision**

The commission are asked to note and support the proposals to set up a new disability access group to assist the Council with accessibility considerations on highways and transport related projects.

## **3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement**

- 3.1 EDTT Scrutiny Commission 9<sup>th</sup> July 2020; a question was asked regarding the Council's approach to engagement with users with disabilities. It was explained that much progress had been made to develop expertise in house and that the council would continue to invest resources into accessibility and was committed to inclusive design. As part of the Council's street design guide a street assessment tool has been developed and the guide itself was produced with input from disability groups.
- 3.2 Engagement with the Chair of the Leicester Disabled Persons Accessibility Group took place on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020. Email sent to accessibility groups in January 2021 inviting them to put forward representatives to take part in a proposed new forum.

## **4. Background and options with supporting evidence**

N/a

## **5. Detailed report**

### **Proposed Leicester Transport Accessibility Panel**

- 5.1 As part of the design process, the department has previously engaged with accessibility user groups via the Leicester Disabled Access Person's Group (LDPAG) and Bus User Panel (BUP). This has highlighted the needs of different users and helped officers design for inclusive access. Since the COVID pandemic and lockdown in March 2020, these groups have been unable to meet as they had done previously although engagement has taken place wherever possible as outlined in paragraph 5.6. Proposals have now been developed for a new disability access group to ensure the

wide range of accessibility interests and issues are considered within both individual project designs and the wider management of the public highway and urban realm.

5.2 Officers met with the LDPAG Chair, Sujata Barot, in December 2020 to ascertain the status of the LDPAG group and to discuss future engagement options and opportunities. Sujata explained they were trying to get their members to adapt to using IT in order to set up online meetings, but this was proving difficult. A discussion took place around the need to organise a suitable group, including LDPAG, to appropriately represent the wide range of accessibility interests and provide informed comments on draft scheme designs being developed by the council. It was a very positive meeting and the LDPAG Chair welcomed the opportunity for their group to be represented in this new forum alongside other relevant groups. Following that initial meeting, we were informed of the very sad news that Sujata had passed away. Officers have since exchanged e-mails with Sally Williams of LDPAG who, on an interim basis, has agreed to administer invitations to any future consultation meetings.

5.3 A new disability access group is subsequently being formed called the “Leicester Transport Accessibility Panel” (LTAP). This will support the Council with accessibility considerations on highways and transport related projects by providing informed comments on:

- individual scheme designs.
- design standards and related guidance.
- technology which enhances accessibility; and,
- other relevant accessibility issues

5.4 The Panel will meet 3 times per annum chaired by the City Transport Director. Additional meetings focussed on specific schemes will be arranged as required, led by the relevant project leader. Officers have made contact with a number of groups to represent accessibility interests and, to date, have received an interest to join from the following:

- Mosaic
- LCC Disabled Employee group
- LDPAG
- VISTA

This can be kept under review and additional groups can be added as appropriate. Any suggestions from the Commission would be welcomed.

### **Officer Training on Accessibility**

5.5 As part of our commitment to accessible design, all officers that are involved from a project delivery, planning or policy perspective will receive suitable training. The following are examples of training that is ongoing or proposed.

a) ***Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) for each project***

EIAs are carried out for all relevant projects. They are reviewed and updated throughout the life of the project. Project Managers have training sessions on the requirements of an EIA and use of the corporate EIA template. Regular training sessions will be held to ensure officers are familiar with EIA requirements.

**b) Design Guide Workshops**

- Relevant officers have or will attend workshops on the new Leicester Street Design Guide. This promotes sustainable, healthier and accessible designs which reflect the characteristics and function of the particular streets within the scope of the project.

**c) Inclusive Design Training**

- Strategy managers, programme / project managers and scheme designers will be given ongoing inclusive design training opportunities relevant to their role. Officers are reviewing external and in-house training options. Examples of available courses include:

**Ensuring Compliance with the Equality Act (Supplier – PTRC)**

This course has been developed to help transport, highways and public realm professionals in unitary county and district authorities to understand the provisions of the Equality Act and what this means for their day-to-day work in policy development through to planning, designing and delivering schemes on the ground

**Delivering Accessible and Inclusive Transport (Supplier – PTRC)**

Retro-fitting high-quality cycling infrastructure is a significant challenge for engineers and planners.

This course explores the different approaches to making cycling feel convenient and safe in urban areas, illustrated by case studies of innovative cycling infrastructure design.

**Inclusive Design – Examples of Inclusive Design & Engagement with Disability Groups**

**5.6 Core Features and Facilities** – the following elements are routinely embedded within our scheme designs to improve accessibility:

- Tactile paving at crossings & on cycleways
- Tactile push-buttons and audible signals (when safe to do so) at traffic signal controlled crossing points
- Raised boarding platforms at bus stops

**5.7 Consultation on Major Schemes (pre-Covid 19)** – despite the absence of a formal access panel, designers have been able to consult relevant groups on accessibility issues associated with major projects. Examples include:

**a) London Road Improvement**

The London Road Highway Improvement scheme aimed to create a safer route for all users. Consultation on the scheme took place in Autumn 2017. Comments were received from members of LDPAG at exhibition events. A meeting was also held in September 2017 with different stakeholder groups including LDPAG and Vista. Comments from the meeting were fed into the public consultation which took place

in October 2017. The scheme was constructed between October 2018 and December 2019.

**Photo: London Road – bus and cycle lanes outside railway station**



***b) Belgrave Gate Improvement.***

This scheme creates a safer and more attractive route for all users, including cyclists and pedestrians. Stakeholders, including members of LDPAG, were consulted on the scheme in summer 2017

**Photo: Belgrave Gate – segregated pedestrians, cyclists, buses and cars**



**c) Lancaster Road / Tigers Way & Victoria Park Road / Queens Road Junctions**

Consultation with LDPAG was undertaken in 2019 and resulted in positive and effective design changes including:

- Introduction of a crossing on Lancaster Road adjacent to Tigers Way.
- Introduction of guidance paving on the path through Victoria Park.
- Simplified design at Victoria Park Road/Queens Road junction.

**Photo: Tigers Way Crossing – with segregated pedestrians, cycles and vehicles**



**d) King Street**

Design changes were not required following consultation with LDPAG in 2018.

**Photo: King Street – shortlisted for national “Healthy Streets” Award**



5.8 **Consultation during covid-19** - notwithstanding the limitations on engagement during scheme development through the Covid-19 pandemic, several projects have in the recent past been subject to engagement with members of LDPAG and other disability groups. Examples include:

**a) Live Bus Information Signs with Audio Announcements**

Our Transforming Cities Fund Programme includes the roll-out of live bus information signs along our major radial routes. For the first time in Leicester, the signs have the potential to include an audio announcement facility triggered by a push button.

A trial sign was installed in Charles Street (nr the junction of Church Street) and was available to any users making an essential trip to that area of the city centre. Recognising the constraints imposed by Covid-19, mobility impaired users were also consulted using a video clip of the Charles Street test sign in operation. Feedback has been positive.

In addition to improving accessibility, these battery powered signs are quick and easy to install – avoiding the expense and inconvenience of the excavations and cabling required for mains electricity connections. Removing the need for these on-site works is a further small but worthwhile benefit for mobility impaired pedestrians.

**Photo: New Audio Sign & Next Bus Information Button**



## ***b) St Margaret's Bus Station Rebuild***

Two separate meetings were held with LDPAG during the RIBA design stages. The first, in November 2020, outlined the scheme proposals and sought to understand any issues and requirements from an LDPAG perspective. Following this meeting, scheme designs were amended and presented to LDPAG in January 2021. Additional items were raised during the second meeting and have now been incorporated within the design and tender documentation. Minutes of the consultation meetings were sent to all those in attendance.

Going forward, our tender documentation stipulates that the successful contractor must continue engagement with LDPAG when finalising the RIBA stage 4 design work.

### **Artist's Impression: New St Margaret's Bus Station**



**5.9 Working with others to improve accessibility** - the above examples illustrate projects which are designed and delivered by the city council. However, if the opportunity arises the council will work with partners to improve accessibility by building on systems and services which are outside our immediate control. For example:

#### **a) Public transport – off-bus mobile ticketing**

The challenge of increasing social distancing and reducing personal contact during Covid-19 provided a window of opportunity to work with bus operator partners and make rapid progress in the complex area of contactless and mobile ticketing. Building on existing bus operator platforms, the result is that our multi-operator



flexi-tickets can now be purchased off-bus and used across Leicester's commercial bus network.

Although many mobility and visually impaired bus users will benefit from the concessionary travel card scheme, it is not always the case. The provision of this cashless and contactless multi-operator ticket is therefore considered to be a positive step which will increase accessibility and improve safety during Covid-19 and beyond.

**Photo: Flexi-Ticket Ad for Unlimited travel on any bus in Leicester**



## **6. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications**

### **6.1 Financial implications**

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

### **6.2 Legal implications**

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

### **6.3 Equalities implications**

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 also requires that reasonable adjustments be made so that disabled people are not excluded from places that serve the public, including publicly accessible open spaces. This duty is on-going and anticipatory and, therefore, reasonable and proportionate steps to overcome barriers which may impede people with different kinds of disabilities.

Accessible and inclusive design relating to highway and transport schemes in an around the City will support the general aims of the PSED and will be beneficial particularly in removing barriers to participation in public life. Ongoing engagement and consultation with key service user groups, disability groups and organisations is a vital aspect of ensuring that an inclusive approach which is consistent with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 is taken. It is vitally important that less visible disabilities are taken into account, as they can pose just as much of a barrier as a physical disability.

As the report notes, equality impact assessments are carried out to ensure that any potential disproportionate negative impacts on any particular protected characteristic/s are identified and mitigated and to ensure that the schemes are inclusive of individuals and groups with different protected characteristics.

Engagement enables public authorities, and people with an interest in their work, to pool their knowledge and experience of eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations. This evidence can then be used to improve decision making. Setting up of a new disability group to help to develop projects should make a positive contribution in achieving positive equalities outcomes. Engagement can also help to design more appropriate projects/services, which in turn are more likely to be effective, and make better use of resources.

Surinder Singh Equalities Officer, ext 37 4148

#### 6.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no specific climate change implications arising directly from this report.

#### 6.5 Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

There are no other implications.

7. Background information and other papers: there are no additional papers
8. Summary of appendices: there are no appendices attached
9. Is this a private report? (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly). Answer – No.
10. Is this a “key decision”? If so, why? Answer – No