



# **Suffolk Sight**

## **Newsletter**

East Suffolk Edition  
Winter 2019



**Disability Resource Centre  
4 Bunting Road,  
Bury St Edmunds, IP32 7BX**

**Tel: 01284 748800**

**19 Tower Street,  
Ipswich, IP1 3BE**

**Tel: 01473 611011**

**email: [info@suffolksight.org.uk](mailto:info@suffolksight.org.uk)**

## **MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN STEVE HODGKISS**

Hopefully by the time you are reading or listening to this newsletter, we at ESAB will have completed our long-awaited amalgamation with our friends at West Suffolk Sight, unifying for the first time locally based charitable services for the visually impaired across the whole county. The front cover picture reflects the new dawn for the new unified organisation which is to be called Suffolk Sight. Achieving a unified organisation for Suffolk has been a long-held goal and one which I'm sure will prove well worth the extraordinary effort. On behalf of all, may I thank all those involved from both organisations who helped to bring this amalgamation to fruition.

For those of you who may be worried by the change, I'd say Suffolk Sight is committed to building on the great work done by both of its predecessors and further to ensure consistency of services across the county. Whatever your level of visual impairment and wherever you are in Suffolk you can look forward to receiving the very best services available.

The Trustee Board of Suffolk Sight has representatives from both the old organisations ensuring the ethos and ambitions of the new organisation closely mirror those we have all enjoyed up until now. Several trustees of ESAB CIO have taken this opportunity to stand down. Leaving us are Dianne Simpkin, Susan Holmes, Sue Swayze and Brian Williams. Without folk being willing to undertake the role of trustees, the charity and its good work could not exist; you have all played your part and I'd like to extend my personal and our collective best wishes for the future and heartfelt thanks for all you've done. The chairman of the Suffolk Sight Trustee board will be Geoff Staff, previously chairman of West Suffolk Sight; I myself will be taking on the role of Vice Chairman.

Some of the people most impacted by any amalgamation are the ESAB staff; to whom I'd offer a few thoughts. The task of serving the visually impaired has not changed, the trustee's ambitions to provide the very best services to the visually impaired are undiminished and your role in doing all of this is accepted as being absolutely paramount. So, thanks for all you've done up to now and please carry on with the great work you do. Without you, our organisation would not be the success it is, and the lives of our visually impaired

members would be the poorer for it. Some members of staff have also chosen this moment to review their life plans and move on. I would like to extend my personal and our collective best wishes for their future and heartfelt thanks for all they have done.

I'll conclude by wishing you all a very happy Christmas and the very best of health and happiness in 2020.

---

### **TRIBUTE TO RAY LING**

We are sad to report that Ray Ling, who was a long-standing servant



to ESAB both as a Trustee and in various activity groups in Lowestoft passed away in August at the age of 88. Ray was involved in running the socials since 2004, he helped to set up the local Taxi Scheme, was an active member of the local clubs and has served on the Bowls Club, Activities Club and Minibus for the Blind Committees. Thank you Ray for your huge contribution in Lowestoft for which we are extremely grateful. £570 donations have been made in his memory which will be used for the benefit of members in Lowestoft.

### **IPSWICH OFFICE GETS NEW CARPET TILES THROUGHOUT**

Thanks to the magnificent generosity of Keith (Keith Mann Carpets) and Mark (Gammages Flooring Services), shown in the photo, we have had new carpet tiles laid in the Ipswich office at Tower Street which has given a huge facelift to the décor of the rooms there, as well as an improved fragrance! We really did appreciate the fact that the guys gave up their Saturday and charged no fees to do this for us before we started the move from our office in Little Bealings into the Ipswich office.



## **TV LICENCES FOR THE OVER 75'S**

The free TV licence for those aged 75 or over ends on 31 May 2020; the BBC has already mailed out over 4 million letters to the over 75's and will send another 4 million letters in February 2020 to remind people to either buy a licence before 1 June 2020 or be able to provide proof that they are in receipt of pension credit. The BBC have also announced their intention to continue using a firm called Capita to make additional support home visits to those still without a licence. If you have received a letter informing you that you will need to pay your TV licence from next June:

- a) Don't panic yet: there is massive media interest in the topic.
- b) If you are 75 or over and you are still inadvertently paying for a licence, please reclaim the money! You are fully entitled to a free licence until the 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020.
- c) If you think you may be entitled to Pension Credit, please claim for this! It is one of the most under-claimed benefits; the Claim Line number is 0800 99 1234 and there is also lots of advice on the Age UK website.

If you have any questions please access the Age UK website or feel free to speak to Sally Wainman on 07807 984589.

---

## **BLUE BADGE APPLICATION**

Blue Badge application process is no longer available through paper application.

From February 2019, it has not been possible to apply for a Blue Badge in Suffolk by filling in paper forms. Since then applicants have had to apply on-line at <https://www.gov.uk/apply-blue-badge> where it allows you to complete all steps of the application including payment and providing supporting documents.

For those without on-line access, they are able to offer a telephone assisted application. This is where they arrange a specific time and date to call and complete the application over the phone with the applicant or someone on their behalf. After the application has been completed, they will require any supporting documents or photo to be sent to them via email or post and finally the fee will also be requested. To set this up, you need to call the Suffolk County Council Blue Badge Customer Services team on **0808 800 4005** and select option 2.

## **RNIB FORCES HMRC TO CHANGE BLIND PERSON'S ALLOWANCE RULES**

The charity said calls to its tax advice team uncovered difficulties with claiming and transferring the blind person's allowance, which is an additional tax-free amount available to a blind person above the standard personal allowance for calculating income tax.

The allowance is set at £2,390 for the tax year 2018/19, rising to £2,450 in 2019/2020. If an individual and their spouse or civil partner are both eligible, they will each get an allowance. Individuals can transfer their blind person's allowance to their spouse or civil partner if they do not pay tax or earn enough to use all of their allowance.

However, RNIB said it was alerted to two cases where HMRC had refused to transfer the allowance because one person in each couple was living in a care home and HMRC said its guidance only allows blind person's allowance to be transferred where a couple is 'living together'. RNIB successfully challenged this decision on the grounds that 'living together' for income tax purposes includes couples where one of them is living in a care home.

In addition, a form called a 575 form had to be completed to transfer the blind person's tax allowance between spouses and civil partners. RNIB explained the difficulties this caused and HMRC eventually agreed that these forms were no longer necessary.

'HMRC are now updating its internal guidance for staff and on gov.uk on this issue. This is a great outcome which we know will help other couples in the same situation in the future.'

---

## **CAN I STILL DRIVE IF I ONLY HAVE SIGHT IN ONE EYE?**

You may still be able to drive a car or motorcycle if you only have sight in one eye (sometimes called "monocular vision"). You don't have to let the DVLA know about the loss of your sight in one eye, as long as you are still able to meet the standards of vision for driving. However if you have a health condition in your sighted eye, you should still check the rules for that condition on the DVLA health conditions web pages. You can be fined up to £1,000 if you don't tell them about a medical condition that affects your driving. You may be prosecuted if you're involved in an accident as a result.

If you previously held a Heavy Goods Vehicle or Public Service Vehicle licence you must let the DVLA know if you have monocular vision. You will need to complete a V1V form which can be found on the DVLA website.

Your ability to judge distances accurately may be affected and you may be less aware of objects on the side that has lost vision. Making better use of your wing mirrors will help. You will also need to bear in mind that blind spots caused by your car's design will be larger for you if you only have vision in one eye.

If you have any doubt about whether you can meet the requirements for driving, you must consult your GP, optician or eye specialist who will be able to advise you.

---

## **BLIND VETERANS UK BEGIN WORLD FIRST TRIAL OF DRIVERLESS PODS**

An autonomous vehicle company, Aurrigo has begun a world first trial in April 2019 of its driverless pods with Blind Veterans UK and the charity that supports them. It was anticipated to be a six-month collaboration.

This is the first time Aurrigo have ever conducted a trial with veterans or people with a disability. Trialling the pod, which is named Arthur after Blind Veterans UK founder Sir Arthur Pearson, will give the veterans a taste of what it would be like to regain the independence of driving again.

The route of the company's 'Pod Zero', which can carry up to four people and travels at a maximum speed of 15mph, will follow the most popular parts of the Blind Veterans UK training and rehabilitation centre in Ovingdean, near Brighton.

The first blind veteran to take part in the trial was 51-year-old Mark from Saltdean in East Sussex. Mark lost his sight entirely in 1999 and has been supported by Blind Veterans UK ever since. "I was a motorcyclist and I used to race my car before losing my sight, so it was a massive loss to lose my licence. It was the hardest thing. Being able to make more journeys on your own independently would be absolutely fantastic and open up the world for blind and disabled people everywhere. It was an honour to have been the first one to make the journey."

The trials are exploring the importance of voice activated controls, something Aurrigo piloted with IBM Watson at the recent Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas.

Using information taken from discussions with Guide Dogs for the Blind, they have made some initial modifications to the pods to help the vision impaired, such as lighting and prominent colours on grab rails and seats. The trial is intended to see how the pods operate in a real-life environment and highlight any changes they need to incorporate into the evolving design of the pod.

---

## **ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION**

RNIB wants to create a society where sight loss is not a barrier to living life. However, it is aware that blind and partially sighted people are often treated unfairly because reasonable adjustments are not being made to enable them to access services such as providing information in an alternative format.

RNIB provide a useful toolkit that gives advice on how to write a letter to a company asking for a reasonable adjustment and if that doesn't work, RNIB would provide further support.

It is not uncommon for blind and partially sighted people to experience situations where they are refused access to a restaurant or a hotel with their guide dog or are given inaccessible information by their bank.

The Equality Act 2010 is designed to protect you from unfair treatment and to create a more equal society; in short, no one should face discrimination because of their sight loss. If you believe that you've been treated unfairly because of your sight loss, then you can challenge the service provider using the Act. For further advice or to obtain a toolkit contact RNIB's Helpline on 0303 123 9999.

---

## **WHO CAN HELP YOU AT EYE CLINICS AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES?**

There are many different people you may meet during your journey with macular disease, with different job titles and roles. Here, we explain who some of these key people are and what they can do to help you. This list is not exhaustive, so do ask your doctor or optician

who is available in your area and how they can help. In the early stages if you notice a problem with your vision, you should visit your optician. They can refer you to your local eye clinic or hospital for an ophthalmology appointment if required. Your optician should refer you directly to the eye clinic or hospital if they suspect a problem – without referring back to your GP first. If you are referred to the eye clinic or hospital ophthalmology department, you will be diagnosed and treated by either a consultant ophthalmologist or a specialist doctor.

Low vision clinics may also be provided within your eye clinic or hospital ophthalmology department. These are run by optometrists and are available to help you with low vision aids and information. When visiting your eye clinic or hospital, ask if they have a low vision clinic and if you can be referred. Your GP or consultant can refer you or may be able to advise you about opticians or local charities also providing low vision assessments, if they are available in your area.

Some eye clinics have an eye clinic liaison officer (ECLO). They are there to provide emotional and practical support and offer a wide range of information. They act as a bridge between clinical and social support. Alternatively, in some areas, your clinic may have a sight loss advisor or patient support officer; they perform a similar role to an ECLO. Outside a healthcare setting your local authority is also a source of support and resources and can be a great help.

There is a sensory team within the Suffolk County Council (called Sensing Change) whose job it is to support you. They employ rehabilitation officers for the visually impaired (ROVIs) who can provide you with information on local resources and local societies and will also be able to visit you at home to assess your needs. However, there may be a wait to be seen by a ROVI.

If you are registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired, Sensing Change should automatically contact you to arrange a home assessment and act as your link to wider social services.

### **Important tips**

- You may not always be referred to helpful resources such as ECLOs or low vision clinics – remember to ask if these resources are available in your clinic or hospital and ask for a referral or for alternative methods of support.

- If you require documents in large print, ask your eye clinic or hospital – this can include appointment letters as well as information.
- If there is one available at your eye clinic or hospital department, an ECLO can attend your appointments with you if you would like.
- The RNIB hosts a database called ‘Sightline’ that allows you to search for sight loss resources in your area at web site [www.sightlinedirectory.org.uk](http://www.sightlinedirectory.org.uk)

If you have any questions about macular disease or would like more information, call the Macular Society Information Service on 0300 3030 111.

---

## **WET AND DRY AMD – WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?**

People diagnosed with age-related macular degeneration (AMD) will also be told if their condition is ‘wet’ or ‘dry’. This distinction affects whether the condition can be treated or not, its progression, and how you need to monitor it. But we know that people are often left confused by their diagnosis and what it means.

What is ‘wet’ AMD? Wet AMD is caused by the abnormal growth of blood vessels in the part of the retina called the macula. People with wet AMD will often experience sudden changes in their vision. There are treatments available for wet AMD, and NICE guidelines state that treatment should be given within two weeks of your first appointment. Treatment is primarily an injection into the eye of drugs that will suppress the abnormal growth of blood vessels. However, these treatments are designed to stop your vision loss getting any worse, not to recover already lost vision – this is why it is important to receive treatment as soon as possible.

Different drugs will have different treatment regimens, and it’s important to ask your doctor which you are on so that you can keep track of appointments and chase any that are required.

You may be told, following treatment, that your AMD has ‘gone dry’. This does not mean that you now have the dry type. This means that the blood vessel growth that was causing your wet AMD is stable and under control. You should continue to monitor for any changes and ask for an urgent referral back to your ophthalmologist if any occur, as further treatment may be required.

What is 'dry' AMD? Dry AMD is a gradual deterioration of the macula as the retinal cells die off and are not renewed. The term dry does not mean the person has dry eyes, just that the condition is not wet AMD.

There is currently no treatment for dry AMD. The progression of dry AMD varies, but in most people it develops over many months or years. People often carry on as normal for some time.

It is important to know that wet AMD can develop in someone with dry AMD – and these changes need to be spotted and treated quickly. People with dry AMD may be given tools to monitor their vision – such as an Amsler grid.

It is important that you monitor your vision regularly (once a week is ideal) for any changes. If there are any, you must make an urgent appointment with your optician, who can refer you to an ophthalmologist for treatment if wet AMD has occurred. You should then be treated within two weeks. You should err on the side of caution if you detect any changes to your vision, as fast treatment is essential to prevent deterioration in your vision.

If you have any questions about AMD, or any other macular condition, call the Macular Society Advice and Information Service on **0300 3030 111**.

---

## **SIGHT ADVICE FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

The "Sight Advice FAQ web site" answers questions about living with sight loss, eye health or being newly diagnosed with a sight condition. This includes those who are supporting people through their sight loss journey, including parents, partners, carers and friends.

To find answers to your questions, go to their web site at <https://www.sightadvicefaq.org.uk/> where you can type your question into the search box, or use the menu to find what you are looking for.

This web site has been procured for you by the RNIB, Guide Dogs for the Blind, Visionary, VICTA, Fight for Sight, Vision UK and the Macular Society working together in partnership.

## **SKILLS FOR SEEING**

Eccentric viewing involves identifying and using the healthiest parts of a person's vision. Many people adopt this technique as they adjust to their sight loss and often discover it by accident. By scanning what they want to see, they find an area of their vision that gives them a clearer image. This may mean that they look slightly above, below, or to the left or right of an object to see it more clearly. With time and practice, eccentric viewing can become automatic.

Steady eye strategy involves learning a new way to read text. Steady eye strategy can improve your ability to read. When we read, we usually hold the page still and move our eyes from left to right across the text. This scanning movement becomes automatic as we learn to read. If you lose your central vision, this way of reading no longer works – the damaged part of the macula will block out the words. The technique involves keeping your eyes still and moving the text through the best part of your vision. This can help you read faster and more accurately.

For more information about Skills for Seeing and for free one-to-one coaching in these techniques, call the Macular Society Advice and Information Service on 0300 3030 111 or email [help@macularsociety.org](mailto:help@macularsociety.org)

---

## **HOLIDAYS**

Don't let your sight loss prevent you from taking and enjoying a holiday. There are lots of different types of holidays to choose from, and a number of services and organisations who can help find the right holiday for you.

### **Choosing a holiday**

There are number of organisations in the UK who can help you find and book a holiday which is especially tailored for people with sight loss.

Bodies such as Tourism for All UK, Visit Britain and the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) can also provide information about booking a holiday from mainstream tour operators who have made efforts to make their information and holidays more accessible.

## **Specialist hotels for blind and partially sighted people**

A number of specialist hotels around the UK cater specifically for blind and partially sighted people.

A "specialist" hotel has staff specifically trained to offer support to people with sight loss. The hotels often have additional features such as:

- colour contrasting surfaces
- talking lifts
- tactile signs
- talking menus
- useful products such as liquid level indicators and talking alarm clocks.

If you need a bit more support and care on holiday, some residential and care homes which provide care for blind and partially sighted residents, including RNIB's residential homes, also offer short term respite care.

You can find more specialist hotels or places to stay in the UK using the Sightline Directory web site at:

<https://www.sightlinedirectory.org.uk>

## **Other hotels and guesthouses**

As well as staying in specialist hotels, you can of course choose to stay somewhere which doesn't specifically cater for people with sight loss. Under the terms of the Equality Act 2010, a hotel cannot refuse to serve you for a reason related to your disability or offer you a different standard or manner of service. Holiday providers should make reasonable adjustments to accommodate you and be willing to offer "auxiliary aids" to make your stay more comfortable. For example, if you are unable to read the menu, they could enlarge it or read it out to you.

When you are making your booking, it is a good idea to let the hotel know if you might need extra help getting to the hotel, or a tour of the hotel when you arrive so you can familiarise yourself with the layout.

## **Activity holidays and themed breaks**

If you are feeling a bit more adventurous, you can go on an activity holiday which could include activities such as rambling and walking, creative and cultural courses, sensory experiences or sports. There

are a number of different providers of activity holidays for people with sight loss, both across the UK and further afield, for example:

**The Calvert Trust Centres** in Northumberland, Cumbria and Devon which offer activities such as abseiling, archery and swimming.

**Torch holiday and retreat centre** is a family-run retreat in the West Sussex countryside. With secluded grounds and wonderful views of the South Downs they offer a selection of diverse holidays including book weeks, activity weeks, craft and music.

**Seable** is a social enterprise based in London that organises accessible tailored holidays for the sight loss community. Their holidays are suitable for individuals, couples, families and small groups of friends. Destinations include: Sicily, Amsterdam, Cyprus, Lanzarote, Rome, Slovenia and Thailand. They offer a wide range of activities for every taste, including relaxing, sport, culture, winter sun, honeymoons, food tasting and more.

**Traveleyes** is a UK-based company specialising in providing holidays for blind and partially sighted people who want to explore worldwide destinations, with independence, flexibility and freedom. They offer a range of UK breaks, sun holidays, cruises and long-haul escorted tours.

---

## **GATWICK IS TRIALLING ON-DEMAND SUPPORT**

Blind and partially sighted passengers at Gatwick airport can now call a trained agent 24 hours a day for free support via an app called Aira. The agent can guide the passenger through the airport, help them read documents or find the right bag on the luggage carousel just by using the camera on the passenger's mobile phone. The system is being trialled for six months at Gatwick in partnership with the airport's biggest airline, EasyJet, which is helping to fund the trial to improve accessibility for blind and partially sighted passengers. The service can however be used by passengers flying with any airline at Gatwick.

Twelve thousand passengers a year notify Gatwick that they are blind or partially sighted. These passengers can now download the Aira app and register in advance. The app is available for both Android and Apple smartphones and has been designed to be simple to use. Through the app, trained agents can help passengers to find

boarding gates, shops, restaurants, special assistance facilities and more.

### **How to use the app**

Download the Aira app on your smartphone. Visit the Google Play store if you have an Android phone or the App Store if you have an iPhone.

Open the app and choose, “Tap to use Aira as a Guest for FREE!” and register with an email and phone number.

You will get a text message confirming your phone number. Tap the link in the text message to complete the signup process. Then, connect with an agent.

### **Other accessible services at Gatwick**

Gatwick was the first airport to introduce a hidden disability lanyard – a discreet signifier to staff that the person wearing it has a hidden disability and may need a little extra help – and all major UK, and several international, airports have introduced the lanyard since. There is a separate article in this newsletter letting you know more about the lanyard and where it can be used.

Gatwick engages with a broad range of disability groups to help ensure that the airport makes its services accessible for everyone. New facilities at the airport include the UK’s first airport sensory room and a new £2 million airline lounge for passengers who require special assistance – one of the biggest of its kind in any European airport.

Gatwick also hosts regular Accessibility Days to help new passengers get used to airport surroundings before they travel. Visit Gatwick’s Special Assistance web pages to find out more.

## **SUPPORT WHILE YOU'RE OUT AND ABOUT WITH THE SUNFLOWER LANYARD**

If you have a disability that may not be immediately obvious but would appreciate support from staff in UK airports, certain railways, supermarkets or visitor attractions, then you may be interested to know there is a lanyard you can wear to signal this. The lanyard, which is



entirely voluntary for people with hidden disabilities and their families, acts as a discreet sign for staff that additional support or help may be required.

The hidden disabilities lanyard is also called the “sunflower lanyard” because of its appearance – a strip of green with a pattern of yellow sunflowers. Once you get one, it is yours to keep and use for future travels, shopping trips and outings where the scheme is recognised.

### **Airports**

In 2016, Gatwick launched the first-of-its-kind lanyard for passengers with hidden disabilities who may require additional support when travelling through the airport. For instance, by wearing the lanyard at Gatwick or other major UK airports, you could receive support with:

- getting more time to prepare at check-in and security
- getting a more comprehensive briefing on what to expect as you travel through the airport
- staff assisting with reading a departure board or sign.

### **Railways**

The lanyard scheme is gradually being adopted by railways. It is now being used by LNER, which operates the London North Eastern routes, and C2C which serves 26 stations in East London and South Essex.

### **Supermarkets**

The lanyard is being trialled by two major supermarkets. Sainsbury’s is running an extended trial at 40 branches following a successful test at its Barnstaple store, while Tesco is running a trial in 15 of its Hertfordshire stores.

## **Visitor attractions**

In August 2019, Eureka!, a children's museum in Yorkshire, joined the lanyard scheme. If you're planning a visit to Eureka!, they have lots of information on accessible visits on their website. The Royal International Air Tattoo, which stages air shows in Gloucestershire for aircraft enthusiasts, is another attraction currently trialling the lanyard.

## **How to get a lanyard**

- Airports: If you're due to fly from a major UK airport, you should be able to ask for a lanyard from an airport assistance desk or order it in advance. Find out more about the best way of getting the lanyard by contacting the airport before you travel.
- Railways: For LNER or C2C, ask at any station booking office or by contacting their Customers Services.
- Supermarkets: If you happen to shop in any of the Sainsbury's or Tesco stores running the trial, you can request the lanyard at the customer service desk of larger stores or the checkout at smaller ones.
- Visitor attractions: Ask at the tills or information points.
- Alternatively, you can purchase the lanyard from the Hidden Disabilities Store.

---

## **EATING OUT (Reproduced by kind permission of the Macular Society)**

Eating out at restaurants with friends and family is an enjoyable and important experience for a lot of people. Here are some tips received from some visually impaired people to help you to keep it an enjoyable experience.

### **Adjusting the environment**

- Remove clutter from the table if you can, it makes life easier.
- When booking, make sure you ask about lighting over the table. Too much or too little light can cause issues. Also, choose a quieter area, so you can hear what your friends are saying; it's hard to part lip-read in a noisy environment and you don't want to miss out.
- Don't be embarrassed to ask for a seating area in the restaurant where the location suits your needs e.g. close to toilets, near to a window etc.

- Carry your symbol cane so that the restaurant is aware of your needs.
- Take a small task light, it'll help you see the menu and your plate. You can even stand your menu up if you don't want others to see it, and you'd be surprised how many people wish they had one too!

## **Menus**

- Make sure you have your preferred app on your phone for either magnifying the text in a menu or for reading it out to you - for example, the 'Seeing AI' app.
- Look at the menu online beforehand if this is available.
- If struggling with the menu, ask for help from a member of staff – they may even be willing to give you a recommendation based on their own experience/knowledge.
- Ask if the venue has a large print menu. If they don't, it'll at least get them thinking.
- This may also trigger the conversation with the staff and you can feel more confident about asking them to read the menu out to you.

## **Food and drink**

- If you struggle with meat on the bone either ask them to cut this for you in the kitchen or choose fillet options.
- Ask waiters to tell you where the glasses are on the table.
- Ask friends to pour your drinks.
- If you order something light in colour, ask if they have darker plates they could put it on.
- Take a coloured paper napkin with you and if the tablecloth is white, place it on the table in front of you before the waiter puts your plate down so that there is good contrast between the plate and the napkin.
- Ask for wine in a tumbler with a sturdy wide base. It's easier to grip, less easy to spill and you get a decent measure.

---

**SMARTPHONE TECHNOLOGY OFFERING A VISION** – (authored by Gus Aleriou and as published in the Daily Telegraph)

After Gus Aleriou started to lose his vision, even recognising loved ones became tricky, but now scientists are developing tech to help him see. He wrote:

Fifteen years ago, I began to lose my central visual field, as a result of damage caused to my optic nerves during the early stages of multiple sclerosis. This impairment, which I share with the 1.5 million people in the UK who have macular disease, including age-related macular degeneration, is a cruel robbery. Although basic navigational sight often remains intact, it can make it impossible to recognise the face of a loved one from a few feet away or read the text in a book.

For me, it means I exist within an immediate bubble of my near vision. I can function independently at home. I struggle to see small details, for example print on a page or a screen, but use software or camera-based magnification to resolve this. However, my effective distance vision has vanished entirely. A central blind spot makes looking down a street, or even across a large room, feel like staring into a gaping abyss.

Human interaction and the social sphere have therefore become somewhat nuanced and complex. After all, when watching TV, particularly alone, one can always draw in closer to the set. This is not quite so practical when it comes to being introduced to somebody across the table at a dinner party, or a business meeting. At these mid-range distances, full facial recognition becomes impossible and I have even failed to recognise members of my family from across a room.

This may all be about to change with the emergence of a new breed of wearable visual prosthetics aimed at enhancing real-life scenes and, perhaps most crucially, allowing people to see others' faces. The headsets immerse the user in a high-resolution, ultra-realistic rendition of what they are looking at, magnifying the missing part of their vision. I recently had the opportunity to try out such a device, called the IrisVision, and was able to do things I hadn't done in 15 years, like watching TV from the other side of the room, going to the theatre and a live football match. The adjustable magnification meant that even sitting a few rows back, I was able to zoom in on the actor's faces at the theatre and the crunching tackles at the football, just like I once could.

"Wearables are now making a lot more tasks possible that were extremely difficult for us to address before," says Dr Michael Crossland, an optometrist at Moorfields Eye Hospital in London.

"They are particularly useful for hands-free activities, tasks involving prolonged viewing over distance and more detailed near-vision hobbies, such as art, playing cards or reading music."

The software allows the scene on the display to be customised for a range of visual impairments: for example, in the case of tunnel vision, the image can be shrunk down, deploying so-called "minification" to match the patient's reduced field of view, while in strabismus, often referred to as cross-eyedness, images can be shifted laterally to compensate for "eccentric" eye movements.

Dr Frank Werblin is the inventor of the IrisVision and a professor of neuroscience at the University of California, Berkeley. His life's work has focused on devising a non-invasive sight enhancement prosthetic for patients with low vision. "What has always been missing from the equation," he explains, "is social contact. People have been helped to use a computer and read books but they haven't been able to see people properly. With a reading enhancement device, you can't see across a room and you can't recognise faces."

Studies are examining whether this effect on social interaction may mean the device could postpone dementia among people with low vision.

What makes the IrisVision - £2,895 to buy in the UK – particularly exciting is its novel use of mainstream hardware, in the form of high-end Samsung Galaxy smartphones and the complimentary Samsung Gear VR headset. Indeed, the arrival of the smartphone - and mass production of high-performance cameras, displays and graphics processing units - has undoubtedly provided the largest technological impetus for wearable visual prosthetics.

High-tensile strength carbon fibre developed in the fifties for transportation and heavy industry, eventually revolutionised prosthetic limbs for amputees. Decades earlier, the emergence of the telephone and microphone led to the development of the modern-day electronic hearing aid. Smartphones could now be the equivalent game-changer for low vision rehabilitation.

As Dr Werblin explains: "At the beginning, we were fairly agnostic to the device. But it just so happened that this Samsung phone had the capabilities we needed for the device - very high-resolution display, an excellent camera and fast enough processor."

Currently, the two most obvious drawbacks of prosthetics like Dr Werblin's relate to mobility and appearance. "The problem with an immersive device is that in boosting their central vision, the wearer loses that peripheral vision essential for navigation and having a sense of where you are looking," says Dr Crossland. "If you are in a completely enclosed environment, you can't really walk around and mobilise effectively. The challenge, in the future, will be to have something that someone can walk around in, without obstructing their visual field".

The bulky appearance of a VR headset, despite them becoming increasingly common nowadays, can also be a barrier to spontaneity and full social integration. I certainly found the device drew the attention of the public and would reserve using it for spectator events and communal TV watching.

Artificial intelligence will also likely play a role in future products, says Dr Stephen Hicks, a neuroscientist at Oxford University and a founder of OxSight, a private enterprise developing slimline eyewear for patients with tunnel vision. "What is vital is that the person feels like they are ultimately in control he says. Dr Werblin says the more immediate challenge for low vision wearables is to create a discreet device that does away with the need for a headset altogether: I believe this new technology will be something that will be projecting right through the pupil on to the retina, so we won't need any of the bulky optics any longer."

He is optimistic that this Holy Grail -a device for low vision that resembles a pair of regular spectacles - may soon be in sight.

---

## NEW PRODUCTS

**SokLoks.** Never lose a sock in the wash again with these handy pairing discs. SokLoks are circular plastic discs designed to keep your socks paired together in the washing machine, tumble dryer and your sock drawer. Each disc has a cross-shaped slot in the middle, simply push your dirty socks through, to ensure they stay as a pair and then wash and dry as usual.

SokLok's are available as a starter pack of 10 priced at £3.99 per pack or a family pack of 25 priced at £6.99 per pack. SokLoks are supplied in five mixed colours; blue, green, purple, red and yellow.

**The Ramble Tag** is a lightweight harness, designed to be worn on the upper arm of a guide. The Ramble Tag is a guidance aid, created to increase independence and enjoyment for blind and partially sighted people while walking with a guide. Available in black or high visibility orange, and for left- or right-handed users, the Ramble Tag is comfortable, weather-proof and breathable. The strong neoprene rope handle is a comfortable alternative to linking arms, allowing for free movement, without physical contact. The harness can be adjusted to fit the guide's arm by two Velcro straps. The Ramble Tag is priced at £21.00



---

## **CAR CANE MOBILITY AID STANDING SUPPORT**

Do you struggle getting in and out of a car? If so, the car cane may be a useful aid. Car cane mobility aid standing support securely hooks into place and will not move allowing you to get a steady grip when you need it. Its non-slip grip is comfortable to hold and gives you the leverage to lift yourself up. It can hold 350lbs (160kg), stores away easily in your door or glove box and has a built-in flashlight. The superb bright LEDs can last 100,000 hours (uses 2 x 3V Cr3032 batteries - included). The car grab bar is available from various outlets including Amazon.



# SHOPPING TIPS FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE

## Preparation

If you have a smartphone, write your list on a computer keyboard and email it to your smartphone. Use the smartphone camera to take photos of labels; you can then magnify them up to a size you can read. There are also apps that can help with reading too.

Before you go out shopping, try to organise your list of items for purchase in a way that is easy for you to refer to. This may be on paper in large writing, on a digital recorder, etc. Also try to use your knowledge of the local shop to cluster the items on the list that are likely to be close together in the shop.

**In the shops:** Take time to learn where the Customer Service desk is in your local shop and don't be embarrassed to ask for help to do your shopping. The more you use assistance from shop staff, the more they will begin to recognise you and the easier it will be to get the help you want.

**It's time to dust off your cane:** we are often worried about using a cane if we've not had it for long, but in a busy shop it can be so helpful to stop you bumping into people or the special offers stands. It's also a quick indicator to staff that you might need assistance.

**Paying:** Ask your bank for an accessible debit or credit card. One example has on it a large arrow and a small notch on the end which helps you to know which way to put it into any paying machine. The number on the card is black numbers on a white background rather than silver, so the number can be read using a hand-held magnifier or CCTV magnifier.

When at the checkout, divide goods into two lots on the conveyor and ask the checkout operator to stop the till at £30. Put the extra goods into the second lot and pay on contactless card twice avoiding using PIN.

**Organising at home:** When putting shopping away, line up your tins by product so all the tomatoes are in one line from front to back, and all the beans and have your rows in alphabetical order.

If using technology such as barcode recognition software/ apps (e.g. Seeing AI), remember that there may be barcodes on the packaging

of multipacks but no barcode on the individual items within the multipack – this may mean that the individual items are not recognised at home. You might need a back-up way of doing this!

---

## **TIPS ON HOW AMAZON'S ALEXA CAN HELP YOU WITH DAILY LIVING – BY CLARE BURMAN, MEMBER OF ESAB**

In our newsletter 12 months ago, we published an article on the Echo Dot, the smallest in the range of Amazon's voice activated smart speakers. We thought it was time to revisit the personal assistant, more commonly referred to as Alexa, to share some ideas as to how she can help with daily living.

### **Communication**

Alexa communication allows you to make calls and send messages from your echo device for free, quickly and easily with just your voice. You can also send announcements to your additional speakers, drop into other devices that have granted permission, look up business numbers, and even locate your phone when you have mislaid it! Examples of this are:

- Call Zebedee's mobile
- Send message to Ermintrude
- Call 0 1 4 7 3 6 1 1 0 1 1
- Announce... dinner is ready
- Drop into Mum's Echo Dot
- Find my phone

### **Time and Information Management**

Keeping track of information and schedules can be challenging when you lose the ability to glance at a notebook or just grab a pen and jot down a thought. Alexa can help by scheduling and reviewing appointments, setting reminders, managing lists and even checking facts, all with just your voice. Examples are:

- Add Terry's chocolate orange to my Christmas List
- Remind me every day at 6pm to take my medication
- Schedule doctor's appointment for Monday at 10am
- How do you spell supercalifragilisticexpialidocious?

### **Wake me up to Radio Suffolk at 7am**

Another useful feature of Alexa is the ability to set and control alarms by voice alone. You can set one-off or recurring alarms easily, and

choose to be alerted with classic alarm sounds, a music playlist or a radio station of your choice.

### **Set Pizza Timer for 15 Minutes**

Set, check and cancel multiple countdown timers on your Alexa device, perfect for in the kitchen. Fancy some cooking inspiration? Alexa can help you find and follow recipes too, just say 'suggest a recipe.'

### **Read my Book**

Books from Amazon's Audible and Kindle libraries can be played on any Echo device, providing convenient and simple playback controls. Use your voice to navigate through the book by chapter or time, and even ask Alexa to set a sleep timer for those occasions when drifting off is inevitable! Not to worry if you are not subscribed to these services, Amazon Audible makes 3 books each month available to listen to for free. Just say 'What's new on Audible,' or 'Open Audible Stories' to hear free short stories by authors such as Roald Dahl.

And stay tuned for news from RNIB. They have announced their intention to bring their talking book service to Alexa devices sometime in the not too distant future.

### **Launch My Talking Newspaper**

The 'My Talking Newspaper' skill on Alexa provides over 500 of the UK's talking newspapers, magazines, publications and podcasts.

### **What's on telly?**

You can find out what is on television now or ask for listings at a specific time. Want to know what's on at your local cinema? You can do that too by asking 'what films are showing?'

### **Smart Plugs**

Many devices and appliances have been designed specifically to work with Alexa to bring voice control to their features. These range from door locks to blinds, microwaves to coffee machines and light bulbs to thermostats. Perhaps the most versatile of these is the smart plug which allows you to turn on and off any electrical appliance that plugs into a standard wall socket. Control your existing lamps, television, kettle, slow cooker all with your voice via an Alexa device. Use the app to schedule your lights to turn on at a certain time or as soon as you arrive home. Set routines so that when you tell Alexa

that it's 'Time for Bed, your downstairs lights and television turn off and your bedside lamp turns on. Be as creative as you like!

If you would like more information about Alexa or to arrange a visit to the resource centre to get hands on with an Echo Dot, call the Ipswich office on 01473 611011.

---

## **UNSCENE SUFFOLK**

Unscene Suffolk is a community theatre company for adults with visual impairment based in Suffolk. They run accessible creative arts workshops and promote access to cultural events for visually impaired people in Suffolk.

### **Drama Workshops**

**What? Accessible drama workshops led by professional theatre director, Jenni Elbourne.**

**When?** Thursdays from 1.30pm to 4pm from 3 October 2019

**Where?** DanceEast, Foundry Ln, Ipswich IP4 1DW.

Their volunteers can meet you from local buses and trains.

**How much?** Initial taster session free of charge, then £5 per session.

### **Unscene Singers**

**What?** Fully accessible singing workshops led by professional singing leader and vocal coach Emma J. Bishton. Songs will be learnt by ear and distributed in large print or audio format.

**When?** Mondays afternoons, 2.15pm to 4.15pm.

**Where?** DanceEast, Foundry Ln, Ipswich IP4 1DW.

Their volunteers can meet you from local buses and trains.

**How much?** £5 per session.

Find out more at their web site <https://unscenesuffolk.co.uk/>

To book a place on either or both workshops, please contact: [email@unscenesuffolk.co.uk](mailto:email@unscenesuffolk.co.uk) or call 07528 189865

## **MAILING LIST FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE TO SHARE INFORMATION AND DISCUSS TOPICS OF INTEREST**

The idea behind this new initiative is to give people a simple way of distributing information relevant to Visually Impaired people living in Ipswich and surrounding areas. This might include announcements and information from the Suffolk Guide Dogs Forum, the Ipswich and District Talking Newspaper, the local Guide dogs fund-raising branch, and any number of sporting, recreational and social groups. Once subscribed, members can simply send a message to [Vipswich@groups.io](mailto:Vipswich@groups.io) and their message will be automatically sent to everyone else subscribed to the list.

To subscribe to this service, send a blank message to [Vipswich+subscribe@groups.io](mailto:Vipswich+subscribe@groups.io)

You can unsubscribe in a similar fashion by sending a message to [Vipswich+unsubscribe@groups.io](mailto:Vipswich+unsubscribe@groups.io)

Membership isn't limited to people with a visual impairment and can include friends, family, local volunteers etc. If you have any trouble subscribing, email the group's administrator Tim Pennick at [tim.pennick@btinternet.com](mailto:tim.pennick@btinternet.com) and he will complete the process for you.

---

### **A BIT OF HUMOUR**

#### **HIS NAME WAS FLEMING**

His name was Fleming, and he was a poor Scottish farmer. One day, while trying to make a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog. He dropped his tools and ran to the bog. There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself. Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death.

The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Scotsman's sparse surroundings. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved.

'I want to repay you,' said the nobleman. 'You saved my son's life.'  
'No, I can't accept payment for what I did,' the Scottish farmer replied waving off the offer. At that moment, the farmer's own son came to the door of the family hovel. 'Is that your son?' the nobleman asked. 'Yes,' the farmer replied proudly. 'I'll make you a deal. Let me provide him with the level of education my own son will enjoy. If the lad is anything like his father, he'll no doubt grow to be a man we both will be proud of.' And that he did.

Farmer Fleming's son attended the very best schools and in time, graduated from St Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin.

Years afterward, the same nobleman's son who was saved from the bog was stricken with pneumonia. What saved his life this time? Penicillin. The name of the nobleman? Lord Randolph Churchill. His son's name? Sir Winston Churchill.

Someone once said: What goes around comes around.

### **WHEN INSULTS HAD CLASS....**

These glorious insults are from an era before the English language got boiled down to 4-letter words.

A Member of Parliament to Disraeli: *"Sir, you will either die on the gallows or of some unspeakable disease.*

*"That depends, Sir,"* said Disraeli, *"whether I embrace your policies or your mistress."*

*"He has never been known to use a word that might send a reader to the dictionary."*

- William Faulkner (about Ernest Hemingway)

*"Thank you for sending me a copy of your book; I'll waste no time reading it."*

- Moses Hadas

*"I am enclosing two tickets to the first night of my new play; bring a friend, if you have one."*

- George Bernard Shaw to Winston Churchill

*"Cannot possibly attend first night, will attend second .... if there is one."*

- Winston Churchill, in response

*"He is a self-made man and worships his creator."*

- John Bright

*"In order to avoid being called a flirt, she always yielded easily."*

- Charles, Count Talleyrand

*"His mother should have thrown him away and kept the stork."*

- Mae West

*"Some cause happiness wherever they go; others, whenever they go."*

- Oscar Wilde

---

## **EAST SUFFOLK BLIND DISTRICT COMMITTEES NEWS**

### **BECCLES SOCIAL GROUP - Jennifer Langeskov, Chairman**

September 2019 was a month we had been looking forward to all year for a very special reason. One of our longest-standing members, Gwen Harris, was born on 19 September 1919 and we all hoped that we would be able to celebrate her centenary at our September social. Happily, Gwen remained in good health and excellent spirits and so the party went ahead full-steam. Both Gwen's son John and daughter Margaret attended and the highlight of the occasion was John's piano rendition of 'Centenary Waltz', which he had composed especially for his mother.

Gwen received 116 cards including, of course, special wishes from Her Majesty the Queen. I am sure we all wish her continued good health.



We continue to have a robust membership - 20 as of now - and despite the challenges our members face they always show a positive and enthusiastic attitude and rarely miss a social. Hot on Gwen's heels is Joan Lawrence who in December will reach 99 and a further five members are in their nineties – Joan English, Violet Hughes, Richard Ling, John Smith and Beryl Stewart (Joan Lawrence's sister).

While on the theme of ninety we would like to pay tribute to one of our highly valued helpers, Joyce Francis, who reluctantly decided to retire as she approached her ninetieth birthday in September. Joyce was probably the longest serving helper and without fail produced her wonderful sandwiches and wielded the teapot in a highly professional manner. She is much missed! However, as one door closes another opens and we are delighted to welcome Brenda Bedwell who has volunteered to take on dear Joyce's responsibilities. Welcome Brenda!

---

## **FELIXSTOWE BRANCH VISIT TO DEBACH AIRFIELD MUSEUM**

At the beginning of July, a party of seven members of the Felixstowe Branch and some volunteers enjoyed a day at Debach Airfield. Richard and Prilly Taylor opened their museum especially for us and spent time showing and explaining all the exhibits. Our members were able to hold and feel many of the items which made the visit so much more interesting for the visually impaired.



The airfield was used by the US Airforce during the Second World War and then fell into disrepair. Thanks to an enthusiastic band of volunteers, buildings including the air control tower and nissen huts

have been restored. Over the years Richard and Prilly have collected (and still are!) memorabilia and equipment relating to a working airbase. The airfield is open to the public on the last Sunday of the month, April to September but private visits are always welcome – (contact Richard Taylor on 01473 737236). Our Committee would thoroughly recommend a visit and thank Richard and his wife for making us so welcome.

On a final note, our loyal band of volunteers and drivers must be thanked for giving their time, as without their help, we would not be able to continue with our activities.

---

## **NEWS FROM HALESWORTH AND SOUTHWOLD SOCIAL GROUP – Alan Middleton-Stewart**

We have had a wonderful spring and summer. Lucy Croft talked to us about bank security and the following month we were entertained by Jean & Barney Barnard who sang for us with up-lifting spring songs. In March, Simon Green from the Suffolk Police gave us advice on home security and this was followed in April by Mike Learner who gave us a very entertaining talk on “Bees”. Mike brought a lot of honey which his bees had produced which was wonderful. Thank you Mike.

We like to go out for a summer spree! So, in June we went to The Five Bells at Wrentham for lunch. Since then we have reminisced over old holiday snaps and generally enjoyed each other’s company over tea and cake.

None of this would have been possible without the help we received from Brian. I am very sorry to say that Brian was unwell in the summer and has had to give up volunteering as a driver. Then there is Chris & Lynne whose support is invaluable. Margaret & Alfie are new volunteers this year and we could not have done without their help and support. Our thanks to all our volunteer drivers and helpers for all they do.

Jo has had a very busy year as our Chairman; long may she continue. Our thanks also goes to Jenny the Community Worker for our area whose help and advice we could not have done without, another very good year. Thank you Jenny

Planning for next year is well under way. The new program should be out soon. I hope that everyone has a very Happy Christmas and New Year with many more to come.

---

### **LOWESTOFT SOCIAL GROUP – Kathryn Outterside, Chairman**

Our Social at the Lowestoft 60+ Club is well attended with members enjoying musical entertainment, refreshments and a raffle. Some members have also been regularly enjoying an evening of music at the local Footsteps Club. October began with an invitation from the Lowestoft Lions for an “extravaganza” evening of entertainment at the Gorleston Pavilion - greatly enjoyed by everyone. Fundraising: Our street collection £577 and donations from individuals, local charities and businesses help to support our Socials, Christmas dinner and local taxi scheme. We end the year with a Christmas dinner at the Masonic Hall.

### **Lowestoft local independent Clubs for the Blind**

#### Lowestoft Blind Bowls Club (LBBC)

The club has two seasons; indoor (October to April) and outdoor (May to September) arranging special matches with local sighted clubs. Meeting on Wednesdays with in-club competitions running regularly and lessons offered to new members to get them started.

#### Lowestoft Blind Activities Club (LBAC)

Monthly activities of target shooting, darts nights, quizzes, tenpin bowling and new age kurling. Other activities include local theatre trips to see Mary Duff and tributes acts Frankie’s Guys, Madness, Lionel Richie and Roy Orbison. A ramble at Dunwich Forest then canoeing with the Bungay Canoe Club during the summer has kept everyone very busy.

#### Lowestoft Live Arts

The Club continues to make their crafts as well as charity items for Suffolk Knitters & Stitchers who pass the items on to a variety of other charities. The Club ends the year with a Christmas meal and Fish & Chips party.

I would like thank Jenny, our Community worker, for all her hard work and all the volunteers and drivers, who help at our ESAB social and also the independent clubs, without your support our members would not be able to take part in any of the activities on offer in Lowestoft. Finally thank you to all our members who have made donations

and/or have given their time to help me with our collections. If you would like more information about the ESAB social or the local clubs please contact Kathryn on 01502 585329.

---

### **SHOTLEY PENINSULA BRANCH – Jean Miller, Chairman**

Once again we can report that the Shotley Club has had another successful year with the monthly socials being well attended and members enjoying a selection of musical entertainment, talks and a quiz.

On an extremely hot day in July, two volunteers accompanied three members on a Barge Trip up the Orwell River and enjoyed being looked after by Rotary Club and Round Table members, given plenty of food and drink, and finishing with Fish and Chips on our return to Ipswich. A good time was had by all.



As usual, in July, we held out Summer Lunch at Hintlesham Golf Club and our Christmas Lunch this year will be at the Holiday Inn in Ipswich. To say thank you to our volunteers for all their valuable help, coffee mornings were enjoyed in May and October. Another coach trip was organised in September with some members bringing along friends, and everyone enjoyed a good day out at a Garden Centre, this time in Tiptree. We have already been asked to organise another one in the future!

Sadly we have lost three long standing members this year and they will all be missed, as they were regular attendees to the Socials. We have, though, welcomed several new members to the group.

My thanks, as always, to the committee for their help and support, and to Ian, our Community Worker, who is always on hand to give advice and assistance if required.

## **WOODBIDGE DISTRICT SOCIAL GROUP - Karen Cade, Chair**

Woodbridge District has had a busy year with a variety of entertainments. The ukulele band was a big hit- they certainly love their cake! Woodbridge School invited us for a concert of beautiful music performed by their choir and a delicious tea. The youngsters were so welcoming and so talented. We visited Ufford Park Hotel for our summer tea. There, we were joined by the Mayor of Woodbridge who stayed to chat and drink tea.

Sadly, we lost a stalwart of our committee this year. Ron Holroyd was a larger than life character who could sell a raffle ticket to anyone! He was charming and kind and is greatly missed.

As well as our monthly raffles we have received donations from a woodturning group and flower arranging club. A yoga event recently gave us the money that they raised. We also held a street collection & our funds are used to book our entertainers and provide transport.



Volunteers attended the 'Woodbridge on Show' in April. It was an opportunity to advertise the work of ESAB alongside other voluntary groups in Woodbridge. We had many visitors to our stall and two volunteers have joined our team as a result. The picture shows Geoff Moss, Lesley Hodgkiss & Karen Cade at the show. We

are looking forward to our Christmas Lunch at Ufford Park in December.

---

## **STOWMARKET SOCIAL GROUP - Tony Arnold, Chairman**

The Stowmarket Social Group held an Extraordinary General Meeting on Wednesday 23rd October 2019. The occasion was because of the retirement from office of Shirley Bonner and the need to elect a replacement. At the same meeting, it was announced that our treasurer, Peggy Peck, also wished to stand down from the committee.



Shirley has been the group's leader for a countless number of years and Peggy has been the treasurer for the last eleven years. Peggy was unable to attend the meeting.

Members heartily thanked both Shirley and Peggy for their hard work and dedication. Shirley had been presented with gifts at the previous group meeting to show the Group members' appreciation and a similar gift will be arranged and delivered to Peggy. All members expressed their sadness at losing such stalwarts.

Tony Arnold was elected as the new Chairman for the Group (because everyone else had taken a pace backwards) and he expressed his own thanks to Shirley who will be a hard act to follow. Tony is an officer of other community groups in the area and the members at Stowmarket have graciously agreed that future meetings will be held on the fourth Wednesday of each month to avoid clashes with Tony's other commitments.

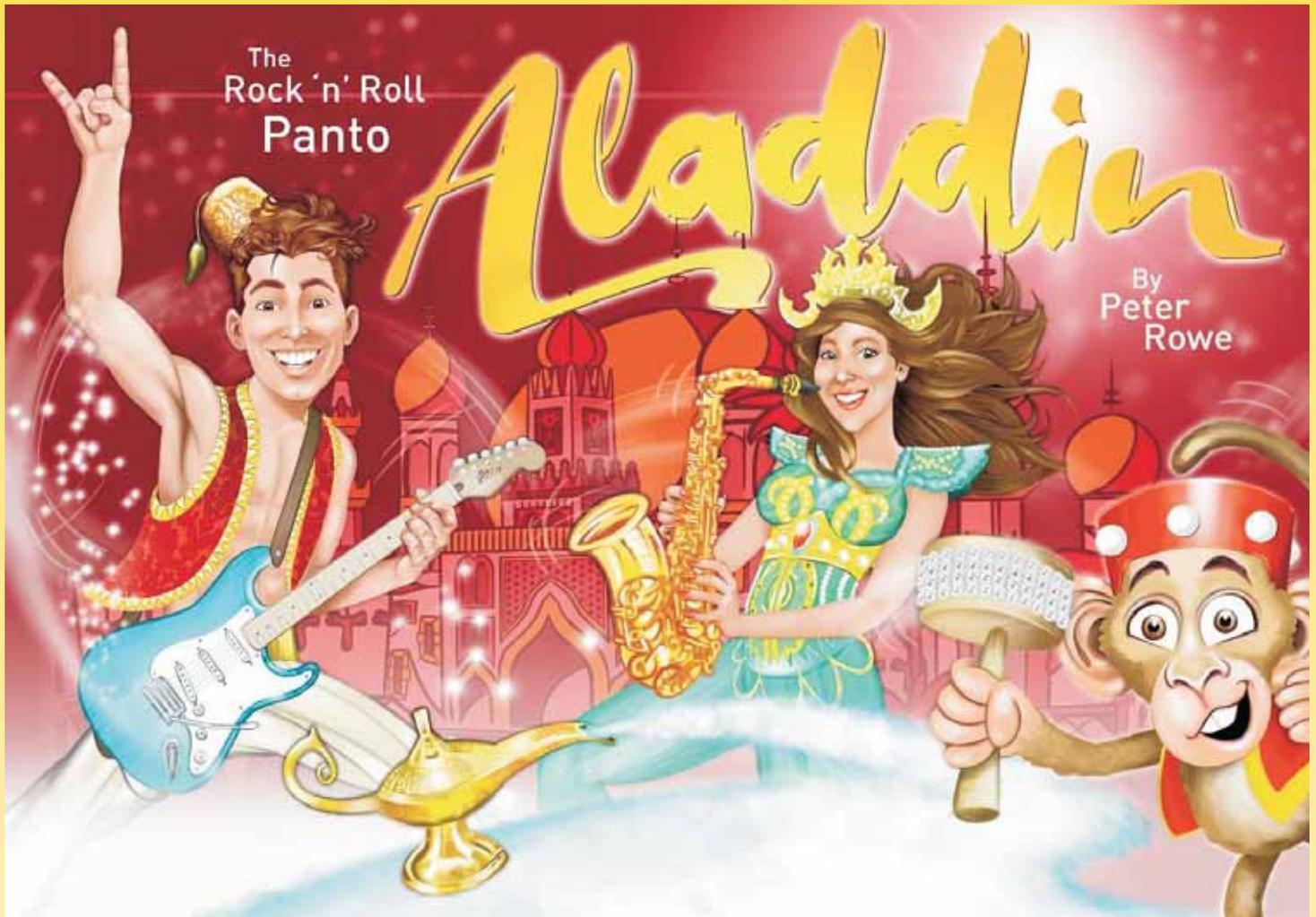
Tony retired about five years ago after spending his working life as a Police Officer for thirty years followed by roles as an investigator with a number of regulators in different industries. He has also worked in the Voluntary Sector and within the National Health Service. He now spends his time on a variety of community projects; growing fruit and vegetables on his allotments; walking his dogs and attempting to complete the endless list of jobs compiled by his wife. He is looking forward to learning about the Stowmarket Group – meeting their needs will be a new challenge.



This year, the New Wolsey Theatre is thrilled to present

## ALADDIN – THE ROCK'N'ROLL PANTO

Thu 28 Nov 2019 to Sat 1 Feb 2020



**Audio Described performances are available after 10 December.**

To help you immerse yourselves in the show as much as possible we offer touch tours before each audio-described performance enabling you to explore the stage and get a feel of the set and costumes before the play starts. We recommend Audio Description headsets are pre-booked at the Box Office for a returnable deposit of £10.00.

**Large print and audio brochures are available on request.**

Tickets are available online on the New Wolsey Theatre website <https://www.wolseytheatre.co.uk/whats-on/accessible-performances/> or by telephoning the box office Monday to Saturday 10am-8pm on 01473 295900