

**Minutes of Wandsworth Access Association Meeting
at the Anchor Church Centre, Garratt Lane, SW18,
Monday 14th April 2008**

▪ **Attendees**

19 attended at the meeting

▪ **Apologies**

7 apologies received

▪ **Welcome and Introductions**

Betty Price chaired the meeting in place of Martyn. She introduced our speakers and welcomed Jane Allen and Geoff Bolton from the Tooting Library Redevelopment Team, Wandsworth Borough Council. (The first speaker's.)

▪ **Redevelopment of Tooting Library**

Jane Allen, & Geoff Bolton, Tooting Library Redevelopment Team, WBC

Wandsworth Council had been considering the redevelopment of Tooting Library for the past three or four years, in order to bring it up to standard with regard to accessibility and to improve the facilities generally.

Geoff: Has been working on the extension project since joining the Council a year ago. The consultation with local people had shown that most people wanted to retain the outer appearance of the building, and so appropriate plans and projections were drawn up. This coincided with an announcement from the National Lottery

offering grants to local authorities of £80m. Jane completed the application forms, and in October, Wandsworth Council was awarded £1.45m with matched funding from the Council – providing a total of £2,9m to spend on the redevelopment.

Geoff informed us that one of the main problems with the existing building has been access. They asked the architects to keep the original front and side elevations in line with public request, and to remove as many of the internal walls as possible. Fortunately the building has flat access from the street.

The redevelopment project also provided the opportunity to look at services, opening hours, and accessibility issues, having consulted with Wandsworth Access Association regarding the latter.

Geoff described the plans. They will be trying to open up the building as much as possible, using the small plot of land at the back to build an extension. A new third floor will be added which will provide extra space for staff offices and staff facilities, thus allowing more space to be used by the public.

The old staircase will be demolished and a new one will be built in the corner of the ground floor area.

Geoff then described the innovative energy saving proposals which will be employed to reduce the building's carbon footprint. There will be no air conditioning, but fresh air ventilation will be used. There will be a new heating and building management system which will keep a regular temperature. It will automatically adjust the opening and closing of windows to minimise the amount of heating needed. During the summer nights, the windows will be open to allow cool air in, and to allow it to be kept in during the day.

On entering the building through automatic doors, there will be a second set of automatic doors to the main body of the building. Three existing pillars will remain in place; otherwise the downstairs space will be open. There will be a mezzanine floor and a first floor. A lift will be installed, thus allowing access for everyone in the community.

Adult books and services will remain on the ground floor. Two self-service points will be installed at which people can log their books in and out. These are popular with people in a hurry and with children who love to use the technology.

The plans include a small space for a learning suite. The Council are in negotiation with organisations such as Skills for Life who will provide courses. There will be 12 learning spaces. The space can also be booked for use in the evening when the library is closed. The dedicated Asian library collection will move to the ground floor.

The children's library will move to the first floor, and along with this will be a special teenage library. The Council have been working with groups and with young people to design this and buy in appropriate books. There will also be a study area suitable for those working on their exams, research etc., and a newspaper reading area.

The top floor will house the staff area – offices and facilities.

There will be general and disabled toilets on the ground floor, plus disabled and baby -changing/children's toilets on the first floor.

A particular feature of the building will be a new bay window which will allow sunlight in and throughout the day will have the effect of different qualities of illumination as the sun goes round the building.

Questions, Answers & Comments

Q: Betty asked about evacuation procedures in case of fire.

Q: Will there be fire alarms, smoke alarms, and safety features in the toilets?

A: Geoff: There would be refuges on each floor, and evacuation chairs will be to hand.

C: Mary requested that wheelchair users be asked to check on the design of the toilets.

A: Jane: WAA members will be asked to vet everything preferably prior to the completion of the work.

C: Mary wanted assurance that the entrance was completely flat.

R: It is (unusually for older libraries!) There are no steps at all.

The building works will commence in October this year and will take a year to complete. In the meantime, Jane said that temporary accommodation was being sought – e.g. closed down shops in Tooting.

Apparently, Tooting is not an area where shops are closing, except that M&S are planning to close their store. This would be ideal. There is also a premises in Franciscan Road.

Q: Jane was asked about the lift, whether it would be a speaking lift.

A: Jane: This would be useful and most premises have speaking lifts. However, visual displays were needed for those with hearing difficulties.

C: With this installed, the library could well be eligible for the Mayor's Award for accessible buildings.

The fire alarms will have flashing lights, as some users find their digital hearing aids switch off when fire alarms go off.

Geoff concluded his presentation by inviting anyone to have a look at what is happening with work in progress. An invitation will be issued to Wandsworth Access Association as a group. Geoff's experience in Bexley was that further changes were able to be made prior to a library's opening when group of disabled people were invited to inspect it.

- **Sports and Leisure Development Officer, WBC**
Ben Hagreen.

Ben explained his role as Sports and Development Officer for people with disabilities. He has been working with Wandsworth Care Alliance to get a disability sports project underway. A questionnaire was sent out to disabled people across the borough asking what sports they would be interested in, and what days and times would be convenient. About 30 replies have been received.

During February and March there was a series of Paralympic Taster Sessions - goalball, boccia, athletics. A total of five out of the planned six were held, and 121 people turned up; 80 of these were new faces. They included people with learning difficulties, complex needs, visual disabilities, and mental health needs. The sixth session, adaptive rowing at Barnes Boat House, was snowed off. This is to be re-arranged.

Ben informed us that he has a grant of £2,500 from the London Development Agency to set up a project for disability sports and indoor games such as Boccia, which is like bowls but adapted.

Ben explained that another part of his job is to help young disabled people with adaptive games. He spoke about the questionnaire which he had produced in collaboration with WCA. About 30 replies had been received indicating which activities people were interested in, and when were the best times for them.

Questions, Answers & Comments

Q: John asked if any indoor games were being offered, such as bridge or whist.

A: Ben replied that he did not cover these but there were clubs in the borough.

There were many activities being offered in the borough such as all sorts of exercise classes, including chair-based exercise classes at Pocklington. Ben commented there was something for everyone, and

most were weekly drop in sessions. Many of us said we would be interested in receiving a list of activities. Ben promised to forward a directory to Martyn, which could then be distributed to anyone interested.

- **The Couper Trust.**
Max Couper

A few years ago, Max, a local artist, set up the Couper Trust which houses a waterborne art collection based on a number of historic Thames barges at Battersea Beach. This venture has the support of the London Mayor's Office.

Plans have now been drawn up to re-organise the moorings so that the complex is fully accessible to disabled people and to the elderly. It is a large scale project involving eight barges and the pontoon structure; a super-structure will be placed onto the pontoons to create walkways. Funding has been secured for the work to begin this summer and continue up till 2012 and the cultural Olympiad and Paralympics.

An access auditor has been appointed and funded by the City Bridge Trust. Advice so far has been to construct large lobby areas so that people in wheelchairs can wait comfortably to enter a particular area, while others exit the area. It is a challenging project because of the tidal levels.

Max informed us that he has a new baby, and as a barge dweller, he has experienced a steep learning curve about accessibility. We talked about navigation and the route around the barges, also the addition of a first aid room. Planning permission has been received for the first stage, and the process of putting in the super-structure is under way. There is a need to keep everything level, especially as there can be a lot of movement when boats such as the river bus go past.

Access currently involves people going up a step and then down some steps. Max asked for our contributions regarding the specific needs of disabled people. Largely, they would be mobility needs. There was also a question about being on a boat in a wheelchair – none of us had had this experience.

A first aid room and a baby changing room would be included in the plans.

There would be issue about the contrast in coming in from bright daylight to the interior of a barge which would be relatively dark. Also access is via a ramp with a gradient of 1:12, and with some movement.

Non-slip surfaces would be required, regularly cleaned, and cross-wise decking with ridges. The pontoons would be decked in some places, and there would be a combination of suitable non-slip surfaces. The final decisions would rest with the borough engineer.

Questions, Answers & Comments

Q: Sarah Dixey asked if building regulations applied to barges.

A: Max: They were governed by marine regulations.

C: Cllr Hallmark had recommended a continuous handrail on one side of the structures, with a lower handrail for wheelchair users. There could be some movement with the wash from other boats. A lower handrail would be useful for children, too.

C: Sarah suggested that Max should contact the Mayor's office as they have up to date building regulations and good practice guidelines which apply to designing resting places, length/gradient of ramps, and size of lobby areas.

The ramps on and off the boats will be 1:12 gradients. The ideal is 1:20 but 1:12 is acceptable. One barge will be equipped with a lift which will be designed to be as attractive as possible.

Betty thanked Max for his presentation. Everyone had found it extremely interesting. Max promised to keep in touch with Martyn and when he returns to report on progress he will bring a projector for his laptop.

- **Minutes of Meeting held on 17th March**

These were accepted and there were no matters arising.

- **Work Programme**

Betty said that the same issues come up repeatedly about Dial-a-Ride and Taxi Card. WAA should concentrate on finding out the problems, as many people in the borough live alone and rely on D-a-R and Taxi Card, but are being let down; both of these systems give a very poor service. Taxi Card does not guarantee a journey home. Wandsworth Council give money to fund D-a-R and Taxi Card, and should be made aware of the problems.

Martyn suggested that there should be a special meeting in September on the issues. He would ask people to contribute their various experiences.

The next Mobility Forum was to be on Thursday 22nd May, at which people attending could raise the matter.

- **Any Other Business**

The AGM will be on 23rd June. The Mayor will be in attendance. New membership forms will go out with the minutes, and be accompanied by an ethnic monitoring form.

Martyn said that if anyone wanted to put themselves forward to stand for any of the offices, they would need to be proposed and seconded. He would like all members to be actively involved. It would be

possible to have a postal voting system but only for those who could not come to the AGM.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm

Wandsworth Access Association of People with Disabilities.

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