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CENTRAL AREA COMMUNITY FORUM

Notes of the Forum held on 20 July 2009 at 7.00pm at St Josephs Community Hall, Matlock

PRESENT

**Derbyshire Dales
District Council**

Councillor Peter Hume (in the Chair)

David Wheatcroft (Chief Executive) and Ros Hession (Overview and Community Engagement Officer)

**Mid Derbyshire
Citizens Advice
Bureau**

Jan Bell (Advice Services Manager)

**Peak District National
Park Authority**

Andy Farmer (Area Team Manager for Field Services)

**Derbyshire Fire &
Rescue Service**

Gary Platts (Station Manager)

**Derbyshire
Constabulary**

Chief Superintendent Peter Lewis, Inspector Bryan Hall and Sergeant Jim Thompson

**Derbyshire County
Council**

Andrea Bond (Democratic Services Officer)

Police Authority

Annetta Christie

Matlock Mercury

Julia Rogerson

Members of the Public

Kath Potter (Rowsley PC), Patricia Leake (DDCVS and resident), Dennis Walton (Lady Fair), M & J Ludbrook (Resident & Sportshots Photography), Sue Sheldon (Age Concern Derby & Derbyshire and Matlock Lions), John Evans (Darley Dale T C), A J Mumby (Council Tax payer), John Lowe (Matlock resident), Laura Stevens (Resident), Ingrid Pasteur (Darley Dale T C), Kath Dyson, Peggie Flynn plus one other (14 in total)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Councillor Peter Hume introduced Members and officers from the participating authorities and welcomed everyone to the Forum.

INITIATIVES TO COMBAT THE CURRENT ECONOMIC CLIMATE AND ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE

Jan Bell gave a brief history of the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) which was set up at the outbreak of World War 2 and was consequently celebrating its 70th anniversary. There had been a CAB presence in Derbyshire Dales since 1967 with the Mid Derbyshire Bureau being amongst the top 10% of bureaux nationally.

Jan outlined services available which can be accessed at the Bureau's main office in Matlock, at various outreach centres (including GP surgeries) around the Dales, through home visits, the internet and by telephone.

The CAB welcomed additional resources from the District Council which would enable the debt advice service to be expanded and reduce waiting time. A specialist debt adviser is working within the district focussing on priority cases, concentrating on people facing problems with housing debt.

The CAB is also working with those with lesser priority debts and helping people better manage their finances. An information pack, 'Top Tips for Managing Your Finances' would be available in August, followed by packs on 'Understanding Bank Accounts' and 'Understanding Financial Products' at a later stage.

Questions and comments were then invited and issues raised as follows:

- Laura Stevens explained how the group, Transition Matlock, was discussing ways in which to help people save money by using energy saving devices and promoting them through initiatives such as a 'drop in' centre and an article in the Hurst Farm newsletter. Laura asked if the District Council and / or other partners could offer assistance through access to leaflets / information, provision of energy saving light bulbs. David Wheatcroft advised that the District Council may be able to help with publicity through Dales Matters in the autumn. He felt that the Drop In Centre would be useful. He was unsure whether the District Council still had a stock of energy saving light bulbs, but would put Tim Braund, the Council's Head of Environmental Health in touch with Laura. David Wheatcroft stated that the Derbyshire Dales area had the biggest carbon footprint in Derbyshire and acknowledged that the District Council must do what it can to reduce this. The District Council no longer had a dedicated Energy Adviser, but climate change was, nevertheless, still being addressed.
- The CAB had information available which Transition Matlock may wish to distribute and Jan Bell indicated that the CAB's money adviser may be interested in attending Transition Matlock's event in September.
- John Lowe commented on the good service provided by the CAB. He had been impressed with the speed at which CAB had been able to set up an interview for him

- Jan Bell went on to explain that contacting the CAB had always been a bone of contention, with telephone lines often busy. However, a pilot study had recently taken place whereby calls were channelled through a call centre. This had resulted in resources being more effectively diverted to provide an efficient service. One number was now used.
- Mrs Dyson recalled distribution of energy saving devices (such as light bulbs) and fire alarms by the Fire & Rescue Service some years ago. Gary Platts advised that free home fire safety checks and smoke alarms were still available.
- Councillor Hume made a plea on behalf of the CAB for volunteers.

David Wheatcroft went on to talk about initiatives that the District Council was supporting and promoting to assist the local economy and individuals, these included:-

- Promotion of 'Source Derbyshire' to local businesses giving information on local contract opportunities.
- Urging small businesses to tender for Council services and advising them whether they qualify for rate relief.
- District Council car parking charges have been frozen for 2009 / 10. The increase in charges would have taken effect from 1 April 2009, but by holding down the prices at this critical stage in the economic climate, it is felt that tourism levels will be sustained and possibly increased. The parking concessions to residents will continue to encourage District Council residents to shop locally without paying car parking charges.
- The District Council continues to promote tourism in partnership with all the Derbyshire authorities as part of the 'Visit Peak District and Derbyshire Partnership'. Tourism in the Dales contributes £243 million and 5,440 jobs to the local economy. There has been a 40% increase in tourism bookings and the Peak District remains the second most visited national park in the world.
- The District Council is making a major investment in its public conveniences as part of its Capital Programme improvements.
- It is hoped that the doors on the Central Area Leisure Centre will be open by Summer 2011. This is not just seen as a leisure centre, but also an exciting all-year all-weather tourist attraction that will encourage visitors to come to the area and spend money in the local economy.
- In conjunction with the CAB, the District Council is providing advice to individuals through the Debt Advice Service and help for businesses was also available eg through Business Link.
- Through its own housekeeping, the District Council is taking a co-ordinated approach, for example in prompter payment of invoices to aid local businesses' cash flow.

Questions and comments were then invited from the floor and issues raised as follows:-

- Kath Potter understood that 361 accommodation providers had advertised in the local tourism guide which is less than last year. Increasing overnight stays needs to be encouraged through initiatives such as car parking vouchers. She was also of the view that training should be provided to accommodation providers to which David Wheatcroft advised that various bodies did provide training and accreditation and undertook to send Mrs Potter some information along with details of the discounted car parking scheme.

- Mr Wheatcroft also explained other ways in which the District Council is trying to attract visitors to the area such as facilities at the new Central Area Leisure Centre aimed at visitors. It was also hoped to extend attractions at the Council's other centres.
- Kath Potter praised staff at Matlock's Tourist Information Centre who had recently been very helpful.
- John Lowe commented that there were good quality smaller accommodation providers, but there was a lack of larger accommodation providers in the Dales' Central area. He asked if the Council would consider the A6 (previously acquired by Marstons) site as suitable for a small hotel. David Wheatcroft acknowledged that it was difficult to attract larger hotel chains to the area, although there was a Travel Lodge now in Ashbournre. A 40 – 50 bed roomed hotel would encourage coach party stays. The Marstons site was now for sale again, advertised as suitable for a pub, restaurant and / or hotel.
- Dennis Walton urged the Council to create a well signed coach / bus drop off point in Matlock and provide somewhere for coaches / buses to park.
- David Wheatcroft advised that signs did exist. The District and County Councils were actively working on the final phase of Crown Square after which signage would be increased. The District Council needed permission from the County Council for any signage erected on the highway.
- A member of the public commented on the decline of the traditional industries in Matlock such as textiles and quarrying and how there was little inward investment in Matlock. He asked how the District Council was addressing this to which David Wheatcroft noted that identifying suitable land for business premises is always an issue which sometimes leads to companies re-locating as they expand due to lack of suitable premises locally. However, the District Council is working with partners such as the East Midlands Development Agency to develop small business units. At a more local level, the Matlock Town Centre Supplementary Planning Document looks at jobs for the town and wider area.
- John Evans felt that the former Cobb Slater site in Darley Dale was an ideal site for smaller business units, but the only expression of interest had been for a housing development on this site. David Wheatcroft highlighted that affordable housing was the Council's top priority. John Evans believed that this housing would not be 'affordable' and asked if the Council could buy the site and develop it for business use. David Wheatcroft advised that this was not possible due to funding. The District Council's role was one of enabling and creating through work with organisations such as the East Midlands Development Agency.
- Mrs Dyson noted the Council's top priority is affordable housing, but questioned the need to keep building when there was no local industry and few employment opportunities. David Wheatcroft informed that Derbyshire Dales has some of the lowest unemployment figures in Derbyshire, but more high quality and higher paid jobs are needed. The agriculture sector is still reasonably buoyant. Some people have jobs, but are forced to live with relatives because they cannot afford to buy housing locally. Housing and employment are not mutually exclusive. The District Council has a housing waiting list of 2,000 which needs to be addressed.

- Mr Mumby noted the tendering and business opportunities available through the local councils' websites, but felt that they needed to be better promoted.
- Mrs Dyson went on to ask if the housing development near Sainsburys was 'still on the cards' to which David Wheatcroft replied that it was, but the development would not be solely affordable housing. The development on the A6 near the island was, however, all affordable housing.
- Mr Mumby had doubts about the style of the houses on the development near the island, noting that some were 5 storeys high.
- Mr Mumby went on to question the number of people on housing and council tax benefits. Mr Wheatcroft clarified that benefits are claimed by people in all types of accommodation, it is not just those in social housing.
- Mr Mumby cited a survey where the A6 island had been voted one of the worst in the country. It was the gateway to Matlock which had so much to offer such as Hall Leys Park which is a blaze of colour – why couldn't the island be smartened up like this? David Wheatcroft advised that works were currently taking place to create a run over strip, so for this reason, no planting had yet taken place. However, a scheme was in place and ready to go ahead and offers of sponsorship had also been received.
- Laura Stevens questioned whether the District Council had been ill advised by West Coast Energy in its recent high courts case to determine the application for 102 metre wind turbines at Carsington Pastures and had concerns of the cost of this to the Council and its tax payers. David Wheatcroft advised that the District Council had paid only 15% of the high court costs with the other 85% being borne by the Peak District National Park Authority. The District Council were not keen to take the matter to appeal, but has a duty to protect the environment. Members were aware of the costs and took this into account. He gave his assurance that local people had been talked to and listened to. He confirmed that there was now an appeal lodged for the Matlock Moor site. This was on account of time scales having expired, but this was due to the District Council not being able to get required information in sufficient time. He noted that the height of these turbines was to be 126 metres and in a more prominent position than the Carsington site. John Evans reported that Darley Dale Town Council had opposed the Matlock Moor application and agreed with the Council's course of action on the Carsington application.

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Andy Farmer began the presentation by highlighting that the Peak District National Park Authority, along with significant help from external funding, had previously invested in programmes to promote sustainable businesses and communities.

In April, a three year programme (until 31 March 2012) had been launched, 'Live & Work Rural' which has two main complementary strands, business and community development. The programme draws on experience from previous business and community support initiatives, but also reflects the changing regional, local advice & support scenes and provides specialist environmental support for business ideas.

The main activity of the 'Live & Work Rural' programme is to nurture new business and community enterprise ideas, guide them through to mainstream solutions and identify

environmental solutions. The programme seeks to complement the work of others such as the Peak District LEADER Programmes and works in partnership with others including District Councils, the University of Derby, Natural England, the Destination Management Partnership and Peak Partners for Rural Action.

Andy detailed the 'Live & Work Rural' business and community strands and how to find out more about grants and support available.

Questions and comments were then invited and issues raised as follows:

- In response to a question from Mr Mumby, Andy clarified the area covered by the Peak District National Park Authority which amounted to 1,406 square miles. Andy continued that much of the funding for the Live and Work Rural programme had come from the Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership and the East Midlands Development Agency and was very much focussed on initiatives in the Derbyshire Dales and High Peak.
- John Evans commented on the good presentation, but noted that Darley Dale was not within the Peak District boundaries and hoped that the District Council was running similar initiatives for non Peak Park areas. David Wheatcroft cited successful funding bids through other projects and initiatives which would allow schemes to be rolled out into other areas.
- Kath Potter felt that the Live and Work Rural schemes were selective and cited her own example – Andy Farmer was unaware of the detail of Mrs Potter's application so could not comment.

DERBYSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE

Derbyshire Fire & Rescue started their presentation by giving some statistics for the Central (Matlock & Wirksworth) Derbyshire Dales area. In the previous 12 months, Derbyshire Fire & Rescue have attended:-

- 16 deliberate primary fires
- 12 deliberate secondary fires
- 7 accidental dwelling fires
- 65 Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) involving 34 serious injuries 4 fatalities

Gary Platts went on to identify what actions, along with partners, are being taken to address and reduce these statistics including:-

- Home Fire Safety Checks, particularly to those most at risk utilising partners through schemes such as the Handy Van Scheme and 1st Contact Scheme
- Holding RTC intervention to address nuisance drivers and educate young (and not so young) drivers in partnership with the Derby and Derbyshire Road Safety Partnership
- 'Clean-Up' – a joint venture to tackle illegal fly-tipping and the subsequent deliberate fires, with local councils, country rangers, street cleansing, Safer Neighbourhood Teams and Anti Social Behaviour officers
- Operating the 'Firesafe' Scheme to intervene with young people who are fire-setting or have been convicted of arson offences, in partnership with the Youth Offending Services and our local communities

- Setting up an efficient and effective communication link to share intelligence with safety partners and identify and intervene with emerging trends
- Dark Smoke – an operation to reduce anti social fires by both domestic and commercial occupants with environmental health units of local councils
- Schemes for young people on the 'fringe' of anti-social behaviour and teaching them discipline, teamwork and a sense of self-value that many have not experienced before, called the Youth Engagement Scheme (YES)
- Opportunity for young people to continue further training with the Fire Service by joining the Cadets which are now forming at a number of fire stations

Questions and comments were then invited from the floor and issues raised as follows:-

- John Evans was very interested in the work of the Fire & Rescue Service and particularly impressed by the YES initiative and asked about the duration of the scheme. Gary Platts advised that, YES required one day's attendance per week for 12 weeks. The Cadets were expected to attend one evening per week for as long as they wanted to or until they achieved B Tec. Each type of training is accredited in some way so as to provide some focus and sense of achievement.
- David Wheatcroft cited the YES as an example of partnership working & funding and targeting resources effectively. Chief Superintendent Lewis added that the cost of creating a place within the penal system is £96,000, thereafter each place costs £28 – 30,000 per annum so huge savings were being made through preventing youngsters 'on the cusp' committing criminal offences. Andy Farmer drew attention to the Peak Park's involvement in YES too. Participants work with Peak Park Rangers to focus on team work. Completion of the Scheme provides the youngsters with more opportunity and vision.
- John Evans commented on RTCs and felt that average speed limits were likely to promote better driving and adherence to the speed limits. He cited an example of driving on the M1 that afternoon where drivers stuck to the 50 mph limit. Whereas, on the A6 through Darley Dale, the limit changes several times and drivers are more inclined to exceed the speed limit.

DERBYSHIRE CONSTABULARY

The presentation 'Policing High Peak and the Derbyshire Dales – Confidence and Satisfaction – a new way of doing business in partnership' highlighted B Division activities in 2008 including:-

- A divisional review reducing six sections to three
- Changes of roles to enable reactive Inspectors
- More Safer Neighbourhood Sergeants aligned to partner and community needs
- Provision of specialist resources for tackling domestic violence / drugs supply
- Changes in performance monitoring with emphasis on customer feedback

With partners, B Division had continued to deliver an effective service and highlighted these statistics:-

- Crime down a further 6.9% in 2008/9
- Crime down 23.1% since 2002/3
- Less than one domestic burglary per day across 517 square miles
- 82.1 % of victims of crime surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied

Chief Superintendent Lewis emphasised that 'B Division remains a safe place to live'. He went on to talk about how policing is changing through the introduction of a new performance indicator, "% of people who agree that the police and local councils are dealing with anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in their area". B Division had also signed up to the National Policing Pledge in December 2008. In terms of customer satisfaction, stretching, but achievable standards had been set.

A high quality policing service to everyone in Derbyshire would be delivered, through five force values for all staff (Integrity, Respect, Performance, Responsibility and Innovation) and a divisional plan aimed at increasing public confidence:-

1. In partnership we will deliver neighbourhood policing that is responsive to local needs and priorities
2. With partners we will reduce public perception of crime and ASB
3. We will treat people fairly and with respect
4. We will provide a high quality of service to those who report a crime or who require our service

The presentation concluded with what this would mean in terms of what people would see:-

- By better interaction with all our communities
- By allowing officers more discretion to deal with crime
- Appointments for the reporting of less urgent matters
- Keeping people informed in a way / time that suits them
- Maintain confidence by ensuring low levels of crime
- Make best use of technology to keep officers on visible patrol and by seeking feedback from the community

Questions and comments were then invited from the floor and issues raised as follows:-

- In response to a question from a member of public enquiring if police presence on the streets could be increased with the help of PCSOs and specials, Chief Superintendent Lewis advised that this was possible and a campaign to recruit specials had recently taken place.
- John Evans noted that the local councils and police and fire service would all be subject to tighter budgeting in the future and hoped that the service currently provided would not deteriorate and established working relationships between the police and the community would continue. Chief Superintendent Lewis noted challenging times ahead facing up to budget cuts in future years. John Evans offered support from community groups and town & parish councils.
- John Lowe was pleased to see the reduction in crime statistics, but asked about the statistics on rates of the detection of crime. Chief Superintendent Lewis quoted this as 32.1% within B Division, but stressed that resources are targeted towards prevention and the need to provide a value for money service.

- A member of the public said that the government performance indicator figures for crime are perhaps reducing to some extent because some offences have been screened out and are not classed as crime anymore. Chief Superintendent Lewis was not aware of any crimes being de-classified, although some may have been re-classified.
- Kath Potter thanked the police for their assistance during a recent incident.
- Kath Potter went on to talk about police presence at local carnivals and events to which Chief Superintendent Lewis advised that there is national guidance on this which should bring every force into line. The police have provided support over the years, but there is an onus on the event organisers for example if an event impacts on the road / flow of traffic, it is the responsibility of the organiser(s) to make appropriate temporary road closure arrangements. He added that attendance at large events does drain resources. Kath Potter was worried that traditions may dwindle because of a lack of police presence.
- Mrs Dyson suggested that event organisers hire policing. Chief Superintendent Lewis advised that this does happen (for example those on rest days may be drafted in on overtime) and gave his assurance that the police would provide as much help and support as they could within existing constraints.

QUESTION TIME

Good debate and questioning had taken place after each presentation. Councillor Hume asked if there were any further questions or comments and none were raised.

John Evans had been impressed with the Forum.

CONCLUSION AND THANKS

Councillor Hume thanked everyone for their participation.

Meeting closed at 9.15 pm