

PRESS RELEASE

Grants will help to make Hebden Bridge accessible for all

A new grants scheme from the Community Foundation for Calderdale will help make Hebden Bridge's businesses and public buildings more accessible for local people and visitors with disabilities. The innovative initiative, being run jointly by the Community Foundation and Hebden Bridge Partnership, is designed to help the local economy recover from the Boxing Day floods and to promote Hebden Bridge as an exemplary town for access for those with disabilities.

The new venture will be launched at a public meeting being held in Hebden Bridge Town Hall on Saturday September 3rd at 11am.

Bob Deacon, chair of Hebden Bridge Partnership, says: "It has long been a priority of the Partnership to make the town as attractive as possible to visitors and tourists who have particular access needs. We want to broaden the range of people who decide to visit the town. We are conscious that one of the side-effects of current local flood resilience work could potentially be that shops and premises become less accessible for those who have disabilities as floors are raised and steps put in, so we are delighted that the Community Foundation is making grant funding available to help our long-suffering independent businesses recover from the floods in this way."

Steve Duncan, CEO of the Community Foundation for Calderdale said:

"At the Community Foundation we believe in the potential spending power of disabled visitors to the area and we feel strongly that this investment, and potentially further investment to come, will prove to be an important factor in helping Hebden Bridge businesses recover from the dreadful Boxing Day flood. We are delighted to be working with the Hebden Bridge Partnership and look forward to seeing a more accessible and vibrant Hebden Bridge emerge from its recent travails."

The idea of promoting Hebden Bridge as an exemplary town for access is considered nationally significant, and the town's facilities for those with access needs will be promoted on both national and regional tourism websites.

Following the September 3rd meeting work will start on an access audit of the town, which will be funded by the Community Foundation and undertaken by Chris Cammiss of local social enterprise Visits Unlimited. Chris, who is a wheelchair user, will be focusing on accessibility in its broadest sense, not just mobility issues. Chris will be pragmatic, looking wherever possible for effective workable solutions to current access difficulties.

Chris will focus on public buildings, access to the countryside immediately adjacent to the town, and also those independent businesses who want to participate. Taking part in the access audit is entirely voluntary, but those businesses who choose to participate will be able subsequently to seek small grants from the Community Foundation in order to undertake work recommended by Chris in his audit report.

The event on Sep 3rd will also see the launch of a new Access Forum, which is being convened by Hebden Royd town council and local parish councils to help contribute to the neighbourhood plan work. The Access Forum will be an advisory body; it welcomes those who may have disabilities and would like to contribute to ways that the wider Hebden Royd/hilltops area can be made more accessible.

More information:

Emma Bolger, CFFC, 01422 349700

Andrew Bibby, secretary, Hebden Bridge Partnership, 01422 845799