

## **Launch of 'Open Britain', National Theatre, London 6 July 2009**

### **JONATHAN SHAW:**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. While listening to the speeches I was reflecting on my early career. A whole hair line ago when I was a care worker working with adults with learning disabilities, and indeed before that when I was a student, I went on holiday with disabled people, many wheelchair users, to a university. It was Young Disabled on Holidays - anybody heard of that? It was sometime ago. I learnt a great deal of things about alcohol on that holiday - that is, what I can remember of it.

Of course, accessibility and the business case for example, as Phil [Friend, Chair of RADAR] and Barbara [Follett, Minister for Tourism] pointed out, was not quite thought through at that time. I remember carrying people - wheelchair users - down this beer cellar in Blackpool and somehow we all got back up. Things have changed enormously of course. I also remember taking a group of young adults with learning disabilities on the Norfolk Broads and what that meant for them, because there were too few of us breaking barriers and saying no, we're not just going on a holiday specifically for disabled people, we're going for a mainstream holiday. We had to fight against the regime that ran the institution where I worked. But what a difference it made for those people, getting away on holiday, and enjoying everything that all of us enjoy. So some lasting memories for me that influenced my political career as well.

It's right that we have travelled a long way since I was in that beer cellar

and on that boat in the Norfolk Broads. As Barbara said it's essential. Even what it says about us as a country, about us and our attitudes. Phil is absolutely right when he talks about the prospects of the 2012 Olympic Games, that the reason we won that bid was because of inclusion. Something that we all hold dear to us as people in this country that can make a real difference - not just to attitudes, but the next step as well which is about behaviour. It's about changing behaviour because we don't just want disabled people taking part in the Olympics - being fantastic athletes they will do that. We don't just want disabled people coming and watching. We've got to make it accessible as we also want people working and being part of the shop window. I think all of those things combined – athletes, spectators, employees, volunteers - is a very, very powerful image. One that can change attitudes and will change behaviour - and we do need to grasp that huge opportunity the Olympics presents us.

So things have changed considerably. I think this guide that we're launching today, Open Britain, which was never available when I was a young care assistant, is incredibly useful. Obviously technology means it available on the internet as well - that was not around either. So I salute the work that you have done. All of the partners. Congratulations.

But we need to ensure that we go forward and we do make Britain far more accessible. It's good for business, it's good for attitudinal change, it's good for behaviour change. It's good for all of the 60 million people that are in our country. Thank you very much.