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NORTHERN AREA COMMUNITY FORUM

Notes of the Forum held on 2 March 2009 at 7.00pm at the Agricultural Business Centre, Bakewell

PRESENT

Derbyshire Dales District Council

Councillor Judith Twigg (in the Chair)

Councillors Tracy Critchlow, Peter Duncan, Peter Hume, Cate Hunt, Garry Purdy, Lewis Rose, OBE and Carol Walker.

David Wheatcroft (Chief Executive), Rob Cogings (Head of Housing Services) and Ros Hession (Overview and Community Engagement Officer)

Derbyshire County Council

Catherine Mills (Principal Librarian – West Area) and James Adams (Local Area Liaison Officer – Highways)

Derbyshire Constabulary

Chief Superintendent Peter Lewis, Inspector Bryan Hall and Sergeant Andy Wordsworth

Police Authority

Carole Brister (Vice Chair)

Peak District National Park Authority

Jim Dixon (Chief Executive)

Derbyshire LINK

Claire Smith (Development Worker Derbyshire Dales and Amber Valley)

Members of the Public

Patricia Leake (DDCVS and Resident), Leonard Twigg (Bakewell resident), Sue Mounsey (Bakewell resident), Peter Watts (Bakewell resident), Roger Lownsborough (Bakewell Chamber of Trade), Pat Lunn (Bakewell Community Group), Caroline and Peter Hinchliffe (Bakewell residents), David Walker (Resident), Dan Zamoyski (Sustainable Bakewell), Julia Zamoyski (Bakewell Area Gardeners Action Group), Tom Pilkington (Matlock Hospitals League of Friends/First Matlock Boys Brigade/First Taste/Darley Dale Tennis Club), Martin Beer (Great and Little Hucklow Parish Council), Ann Dudley, Tony Bolton, Muriel Wilshaw (Derbyshire Dales Community Safety Panel) and Dave Teare (PCSO Bakewell and Councillor for Litton Parish Council) (17 in total)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Councillor Judith Twigg introduced the officers from the participating authorities and welcomed everyone to the Forum.

LOCAL LIBRARY SERVICES

Catherine Mills gave a presentation highlighting the range of services accessible from local libraries.

This included some fascinating facts and figures such as that as a nation we have over 288 million visits to libraries every year and in Derbyshire there was more than 3.4 million visits in 2007 / 2008. Despite the huge growth of Broadband nationally, Derbyshire has the lowest number of households with Broadband access in the East Midlands and consequently libraries are popular for the use of free Broadband internet access, a service which is also provided by some of the larger mobile libraries. Over £2M has been spent in the last year on books (around 150,000 new books).

Catherine went on to point out the accessibility of the service with a presence in every Derbyshire community provided through 45 static libraries and 12 mobile units. Library services can also be accessed 24 hours per day through the County Council website.

Catherine went on to outline services such as reference databases and CDs and DVDs to hire. The library service also supported a number of reading groups across the county and operated a Home Library Service for people and/or carers who were unable to leave their homes.

Reading was encouraged from a very early age and Catherine outlined the schemes currently running for children and young people and went on to talk about initiatives for adults too.

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

- In response to a question from Sue Mounsey about the ancestry website, Catherine advised that it was not possible to access this via your home computer due to license regulations, but it could be accessed via a local library.
- Tom Pilkington asked if classes of school children were still invited to visit libraries to which Catherine responded yes and in addition, the library service visited events such as village fetes and parents' evenings to promote the service.
- In response to an enquiry from Dan Zamoyski, Catherine was pleased to report that home energy current cost monitors (which highlighted inefficient use of energy in the home) were available for hire from libraries, including Bakewell library, for a period of up to three weeks.
- Catherine advised Leonard Twigg to contact the headquarters for local studies to pursue his tracing of people named on a memorial plaque in Bakewell.
- Dave Teare urged that the village home delivery service be promoted more and Catherine took up Dave's offer to distribute promotional leaflets in his role as a Police Community Support Officer.

- In response to an enquiry from David Walker, Catherine advised that CDs were hired out at a £1 per week and DVDs at £3 and £1.80 depending on how recently released they are.
- Muriel Wilshaw cited the recent successful initiative in Tideswell whereby the library had been opened one evening a week to allow youngsters to use the service and gain internet access. This had filled a gap by providing an activity for the youngsters and had worked well. Unfortunately the funding would cease at the end of March.
- In response to a question from David Walker about public showings of films, Catherine advised that they could not be loaned out for this purpose due to licensing regulations. A special license would need to be obtained.

THE LOCAL ECONOMY AND HOUSING ISSUES

The District Council was stepping up its efforts to fight the economic downturn. Councillor Rose advised that with a series of new measures to help local residents and businesses, the District Council was focussing on helping the Dales make the best of the current economic situation. Affordable housing, safety, clean streets and active, healthy communities will remain priorities in the coming year, based on consultation with residents and businesses carried out by the District Council over the past twelve months.

Councillor Rose announced that the District Council would increase its capital expenditure by an additional £1M and that this should help the local economy during the recession by bringing forward improvements to public conveniences and other public buildings owned by the Council.

Councillor Rose advised that the District Council would normally have been due to consider raising car park charges from 1st April 2009 and that this would have been the first increase in three years, but in view of the current economic situation, car park charges would now be frozen and any increase delayed for a further year. It was felt this would encourage trade, visitors and tourism in the Derbyshire Dales. Local residents would still continue to benefit from free car parking before 11 am and after 4 pm.

Councillor Rose continued that, with effect from April 2009, the District Council would be launching a free debt advice service for residents. The Council would also continue to urge small businesses, in particular, to take the opportunity to tender for District Council services through publications such as "Source Derbyshire" and "How to do business with Derbyshire Dales District Council". Councillor Rose also suggested that businesses should check whether they qualify for rate relief.

Councillor Rose confirmed that the District Council continues to work tirelessly with its partners to lever in funding to help the local economy and provide better services for residents and visitors. The District Council also supports the voluntary sector by making contributions to the Citizens Advice Bureau and Derbyshire Dales Council for Voluntary Services as well as providing grant aid to local community groups.

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

- Councillor Walker expressed concerns about the increase in market stall rents and car parking fees for traders and hoped this would not deter them from attending the stall and farmers markets.
- David Wheatcroft reiterated the District Council is taking a long term view and is investing in the local economy, eg public conveniences. Opportunities will be provided for local people to supply goods and services.
- Sue Mounsey was of the view that traders would be deterred if rents were increased and surely it was better to have occupied stalls albeit at a lesser rent. David Wheatcroft reiterated that the Council had to take a view on the whole economy.
- Roger Lownsborough was keen to know what timescales the Council had in mind for its improvement plans to which Councillor Rose advised that the intention was to have an impact within the next year, although not all work would necessarily be completed within that timeframe.
- David Walker asked if it were possible to fast track grants to allow works to be carried out more expediently, eg disabled facilities grants. Councillor Rose advised that grants were dealt with as quickly as possible, but working in conjunction with partners often means that timeframes are regulated and various criteria have to be satisfied. Councillor Rose went on to report that funding had been levered in via the Primary Care Trust (PCT) to allow adaptations in people's homes to enable them to return home, rather than prolong a stay in hospital.

HOUSING AND THE ECONOMY

Rob Cogings followed with a presentation on housing and the economy and advised that local Housing Associations had adopted similar standards for construction as those being applied to the 2012 Olympics. "Local employment projects and local training initiatives will be utilised wherever possible in order to create sustainable communities".

Rob went on to highlight what this commitment meant locally and cited the example of 58 flats under construction at Bakewell Road, Matlock at a cost in the order of £4.5m. Rob gave examples of where local businesses had been used to supply goods and services, with some £0.5m being spent in the local economy as a result of this project alone.

In 2008/9, 91 new homes will have been completed and in 2009/10 the following will be completed:

- Bakewell Road, Matlock – 58 homes
- Elton – 5 Homes
- Brookside Meadows, Ashbourne – 48 homes
- Baslow – 10 homes
- Brailsford – 2 homes

In addition, he was confident that further homes would at least be started in the next financial year and 362 new affordable homes were anticipated by 2010/12.

Compared to other authorities within Derbyshire, the District Council was way ahead in its provision of affordable housing.

In light of the recent credit crunch, there had been increased approaches to the Council for housing advice and the following initiatives were in place to respond to those requests:

- Enhanced housing options
- New debt service
- Mortgage rescue scheme
- Outreach – private tenancy support
- Landlord accreditation
- Rent deposit scheme
- Outreach – older people (Age Concern)

Rob concluded by advising of the current consultation exercise taking place on the Draft Homelessness Strategy 2009-2014 and urged people to comment on the document via the Council's website www.derbyshiredales.gov.uk/housing.

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

- David Walker asked to what extent the District Council works in conjunction with industry, ie where do the people who live in the houses work? Rob advised that the Council's good links with other organisations such as Economic Partnerships, on such matters.
- Pat Lunn asked if there were many Homes in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in the Dales to which Rob responded, not as many as in other areas. He explained that HMOs were units of accommodation within one building, which may be self contained flats or may be units that share facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms.

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Jim Dixon gave a brief presentation highlighting ways in which the Peak District National Park Authority works with Derbyshire County Council, Derbyshire Dales District Council and the Derby & Derbyshire Economic Partnership.

Initiatives included the Peak District Leader Project and the Live and Work Rural Programme, which supported community planning work and also included an environmental economy programme.

The Peak District National Park Authority also worked closely with farmers and foresters through the Peak District Land Management Advisory Service (PDLMA) which held a drop in centre each Monday morning at the Agricultural Business Centre in Bakewell.

Jim went on to advise that the Peak Park would also be bringing forward some of its own capital programme schemes and had been involved with negotiations with local companies on ways in which the economy could be improved. For example the granting of planning permission for Tearsall Quarry which had secured the future of Cavendish Mill which created local employment.

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

- In response to a question from Dave Teare about the availability of results of a car park study some years ago, Jim believed this to have been six or seven years ago and would find out. He was aware of a recent traffic study for which the results were available.
- Sue Mounsey had concerns about the retail sector in Bakewell and felt that saturation point had been reached with cafes and outdoor pursuit/clothing shops. A lack in variety of shops meant that Sue had to shop elsewhere for certain goods. As the planning authority for Bakewell, Sue Mounsey asked if the Peak Park took this into account when determining planning applications. Jim advised that the Peak Park could not dictate the nature of the business unless there were a change of business use – Councillor Critchlow also emphasised this point. Jim noted that Bakewell shops were weathering well compared to some of the market towns and it was important to attract visitors to the town.
- Councillor Walker, in her capacity as Mayor of Bakewell, appreciated what was being said about the variety of shops in Bakewell, but welcomed any quality businesses to the town, particularly in the current economic climate.
- The Chamber of Trade was regularly approached to encourage shops that are attractive to locals as well as tourists, advised Roger Lownsborough. He appreciated this view, but felt it was better to have shops occupied than not.

FEEDBACK FROM DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL CONSULTATION EXERCISE (NOVEMBER 2008)

Following on from the County Council's consultation exercise at the November 2008 Forums, James Adams gave feedback on what local people said were their priorities for the future, how these compared to the rest of Derbyshire Dales and Derbyshire as a whole and how this information was being used to plan services for the future.

Comments and questions were then invited from the floor and the following was raised:

- Jim Dixon, in his capacity as Chair of the High Peak and Derbyshire Dales Strategic Board (LSP) Housing Board, stated that he had no doubt that affordable housing was a top priority.
- Patt Lunn felt that the consultation results were not reflective of the discussion that took place at the time and James undertook to return to this issue.

INTRODUCTION BY CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT LEWIS

Chief Superintendent Lewis, the recently appointed Commander of B Division, introduced himself and outlined his aspirations to build upon the already well-established good relationship between the community and the police and emphasised the importance of local policing.

QUESTION TIME

Questions and comments were then invited from the floor to representatives from the participating authorities and issues were raised as follows:

Police Matters

- Councillor Purdy expressed concerns about the threat of possibly losing the Police Officer that covered Matlock Bath, at the end of March. Chief Superintendent Lewis hoped to maintain current policing levels and make improvements where possible. He was conscious of the situation in Matlock Bath and Inspector Hall was aware of the detail. Chief Superintendent Lewis once more emphasised his desire to work closely with the community to ensure that local needs are met as far as possible.
- Peter Watts commented that he believed the recession would last for some years and that the current economy is not sustainable. He suspected that this may result in an increase in violence and urged community groups to be strong and work with the police to tackle such issues

Derbyshire County Council Highways Issues

- Councillor Critchlow asked for a progress report on the situation with the resurfacing of Manchester Road, Tideswell. She believed this had been on the agenda for some time and that recently signs had been placed advising of the closure of the road, but these had since been removed and no work had taken place. James Adams undertook to look into the matter.

District Council Matters

- Ann Dudley asked to be reassured that if the market stall holders are “going down” because of rent increases and other factors, that the District Council looks at the levels of rent again? The market is important for locals and as a tourist attraction. Councillor Rose gave his assurance that the District Council would be keeping a close eye on the matter.
- Leonard Twigg asked if free swimming for OAPs was mandatory and at what cost this would come to the Council? Councillor Rose advised that this was not mandatory but Derbyshire Dales District Council would be offering free swimming at public sessions. This would be at a cost to the Council of £44,000 per annum in the first two years which would be subsidised by a Government grant, but thereafter the cost would be £70,000 per annum and this would create a further financial challenge for the Council.
- In response to a question from Pat Lunn, David Wheatcroft advised that the District Council has a target of ten working days in which to respond to correspondence it receives.
- Councillor Walker enquired if there were any teething problems encountered since the introduction of civil parking enforcements. James Adams reported that generally things were going well, the streets were safer and congestion had eased. There had been one isolated incident of a common assault on an Enforcement

Officer in New Mills. Councillor Twigg commented that the Civil Parking Enforcement Officers appeared to be working in pairs to which James responded that they are getting to “know the patch”, and reminded that it was only ten days since the introduction of the legislation.

- Peter Watts commented on problems with blocked drains which were going to get worse and urged that something be done. He felt it important to maintain our assets and also to address reducing bureaucracy so that decisions are made quicker.
- David Walker asked if spending could be increased on promoting tourism to attract more people to the area and hence boost the economy. David Wheatcroft commented that he was surprised that tourism had not rated higher in Derbyshire County Council’s consultation results and went on to point out that significant grants had been received in the last year from the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) and East Midlands Tourist Board for the promotion of initiatives such as “holiday at home”. In addition the media were being encouraged to come to the area on an ongoing basis. Jim Dixon added that £400-500M had been spent in the tourism sector which was not just on accommodation, but also service providers too. He believed that more people would be “holidaying at home” so it was important to ensure that services continued to improve.
- David Walker pointed out that this year all councils will be seeking to attract the holiday pound to which Jim Dixon replied that the Derbyshire Dales and Peak District was a good quality tourism product that must be valued.
- Councillor Purdy asked what the Peak Park and District Council could do to encourage the availability of “beds” in the tourism industry. Jim Dixon advised that there was not particularly a shortage of beds, but rather a shortage of higher quality accommodation. However, he did point out that developments such as the one at the Crescent at Buxton and the Marquis of Granby at Bamford were seeking to address this matter. David Wheatcroft added that, in the past, most developments have been by private smaller developers and larger companies have not been so interested in the Dales area as their models have been based on a business model. However, larger companies are now starting to show an interest in the area.

DERBYSHIRE LINK

Dan Zamoyski drew attention to the display by Derbyshire LINK and the valuable work carried out by the organisation.

CONCLUSION AND THANKS

Councillor Twigg thanked everyone for their participation.

Meeting closed at 9.00 pm