

## Equal Access Advisory Group

### Meeting Notes – 12 December 2024 – Congleton Town Hall

**Attendance:** Dr Deborah Lawson (Chair), Cllr Kay Wesley, Denis Murphy, Alec Scaresbrook, Angela Ward, Cathy Dean.

Virtual – Tom Stephens, Diane Ritherdon

Guest – Rich Smith (Thrive)

Apologies – Pam Carey, and Theresa Graystone.

#### 1. Welcome from the chair.

#### 2. Notes of the meeting of **30 September** accepted as a correct record

#### 3. Actions from previous minutes

- **Action** - Kay and Theresa to check out routes from Able World to Readsmore Surgery – **carry forward**
- **Action** - People to report broken pavements etc via FIX MY STREET – **ongoing**
- **Action** - Jackie provided maps; Denis to action where there are dropped kerbs
- **Action** - Cathy & Kay are working on an accessibility leaflet for shops – **agenda item**.
- **Action** - Ruth Burgess CTC looking at the gaps for benches  
<https://openbenches.org/#53.16171/-2.211541/17> - **Cathy to follow up with Ruth**
- **Action** - article in Bear Necessities – issues with bins, parking and A-boards – **Completed**.
- **Action** - interviews with Congleton Radio delayed until October – **carry forward**
- **Action** - list of articles for the Chronicle – **Kay to action**

#### 4. Guest Speaker Rich Smith Thrive.

Rich presented the home page of the CTC website and in particular, wanted to check with the group accessibility tools and navigation on mobile.

- How would you prefer accessibility tools to be displayed?
- How would you prefer mobile navigation to be displayed?

The Thrive presentation has been shared with the minutes to group members, and a live version of the homepage has been constructed to allow you to test accessibility tools with your preferred browser.

**\*\*Note no other links will be working on the homepage**

**\*\*Strictly private, please DO NOT share the live website address**

**ACTION** – interested group members please provide any feedback to Cathy

Comments from the meeting:

- Black on a coloured background can be a struggle for older people.
- Does the tool limit the size of text increase?

- Check reader view in different browsers
- In danger of being over-completed – it's about striking the right balance

## **5. Disability Welcome Leaflet**

A working draft of the disability welcome leaflet was shared with the group. Denis shared some simple adjustments that a local pub had taken to allow Denis to enter the premises in a mobility scooter. Often small adjustments can make a huge difference.

Need to make allowances for smaller businesses.

**Action** – Cathy to add Deborah's amendments, and contact the designer to produce a brand & logo for disability welcome which will include the design of the leaflet.

**Action** – Shop Motability – what has happened to that? Can we include it in the Bridgestones shopping Centre? Cathy to make contact with the owners.

## **6. Congleton Christmas Light Switch On**

Deborah attended the event and noted the following:

### **Screen not working**

The screen would have been excellent; however, it only worked intermittently. It didn't work over the lights switch on time at all – or the 15-minute lead-up, so those who went to it were disappointed that the screen was not on and soon left.

### **Screen position**

The screen may have perhaps been better in the market quarter or on Little Street by the pedestrian area.

Maybe put a sign under the screen saying it's live streaming the Christmas light switch on for anyone needing a quieter/less crowded area to watch (such as wheelchair users/children, etc).

### **Chairs**

Chairs were a great idea by the screen – but needed a laminated sign to say you could take them to sit on, as people weren't sure they were allowed.

### **Mill Street/Swan Bank onto Pedestrian Area**

As the pedestrian area began, a stall in the centre made it very difficult to use the blocked curb and get past in a wheelchair.

### **Toilets**

The map didn't show where any accessible toilets were.

Ideally, mark them out as well, and because the portable ones wouldn't fit my powered wheelchair (or many other powered wheelchairs), it would be helpful to say on the map and on the doors of the portable toilets, "A slightly bigger accessible toilet is situated in the town hall to accommodate larger powered wheelchairs."

### **Town Hall – could not access it**

I couldn't get to the town hall as the dropped curbs were blocked by the fairground ride outside of the town hall, and the ride blocked the entire width of the road. Also, a food stall was blocking the pavement, so you couldn't access it that way. This was fine for prams, etc, as parents could lift them onto the pavement, but powered wheelchairs could not get to the town hall as there were no dropped curbs available (\*I know Kay went to find a ramp as a temporary measure).

**Solution:** Don't allow a food stall on the pavement blocking access in this area, and ensure clear access to the town hall from at least one dropped curb. Particularly as this was the only accessible toilet I would have been able to use (I didn't end up going to the town hall because of it being inaccessible).

### **Crowd etiquette**

People not stepping to one side for wheelchair users or for disabled people was something many people mentioned in the survey as being a big problem in Congleton and at town events.

I found it surprising that this was a huge and very unsafe problem. People didn't move and were banging into me. I couldn't use the riser function on my wheelchair (which I usually always use elsewhere), fearing my chair could be tipped over by being knocked into. I couldn't be independent, and my husband had to protect me and ask people to move/be careful – it wouldn't have been safe for me to attend alone. People either weren't looking and considering that there could be wheelchair users there or were happy to block my path and not move to one side.

**Solution:** More campaigns on social media, bear necessities, chronicle, and in the lead up to events to always prioritise wheelchair users/mobility scooters/disabled people, be kind etc.

### **Parking**

Accessible parking – This was an excellent idea and in a perfect location. 10 Accessible spots but only 2 taken. More social media coverage is needed to ensure others know they are available.

### **Stalls**

One-sided stalls are great and spread out well.

Market quarter – great (how do you get down to it aside from by Morrisons? It said Mill Street? Is this the step access only? Perhaps put where the accessible entrance to the market quarter is on the map).

### **Community stage**

The gazebo would have benefited from being bigger here. The brass band we watched were brilliant, but they were playing, huddled underneath (not all quite fitting), and getting wet. And there was nowhere for their instrument cases to go aside from the pavement in the rain.

### **Misc**

Carnie Bear – brilliant, really friendly, chatty, great with the crowd and disabled people.

Karamba – the drums were exceptional – enhanced the atmosphere.

Thanks to Deborah for the feedback; points will be considered for the 2025 event. Crowd etiquette is a significant issue in Congleton. The new website could highlight challenges faced by disabled people and share real-life stories from the group, starting with education in primary and secondary schools.

**Action:** Dedicate the next meeting to crowd etiquette and attitudes toward disability.

## **7. A.O.B**

**a)** The equal access group will remain an advisory group but needs to be formalised.

**Action** – Cathy/Kay/Deborah to draw up terms of reference so members and potential new members understand and align with the purpose of the group.

**b) Hybrid Meetings and Proxy Voting** - a short consultation seeks views on the detail and practical implications of allowing remote and hybrid attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings in England.

All in favour of a group response. – **Action** – Deborah / Kay.

Closes 19<sup>th</sup> December.

**c)** Email received from a deaf member of the Congleton community regarding the problems accessing services in Congleton.

We need to invite organisations such as theatres, leisure centres etc to understand costs/staff training needs to allow better accessibility for residents.

Basic sign language course, potentially organised through Congleton Partnership for councilors', staff & members.

**Action** – Kay to investigate if the council can action or invite from the Mayor. The deaf community isn't represented at the moment in the equal access group, Kay to contact and invite.

**d)** Meeting dates 2025

Meeting frequency agreed every 10 weeks. Cathy will send out dates.