University of Essex Access Forum (EAF)

Minutes of meeting held on June 15th 2016

Present: Rowena Macaulay, Bryn Morris, John Stevens, Alexandra Seabrook, Jan Cooper, Kevan Wilding, Angela Jones, Kevin Mascall, Keith Miller, Penny Christmas.

1. **Apologies:** David Sanders, John Crust, Mary Pelowski, Francisco Sepulveda and Karen Bush.

2. **Minutes from previous meeting (January 25th 2016)**

3. **Matters arising**

   i. **Library:** heavy doors to Postgraduate room and on route to main lift
   
   Mary Pelowski and Ian Hack have met to consider issues with door weights in the library, but were not able to attend today’s meeting to report back. The cost of automated doors to be explored.
   
   **ACTION:** RM to follow up with MP/IH.

   ii. **Silberrad:** Angela Jones reported that an automated door has now been installed at the entrance to the Student Support Office in the Silberrad Centre. The doors at either end of the Information Desk are having stay-backs fitted (these are on order).

   iii. Student complaints have been received about the automatic door at the principal entrance to the Silberrad: the trigger mechanism regularly fails and the doors are then very heavy to operate manually. Works are to be carried out.

   iv. Complaints have also been received about the zig-zag ramped approach to the Silberrad. These were to be anticipated; the approach is known not to be ideal. Rowena Macaulay commented that the change of direction on the ramp is visually indistinct, risking the user turning too early and encountering an invisible ‘step’.

   **ACTION:** Kevin Mascall to explore whether ramp furniture (benches and/or planters) could be added or differently located to act more effectively as markers.

   v. **EAF representation on project steering groups in Karen Bush’s absence:** KB is on long-term sick leave. Best wishes extended by the group for her speedy recovery. In her absence, John Stevens and Alexandra Seabrook will continue to cover STEM matters on behalf of the group. JS will attend STEM Project Steering group as well as STEM Users group. Bryn Morris will represent EAF on other builds over this period (where this may entail a conflict of interests, ensuring that responsibility for access issues are passed on).

   vi. **Sports Centre (proposal to remove one accessible toilet):** RM reported on discussions with KB (at the request of Michael Willis) about the suggested removal from plans of an accessible toilet located opposite the bar in the new sports centre, as a space/cost-saving option. KB/RM agreed to argue against removal, since a)
plans indicated a significant toilet facility would still remain in this location (both male and female), and b) the location opposite the bar made a toilet more necessary. The nearest alternative was at the other end of the corridor.

vii. The double-decker bus/caféd: some of the issues of previous concern have been resolved. The bus now sits against the raised approach of the Silberrad front square, making access to the serving hatch and visual contact with those serving easier. The issue of shelter for disabled customers in poor weather remains, as they can typically expect a wait of several minutes for their order if it is being heated up. BM reports that this is already planned for.

viii. Barrier access: BM has actioned this, and barrier access for under podia drivers has been successfully in place for several months. Number plate recognition does not always seem to work (intercom is used instead). This may be on account of dirty number plates.

ACTION: RM and JS to get their cars washed and report back!

4. Buildings and Estate

Report from Bryn Morris on EMS Project Steering Groups:

i. North Towers Teaching Centre is complete and already full booked into July. Its modular construction and in particular double-width corridors are regarded as very successful – they have ‘great feel and functionality’.

ii. The STEM building is moving from design to construction phase, and subject to budget constraints still being negotiated. The main access issues concern connectivity between building levels on squares 1&2 and the broader estate, and under podia parking management issues (see 5).

JS expressed concern at the narrow corridor width (1200mm) of the original building which won’t allow for chair users to pass one another, or even for a single chair user to have an ambulant companion alongside. This may be especially problematic when large numbers of students are exiting the building at the same time at the end of classes etc. The meeting agreed this is a problem. Keith Miller clarified that the issue is structural rather than the result of cost-saving: the presence of load-bearing columns at the entrance to the original building from Square 2 means the corridors cannot easily be widened. Options are currently being explored.

ACTION: Kevin Mascall to consider all mitigating design solutions, should corridors have to remain narrow at this point, including the provision of passing places and good lighting levels.

iii. New sports facilities: progress has been held up due to discussions with planning authorities over ‘finish’. A timber-clad build was requested that would have been costly to maintain. Revised proposals by the University will hopefully be accepted, allowing the plans for a new sports hall, relocated offices and a sports therapy clinic to go ahead. The new tennis courts have permission in place for an increase to
4 courts, and these will incorporate a bubble-style cover keeping them playable through winter months, and available as netball courts also. No access issues outstanding at present (other than 3.vi, above)

iv. **New residences**: 600+ new bed spaces envisaged but no planning in place yet.

v. **Innovation Centre**: envisaged as built in 2 phases, eventually linking North Campus with Parkside and creating a plaza – new public realm that will eventually become part of the principal approach to the University, via Clingoe Hill.

5. **Proposals for management of accessible parking under podia during and following STEM build.**

BM reported that planning for accessible parking and cycle area provision, during and after STEM build, was agreed at the most recent project planning meeting to have been ‘inadequate and inappropriate’ to date, and that detailed written proposals were requested.

AS registered disappointment that draft plans had not shown evidence of an audit of disabled parking needs, including an analysis of likely impacts of changes on users and a rationale for the planned response, although this had been requested at the Building Project Steering Group six months ago.

EMS members at the meeting were not in a position to provide detailed plans.

Keith Miller reminded that the majority of our underpodia spaces are not ‘DDA compliant’ and that the STEM building will eventually provide 6 new ‘compliant’ spaces (+2?) immediately adjacent to it. It was acknowledged that many of the underpodia spaces are far from the accessible ideal, but also that not all of our disabled users need the wider specifications that e.g. chair users are typically dependent upon; many need proximity primarily and can use the narrower spaces adequately. Plus, we have little choice.

**ACTION:**

i. Charlotte Humphries, EMS, to circulate proposals ASAP for discussion via email, giving details of accessible spaces lost/gained/relocated, having in mind the following:

   – That planning should privilege accessible parking and staff/student needs over contractor needs.
   – The need to build in management strategies and flexibility to provide for new staff and students who are unable to park beyond Ivor Crewe etc (although the loss of some spaces is inevitable during the build, a solution that simply replaces one space with another elsewhere is not a complete one).
   – Can we make daytime use of the x2 theatre spaces as designated user spaces?
   – Could the x2 CER spaces become contractor spaces?

ii. Student Support (AJ), Occupational Health and Security (PC) to revisit eligibility protocols and guidelines for allocation of student/staff underpodia spaces respectively, to see if anything can be gained here.
6. **AOB**

   i. **Tony Rich Teaching Centre – out of action fire evacuation lift**: JS asked whether the building is legally usable by disabled staff/students whilst this is the case. Availability of refuges may address this.

   **ACTION**: RM to follow up with John Crust, Fire Safety Officer.

10. **Date of next meeting** – tbc

Rowena Macaulay