University of Essex Access Forum (EAF)

Minutes of meeting held on January 25th 2016


1. Minutes from previous meeting (9th June 2015)

2. Matters arising

i. Personnel changes: Mark Vinter has left and Joe Ramos taken over his role in LTM, Bryte Legister has taken over as Head of Capital and Development (Dep. Dir. Of EMS)

ii. Lift access to teaching/research spaces for disabled staff: Bryn Morris has spoken with Central Timetabling Office and agreement has been reached that rooms with more than one route of access will be prioritised for mobility-restricted teaching staff so that lift servicing etc no longer impacts on full access between staff offices and teaching spaces. No policy is felt necessary in support of this; just a change of practice from now on. We do need to make new staff aware of the need to request this provision however. We currently offer anyone who discloses a disability a meeting to discuss access needs, so this could be an opportunity to do so. EMS are now also giving a week’s advance warning of pending works.

iii. Actions resulting from meeting with Keith Miller & Simon Neil (12/8, KB, AJ & RM):

– Capital team representation on the forum (up until now, LTM has been represented but not Capital, although most issues that arise relate to builds).

– Development of Design Principles specific to University of Essex setting. This has been discussed previously but never fully actioned. To be revisited, alongside current work on Design Briefs and Procurement.

– EMS report they are appointing Access Consultants on some new builds. They have not to date though advised them of the existence of the Forum and therefore there has been no communication between the two. Agreement that in future such notice and consultation should be expected good practice.

iv. Library – Postgraduate room and lift access – the room is now fully open during the day and overnight. The weight of the overnight door is problematic. This has been brought to the attention of Estates. Lift access also remains an issue – it doesn’t stop on the ground floor, so would be hard to make usable in future. There are directions to it from the Paternoster lift, but the route is via another heavy fire door which can’t be held open as it protects the staircase. A magnetic hold-open has been considered but is not possible. An automated door opening seems the only solution.

ACTION: Mary Pelowski to create a priority list for discussion with Ian Hack, EMS.
v. **Installation of automated doors** – this is now complete in both the Health Centre and Greenwood House. In the Silberrad Centre, heavy doors remain an issue. The automatic opening door in Ivor Crewe has been out of action for 2 months – it should be fixed in the first week of February. The Ivor Crewe is to be open later in the evening.

**ACTION:** to be reviewed during DisabledGo audit in August and report to EMS.

### 5. Buildings and Estate

i. **Report from EMS Project Steering Groups**: a number of building projects are active at the moment – North Towers Teaching Centre, new Sports Centre, works at Loughton campus, and the forthcoming Innovation Centre. Access is now a standing item on all project management reports. A Changing Place toilet facility is planned as part of the new sports facilities. We are working with Sport England on accessible design, including provision of a toilet for guide dogs. Planning permission is not yet in place though.

A February hand-over is planned for the North Towers Teaching Centre. No known access issues, however the lighting around the outside access is poor. Review of the lighting situation there and in front of the EBS is required.

At Loughton campus only one meeting has taken place so far, so very early stages. There may be some significant access issues as a listed building. The Innovation Centre is yet to meet. Access is now being considered seriously at planning meetings from earliest stages.

ii. **EBS update** – it not possible to independently access the EBS building due to the slope gradients on approach, as a result of which timetabling cannot not put disabled students in this building. The only accessible route is via Boundary Road but only if arriving from this direction also e.g. via bus, since the routes to this point from campus are not themselves accessible, due to distance and gradients.

EAF Exec met with Mike Willis to review a proposal for substantial works around the upper outside approach to EBS. However these have not been approved on account of cost. The first set of proposals were costed at half a million; the second at £150k. Neither felt to provide value for money. BM reassured that the issue would not fall off the agenda.

iii. **STEM Building update** – Project Manager reports that plans are considerably over budget and therefore negotiations are underway about how to reduce costs. John Stevens has not yet had any new plans – there is a meeting in two weeks’ time at which point he’ll know more.

Concern has been raised that we need as much notice as possible about impact of works on access under podia – a reduced number of disabled spaces is inevitable. AS has contacted Charlotte Humphreys about this.

**ACTION:** JS will follow up and report back.
6. **Barrier access under podia** – Requests have been made by members of disabled staff who would like to have barrier access on Boundary Road to access their car parking spaces under podia, so that they can shorten their journey when driving in.

The road is a private one and maintained by the university. A change in policy would affect 16 Blue Badge holders who have reserved spaces under podia. The barrier is operated by number plate recognition which shouldn't be an issue when working. The University has already been considering relocation of the barrier in the direction of Wivenhoe to balance pressure on parking between north and south towers – if this goes ahead the issue would be resolved in any event. There was general support for a change in policy for Blue Badge holders either way.

**ACTION:** BM will progress this decision.

7. **Employee satisfaction scores** – how do we follow up on the fact that satisfaction scores are generally lower from disabled staff than non-disabled? We can’t assume a direct causal link. HR/E&D are considering work load allocation and how disability is taken into account in that process, and efforts are being made to try and increase the staff voice around disability.

HR are looking at the role of the manager and the provision of advice and guidance training. We need to hear the voice of disabled staff in order to properly air concerns. One problem is that our means of contacting disabled students and staff are limited. We may not be able to contact the whole campus community – could we use Essex Weekly to take issues forward, report on positive stories and EAF successes, and to encourage people to get involved? We have a list of all of those who have registered as having a disability – could we communicate directly to that group?

8. **New catering outlet (double-decker bus)** - the decision to buy the double decker bus and only address afterwards the inevitable access issues it throws up was criticised by RM. None of the proposals made in subsequent consultation were agreed on account of cost.

**ACTION:** Rowena to forward BM the proposals.

9. **AOB**
   i. The fire doors around the university are being checked and upgraded in terms of quality insurance.
   ii. Michele James has taken over from Angela Jones and assumed a new title Accessibility Services Manager (reflecting responsibilities within the role for access issues outside disability alone i.e. mature students)

10. **Date of next meeting** – Wednesday 15th June, 1-2pm, 5A.330

Rosie Redstone & Rowena Macaulay