



Expanding horizons – Opening doors

Autumn/Winter 2018

Dear Unlimited Member,

This summer some of us Unlimited members have been surveying shops, banks and cafes in the main shopping streets of the city centre (outside of the Westgate Centre) to check their accessibility for disabled people. We discovered that the majority of premises did have a ramp if they had a stepped entrance - unfortunately all except one failed to advertise this fact with sign - but did not have a working bell on the door for potential customers to attract the attention of an assistant. Most wheelchair users needing a ramp will simply go elsewhere if they see a step and a ramp is not obvious. But be brave and ask!



Overall access was better than we had originally thought. Preliminary findings of the 136 properties surveyed so far show:

- General shops - 84% had level access or ramps but only 50% had an accessible toilet
- Clothing shops - 87% had level access or ramps, 61% had an accessible changing room but just 17% had an accessible toilet
- Banks/building societies - 100% had level access but none had an accessible toilet
- Hairdressers/barbers - none had level access or ramps and none had an accessible toilet
- Cafés/pubs - 68% had level access or ramps and 54% had an accessible toilet

The larger premises were better generally but there is improvement needed at hairdressers and barbers and in the catering sector. It explains why Marks & Spencer's cafe is so popular with elderly and disabled people having a large lift, decent size accessible toilets (although I find the flush handle badly situated in the ladies'), helpful staff and accessible changing rooms if you need to try on some clothing. We aim to put the final results of the survey on our website when complete.

Diane Sider, Editor



Arts Council Funds for Carnival Organisers

The charity in charge of Oxford's biggest street party has been awarded nearly £90,000 to fund disability arts projects in the city. Cowley Road Carnival organiser's Cowley Road Works (CRW) have even more reason to smile thanks to the large grant from Arts Council England. The grant will be spent on delivering an extensive programme of opportunities for arts training, participation and performance for disabled young people in Oxford.



New Director at OAB

Oxfordshire Association for the Blind (OAB) has appointed Clare Pearce as its new director following the decision of Colin Cure to move on after eleven years of excellent, dedicated service. Clare Pearce has worked for over 22 years in the charitable sector at small and large organisations including RNIB. OAB recently won one of Oxfordshire's Voluntary Awards for Partnership Working with Oxtalk, the Oxford Talking Newspaper for blind and visually impaired people. Colin attended the award presentation with Margaret Simpson, trustee of OAB and Chair of Oxtalk.

www.oxeyes.org.uk/ 01865 725595

www.oxtalk.org.uk/ 01865 765609

Sensory Impairment Team

If you are affected by sight or hearing loss the County Council has a team of trained staff supporting people of all ages. Their telephone number is 0845 0507666.

OXTRAG News

By Co-Chair Deborah Whelan



At our recent AGM we celebrated 30 years campaigning to reach our aim to make Oxfordshire a county where highways and transport are easily accessible by all.

Have you got a problem using the bus or the train because the service is not accessible for you? OXTRAG are always looking for customer experience feedback to help public transport services become more inclusive via our 'Passenger Experience Feedback Form'. Please do let us know of your experiences - good or bad - as we work with many transport providers to assist inclusion.

You can find the form on our website or email us at oxtrag@gmail.com to send you one.
www.oxtrag.org/useful-information---resources.html

Do you have a favourite walk that needs improving?

The County Council's Countryside Service asks OXTRAG to contribute to consultee feedback on requests to divert public footpaths (recently in Tiddington, Wroxton, Sibford Gower, South Newington & Chinnor). This provides an opportunity to find and walk requested routes and recommend inclusion improvements (for example, a firm, flat, flush, free draining path with fewer gates and maybe new seats). So, if Unlimited members live close to these footpaths they will be welcomed to join a walk/viewing using their local experiences. If you live close to: The Plough to Knightsbridge Lane, Pyrton please contact us on oxtrag@gmail.com
Or ring Unlimited if you are not on email and they can put you in touch.

Sarah Lasenby (OXTRAG Member) writes

'I have been trying to challenge the County Council to reduce the distances between bus stops in the City Centre down to less than 400 metres. This is quite enough for those with walking problems. I took this up after I found my bus stop near St Aldates church was well over 600 metres away from those in Magdalen Street. Some of my efforts may have paid off as a new stop T2 has been put in on the High Street by Turl Street. It definitely does help me and those using 17 other routes. Meanwhile the Westgate was opened and, I don't know what you think, but I think the bus stops for delivering and picking up those of us who want to go to John Lewis, are not well placed. Maybe other people who agree could have a go at complaining?'

Blue Badges for those with 'Hidden Disabilities'



Blue Badge parking permits are to be made available for people in England with 'hidden disabilities' such as autism or mental health problems. The National Autistic Society says the change will 'make a massive difference to many of the 600,000 autistic people in England, and their families'. Many autistic people experience major challenges travelling, making detailed preparations and suffering 'overwhelming anxiety' about things going wrong. Some can be unaware of the dangers of the road while others can feel panic in busy or loud environments. Currently the rules do not explicitly exclude hidden disabilities, but councils' interpretations can vary. When the changes to the scheme are introduced, they will extend eligibility to people in Oxfordshire:

- who cannot make a journey without 'a risk of serious harm to their health and safety' or that of others, such as young children with autism
- for whom travel causes 'very considerable psychological distress'
- and those with considerable difficulty walking, meaning 'both the physical act and experience of walking'.

You don't have to be the driver or own a car; the Blue Badge 'goes with you'. It allows holders to park for free in pay-and-display spaces across the UK (except central London). In Oxfordshire this includes hospital car parks and in on-street residents parking. The concessions do not apply to privately-run car parks, but there are often reserved spaces. You can get an exemption from the congestion charge if you are non-resident driving through central London and on the M6 Toll. Recent research shows that three out of four disabled people reckon they go out less without a Blue Badge so if you think you are eligible do apply to help you get out more.

To apply

There are 11 Oxfordshire libraries that provide a 'drop and send' service or you can apply online from home <http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/roads-and-transport/parking/where-park/blue-badge-parking-permits>.

Or phone 01865 792422 if you don't have a computer or find filling in forms online difficult. Ask for a paper form to be sent to you. The office can help you fill in the form as well. You will only be charged £10 if you are awarded a badge. You need a recent head and shoulders photo.

Social Care Contribution Charges

Earlier this summer Unlimited members who receive care from Oxfordshire County Council had letters telling them about the new charging policy for personal care. Several of you have been in contact to tell us your charges have been increased. The new charges start on 1st October. If you are not happy with the new charges you should get in contact with OCC to try to get them changed. Unlimited have been working with Healthwatch to find out more about the appeal process. They met with OCC on our behalf. Please read Joanna's covering letter with more details about the appeals process. In summary you should follow these steps:

Step 1: Contact the OCC Finance Team to discuss your assessment on 01865 323642.

Step 2. If the assessment is incorrect (for example the disability related expenditure calculation does not cover all your costs) ask for a re-assessment.

For disability related expenditure think about all the additional costs from your impairment or condition, including costs from having carers or PAs in your home e.g. increased heating costs, or toiletries. If the assessment is correct but not affordable you can apply for the charges to be 'waived'. Contact your social worker if you have not already done so.

If you need support contact:

Getting Heard 0300 343 5718

office@gettingheard.org

Or the Family Support Network 07891 734987

Info@OxFSN.org.uk FSN also have useful information on their website about disability-related expenditure.

Or the Age UK Oxfordshire helpline 0345 450 1276

helpline@ageukoxfordshire.org.uk

Unlimited have written to Kate Terroni, Director of Adult Social Care, on behalf of all members and other disabled people in the county to say we don't agree with the new charges being implemented on 1st October (it is too soon) and to complain about the lack of information provided about how to appeal. We do not agree that there should be a 'flat rate' of 25% for disability related expenditure. How much an impairment or condition costs us will be different for all of us.

Healthwatch will keep raising the issue with OCC if they hear from enough people that the new charges are a problem. They cannot take on individual cases but every person with a problem adds to the body of voices.

Get in touch with Healthwatch:

01865 520 520 or email

hello@healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk

Getting more out of theatre if you are D/deaf or hard of hearing

Most of us whose hearing isn't as great as it once was have found the subtitles function on our TVs. Did you know that some theatre performances have subtitles too? Most professional theatres have at least one captioned performance (e.g. Oxford Playhouse, The Old Fire Station and Cornerstone Arts) although the cost of doing this can put smaller theatres and amateur companies off.

Now there is a new piece of technology which is available to all theatre companies and audiences who have smart phones or other mobile devices.



It is called The Difference Engine and has been developed by Talking Birds Theatre Company. This is what they say to explain their thinking. 'It is a tool created to help make our performances accessible for as many people as possible – and now we're working with other [theatre] companies so they can use it too.'

The Difference Engine enables audiences to receive captions on their own mobile devices (smartphones/tablets) via a free App, at events using the Difference Engine system.

Audio description (for visually impaired people) and multi-channel captioning options (e.g. for translation) are also being developed and tested at the moment – and we have more ideas for how it might help a wide range of people to have greater access to theatre and other arts events.'

You can find The Difference Engine in whichever App store you use. If you want to help Talking Birds develop their projects or find out more you can get in touch:

<http://www.talkingbirds.co.uk/pages/differenceengine.asp>

Or you can phone Talking Birds Theatre Company to talk to a human 07708 262 182.

Joanna Matthews

Meet the Member - Stephanie Talbot

When Steph first joined Unlimited we interviewed her for the newsletter and now, as she prepares to leave the committee at the next AGM, she shares some of her experiences. Steph had a stroke in 2000 when she was 49. It affects her balance, memory and vision. She says 'I do have a "must do" attitude. I say to my family, let me choose if I am unhappy doing it or discover I can't.



I go out every morning and catch the 9.45 bus and just go – Oxford, Banbury, Witney, you name it. I go shopping, or just for a ride, or meet up with friends from my working days.'

Becoming disabled in later life affects people emotionally and mentally in many different ways. Steph is clear she made the choices that were best for her; volunteering and then running her local stroke club in Abingdon. It was through organising speakers for the Stroke Club that she got her first Guide Dog, Alf. 'Alf made a huge difference, I felt braver about going out.' Sadly Alf retired a year ago and now Steph is on the waiting list again. 'The wait is for the right dog to suit the individual's requirements – your stature, which side of your body you walk the dog.'

'I can see clearly 6 to 8 feet away but what is under my nose is a bit fuzzy. I don't like being closed in. With the dog people moved out of the way but they don't move for a stick! Low lighting inside a building is a problem but also if lights are too bright I cannot see either, a bit like going into over-bright sunshine.' Steph feels more confident travelling independently in the summer months. Capacity and confidence will vary over the seasons for many disabled people. Steph also finds it challenging interacting with people who don't know she is blind. 'I cannot see facial expressions so it makes it harder to judge situations. Sometimes people forget I can't see them and they get offended. People tell me I don't look blind enough! I am not sure how you "look blind".'

Steph makes great cakes and savoury snacks for our AGMs and other meetings and she says she loves cooking most days. She also enjoys listening to audio books from the library and charity shops. Steph discovered MP3 technology when the Women's Institute gave her an MP3 player to listen to their magazine when she joined them. What a great example of an organisation thinking about access needs. We will be sad to lose Steph from the committee and thank her for all she has done over the last three years.

Joanna Matthews

Are you facing challenges 'getting online'?

Oxfordshire Association for the Blind offers technology assistance to people who are living with sight loss. There are one-to-one sessions with a trainer, focussed on individual requirements – whether it's getting started for the first time, learning how to manage emails more effectively, good 'housekeeping', or feeling more confident about online shopping. They are also able to help you with general advice and specialist software. Contact OAB telephone Mark on 01865 725595 or email: clientservices@oxeyes.org.uk

Getting an Assistance Dog

You may think you are not eligible for an assistance dog but if you have a significant mobility, hearing or sight impairment you might be. Assistance dogs can also support people with learning disabilities and difficulties too. There are many UK charities who can help you find out more. One is Support Dogs. Telephone: 0114 261 7800 Email: info@supportdogs.org.uk

Oxford Otters

Is a swimming group for disabled people. They meet on alternate Sundays at the Oxford Brookes' sports centre pool at Harcourt Hill campus, Botley where they have sole use of the pool between 0900 to 1130. There is plenty of free parking space and the campus is served by the U1 bus. The Otters have been in existence since 1966.



There is a hoist chair to lower people into the pool and the group has a large selection of flotation aids. The friendly group has fully qualified lifeguards and voluntary assistants who can help out in the pool or in the changing rooms. Coffee or tea is also available afterwards.

Cost is just £3.00 per person per session payable in advance annually in January (pro rata if you join during the year) and family members/friends are welcome in the pool too. It is open to all ages and disabilities. The Otters are looking for more volunteer helpers, especially women, so if you know anyone who enjoys swimming and could spare a few hours, contact: info@oxfordotters.co.uk or telephone Phil Cooper, Chairman, on 01865 770661.

'Nightmare' rental shortage for disabled people

If you don't own your own home you will probably be aware of the dire shortage of private rental properties suitable for disabled people. A new report by The Equalities and Human Rights Commission says that more than 9 in 10 of the UK's 8.5 million rental properties are not accessible. It calls on ministers to take action to improve housing accessibility. The government has said it was providing councils with almost £1bn over the next two years to adapt properties for disabled people. The government expects landlords to adapt properties for tenants. Landlords must not unreasonably withhold consent if they are asked to make changes to homes. By law (Equality Act 2010) disabled people have the right to changes or adjustments to ensure they have access to housing and that the individual should not have to pay. Adjustments have to be 'reasonable' but there is a duty to do so if *not* doing so places the disabled person at a substantial disadvantage - which surely must be the case if you cannot get in and out of your home or live in it safely?

The EHRC report found 365,000 disabled people were in homes unsuitable for their needs. In theory newer properties in Oxfordshire are much more likely to be easily accessible, but that doesn't necessarily mean they will be ready to move into independently. Many flats still have baths or showers with steps up. As a minimum in Oxfordshire the Council requires larger housing developments to provide at least 5% of dwellings to be wheelchair accessible. *We have to ask why are not all new dwellings built to universal design standards so they can accommodate anyone regardless of age or disability? Ed.*

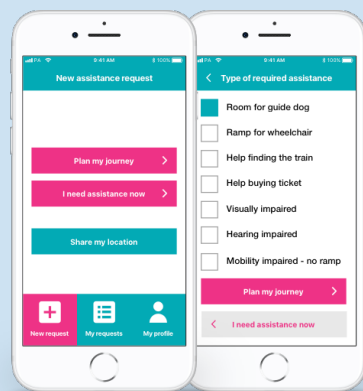


In Oxfordshire the number of people aged 65 and over is growing and for many older people their later years will be spent living with impairments which will impact on their housing requirements. In Oxfordshire housing is the responsibility of Oxford City Council and the 4 district councils. Unlimited have asked the EHRC if they can give us figures to see how those councils are performing.

It is possible to apply for a disabled facilities grant (without affecting your benefits) to make adaptations, for example, to widen doors and install ramps, improve access to rooms, a downstairs bathroom, provide a heating system suitable for your needs, adapt heating or lighting controls to make them easier to use. Ask your council for information.

Rail Journeys to become easier

5% of all UK rail journeys are made by disabled people (according to research by Transport Focus and the Department of Transport). This does account for 85 million passenger rail journeys in 2017 but it could be more if the service was more accessible. One means of increasing accessibility is passenger assistance. Although not all disabled passengers require assistance whilst traveling, at least 25% have reported needing assistance on their train journey. Unfortunately, as any of you who use the train service currently know, booking assistance can be a bit hit and miss.



The technology company, Transreport has developed the Transreport Passenger Assist system, which is being tested with partner rail companies now. The app and the supporting website will enable passengers to request assistance through booking-in-advance or to simply 'turn-up-and-go'. The system notifies rail staff of their exact journey details and any assistance that they require along the way. This will only be for staffed stations. You will need a smart phone however.

Transreport are keen to engage with as many passengers as possible to participate in trialing and early-stage deployment. If are interested in taking part or learning more about the Passenger Assist app, contact this email address emma.taylor@transreport.co.uk, or alternatively phone 0207 559 3446. www.transreport.co.uk

Meanwhile new Oxfordshire company Zipabout wants OXTRAG and Unlimited members to help test their new system which is especially designed to assist people with mobility, memory or sensory difficulties. If you are able to help test this device please tell Yvette from Zipabout on 01865 242 906 or yvette@zipabout.com

Until this new tech is available for all, for booking assistance call Journey Care 08000 158 123 or textphone users, call 08000 158 124*. From 08:00 to 22:00 every day (except Christmas Day and Boxing Day). *Calls are charged at standard BT rates. Other operators may vary.

A Challenging Journey

I thought travelling less than a mile from home would be a straightforward journey; from Iffley Road to Richard Benson Hall on Cowley Road to attend my first Unlimited Oxfordshire meeting. I was excited to meet new people and find out about local events and support. I thought an hour would be plenty of time to ride up on my mobility scooter. Little did I know that Magdalen Road and a lot of the side streets leading off it would make a short journey an absolute nightmare and a stressful challenge to say the least. I found that there were minimal drop kerbs and where there were any, cars had parked over them. I cut through Hurst Street, hoping to scoot up Leopold Street. This was not to be because as soon as I got to the junction of St. Marys Road, there was no drop kerb in sight. I had to scoot up to the end of St. Marys Road back into Magdalen Road and all the way up to Cowley Road. Fortunately, I made it to the meeting with 10 minutes to spare!

N. Ali

Towpath Accessibility



Wandering along the towpath in Oxford can be a good way to get away from the city's busy and noisy streets. In early May, I wandered along the towpath behind the houses on Abbey Road with a friend from Botley Road to Port Meadow. Although very bumpy, most of the towpath is wheelchair accessible, but some parts do need updating to facilitate wheelchair access all the way along its route. For example, the bridge over the Castle Mill stream (see photo) is extremely dangerous, bumpy and steep. I had to ask two men who were passing-by to tilt my electric wheelchair on to its back wheels and lug me across the bridge. A bit further along is another bridge that was too steep to get on to without help from another passer-by. More needs to be done to make the whole towpath network accessible so that it can be enjoyed by wheelchair users.

Don O'Neal

Notice to all members

You are invited to a **Tea Party** for Unlimited Oxfordshire which will take place on Saturday November 3rd from 1.00 to 3.00 p.m. at The Oxford Quaker Meeting House, 43 St Giles, Oxford OX1 3LW
Tel: 01865 55737 www.oxfordquakers.org

At this meeting we will look at the future of Unlimited (see below and also Joanna's covering letter) as well as celebrate our achievements during the year.

The venue is accessible with ramped access, accessible toilets and parking nearby. It has a red door and is a few houses away from the Eagle & Child pub and opposite the Lamb & Flag pub. It is close to bus stops on the Woodstock and Banbury Roads (including park and ride stops from Redbridge, Pear Tree and Water Eaton) and there is some street parking (free for Blue Badge holders) nearby on St Giles, Woodstock Road (next to the Radcliffe Observatory), and on Keble Road. The disabled parking bays on St Giles are not next to the kerb and for the bays on Keble Road there is plenty of space and time for unloading (it is a dead-end street). From central Oxford (e.g. Cornmarket Street) a slow walker will take 10 minutes. Assistance dogs welcome (venue garden for business).



We would like as many of you as possible to attend but places are limited so do let us know you are coming. First come, first served. RSVP by email to info@unltdox.org.uk or ring 0800 044 8192 to book a place; to find out about transport or let us know about dietary requirements. We want to make sure we have coffee/tea and cakes for everyone.

A tiny part of the morning will be taken up with our Annual General Meeting. We have to have this formal meeting once a year but it won't take long we promise!

If Unlimited is to continue we need new committee members – Rosie, Steph and Joanna will all leave us at this AGM because of family and work commitments. A few of your hours a month could make all the difference.

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