

BRADFORD ON AVON AREA SENIORS FORUM

REPORT ON HOLT "AGE MATTERS" EVENT

Holt Village Hall, 2.30pm Thursday 25th May 2017

The aim of the Seniors Forum's "Age Matters" events is to give people who live in the Bradford On Avon Community Area, especially those over 60 and carers, the opportunity to meet their Wiltshire Council Community Engagement Manager, Area Board Chairman, councillors and the Seniors Forum, which is the area's official Older People's & Carers' Champion, and find out what people feel about living in the area – the purpose being to give people a greater say in decisions which affect their lives and tell their elected representatives what works where they live and what doesn't.

Twenty to thirty people attended the Holt event, most of them of retirement age or over. After brief introductions by Seniors Forum Chairman Michael Darlow, Wiltshire Council's Community Engagement Manager for the Bradford On Avon Community Area, Peter Dunford, Trevor Carbin, Wiltshire Councillor for Holt and Staverton, Jim Lynch, the newly elected Chairman of the Area Board, and John Kidney, a member of the Area Board and Wiltshire Council's portfolio holder for Adult Social Care Transformation, the main part of the event involved everyone sitting at tables, at each of which was a Forum member to act as facilitator, take notes and ensure that everyone got a say, to discuss life in Holt and people's views about local services.

Generally people seem very happy to live in Holt. There are clearly a lot of positives to life in the village and a vibrant, mutually supportive community spirit. The village's community bus is seen as a great bonus, although it is not clear how much it is actually used. Forum members wondered if it could be used more and, maybe, by people in other villages.

Overwhelmingly the main issues raised related to traffic, pedestrian access and safety. Almost everyone drew attention to the dangerous, poorly maintained state of pavements which over long stretches are dangerously uneven, with many broken paving stones, potholes and other trip hazards. This problem is exacerbated by poorly maintained and over-hanging hedges, wheelie bins put outside houses in places where they block pavements and cars parked on pavements, especially along the main road through the village. As a result pavements are often dangerous or impassable, particularly for people with impaired mobility, balance or eyesight problems, who use wheelchairs or push prams. The Seniors Forum will continue to try to drum into Wiltshire Council that its continued failure to properly maintain and police pavements and pedestrian areas across the entire Bradford On Avon Community Area shows a disregard for people's safety and ought to be a cause of shame to both the Council and its officers – particularly in light of official statistics which show that people aged over 65 living in the Bradford On Avon Community Area suffer a higher rate of falls requiring hospitalisation than anywhere else in Wiltshire.

Difficulties for pedestrians in Holt are further increased, especially at peak times, by the volume and speed of traffic on the B3107 through the village and by the fact that there is only one pedestrian crossing. People felt there should be at least two more pedestrian crossings, with one near the village shop.

Another frequently raised problem was the very narrow section of the B3107 before you enter Bradford On Avon. People suggested that an alternative cycle path is needed.

Another major issue cited by people is the poor bus service – only one or two services each morning to Trowbridge, Melksham and Bradford On Avon and a similar number in the afternoon, made worse by the fact that the "Zig-Zag" service is not scheduled so as to facilitate connections with the 265 First Bus services to Bath and Warminster. People suggested that one of the reasons why cafés in Bradford on Avon seem so well patronised is because many of their customers are Holt residents who have gone into Bradford for a doctor's appointment or to collect a prescription and are waiting for the bus back to Holt.

Collecting doctors' prescriptions is particularly difficult for people without access to a car or who work during the day. Many people seem not to know that some pharmacies will arrange for people who are house-bound to have their prescriptions delivered direct to their homes. Other suggested solutions to the prescription collection problem included opening a small pharmacy in the village or arranging for a weekly delivery of prescriptions to the Village shop.

A number of people called for a small branch GP's surgery in Holt, similar to The Bradford On Avon Health Centre's surgery in Winsley. People also raised the problem of getting a timely GP appointment at the Bradford On Avon GP practice. One lady said that it recently took her two to three weeks to even get a GP to phone her.

People mentioned problems over parking at the RUH and said they have found notices explaining the new parking system confusing. People have also experienced problems with the new car park keyboards and some have found the keyboards difficult to use because the keys are too small. (This issue has since been raised with the R.U.H. and new, clearer notice boards and larger key-pads are to be installed).

Among issues raised that are not specific to Holt were concerns about potential cuts to pensions and pensioner benefits and more horror stories (similar to those reported to the Forum elsewhere) about the non-emergency ambulance service. One lady told of being picked up from home in Holt at 7.00am for a 2pm hospital appointment in Bristol and the ambulance due to take her home after the appointment never turning up at all. Another talked about an ambulance picking her up from home where the driver had been told the wrong hospital to take her to. In another case an ambulance never got to Warminster Hospital to take a patient home because it had broken down. (The Forum has reported this issue to the Wiltshire NHS Clinical Commissioning Group, which commissions non-emergency ambulance services, and been assured that steps are being taken to rectify the problem).

Michael Darlow
Chairman, Bradford On Avon Area Seniors Forum