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CENTRAL AREA COMMUNITY FORUM

Notes of the Forum held on 12 November 2007 at 7.00pm at Matlock Methodist United Reformed Church

PRESENT

Derbyshire Dales District Council

Councillor Geoff Stevens (in the Chair)

Councillors Shirley Buckingham, Sue Burfoot, Peter Hume and Lewis Rose OBE

David Wheatcroft (Chief Executive), Phil Colledge (Finance Manager) and Ros Hession (Overview and Community Engagement Officer)

Derbyshire County Council

Mike Ashworth (Deputy Director of Environmental Services) and Kay McIntyre (Democratic Services Manager)

Derbyshire Constabulary

Superintendent Paul Rouse, Inspector Shaun Woodcock, Partnership Sergeant Barry Thacker and Partnership Sergeant Dave Parker

Derbyshire Fire and Rescue

Ian Copstick (Area Commander)

Peak District National Park Authority

Ruth Marchington (Director of Corporate Resources)

Members of the Public

Patricia Leake (DDCVS and Local Resident), Kath Potter, Lorna Ellsmore (Matlock Forum Climate Change), Belinda Heaney (Matlock Bath Parish Council), Rob Patterson (Matlock Bath Parish Council), John Lowe, Mike Blair (Peli Deli), Barbara Bowman (Cromford PC), Arnold Crosby (Cromford PC), Juan Thompson (Matlock Methodist & UR Church), Laura Stevens (Matlock Climate Action Forum and self), Tom Pilkington (Boys Brigade/1st Taste/Matlock Hospital League of Friends), Paul Gibbons, Clare Taylor (Dale Road Traders), Dave Wieberg (Matlock Area Climate Forum), Oxfam Shop, Judith Green (Wirksworth Traffic Group), Anne Smith (resident) and 3 other members of the public (20 in total).

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WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Councillor Geoff Stevens welcomed everyone to the Forum and encouraged their participation.

DE-CRIMINALISATION OF PARKING

Mike Ashworth, Deputy Director of Environmental Services, made a presentation on Civil Parking Enforcement (CPE), which was a government initiative which allowed the police to put more money into fighting crime as it transferred the responsibility for parking enforcement from the police to the Highway Authority. Derbyshire County Council, as the Highway Authority, had been taking the lead on a countywide feasibility study involving both on and off-street parking. Any solution needed to have the complete understanding and co-operation of the County and District Council's and the approval of Derbyshire Constabulary.

The new regulations would mean that there would be no more traffic wardens issuing Fixed Penalty Notices, but parking attendants (soon to be called Civil Enforcement Officers) will put Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) on vehicles. The police will still be responsible for enforcing obstructions of the footway and carriageway which will include parking alongside solid white line systems in the middle of the road.

The County Council has carried out a study which found that the best approach was to use a single contractor to deliver the enforcement along with another contract to deal with ticket processing across the whole county. It is proposed that the 8 District Council's across the county will manage the Civil Parking Orders on behalf of the County Council.

Mike emphasised that this was not a money making scheme, but rather the aim was to release the police from this duty and to financially break even.

Mike concluded by advising that all the signs and lines that needed replacing had been identified and that this would be done before starting enforcements. Restrictions were being reviewed to make sure they were appropriate for the Highway network both now and in the future and invited suggestions of where restrictions needed reviewing.

Mike's full presentation is attached to these notes. Comments, suggestions and questions were then invited from the floor and issues were raised as follows: -

- Arnold Crosby queried whether traffic wardens currently do much policing and, consequently, would the new regime free up the police? Mike Ashworth commented that the Traffic Warden service does cost the police service both in terms of time and money, they could be used in other areas.
- Belinda Heaney asked if the new traffic enforcement officers would work at weekends in busier areas such as Matlock Bath to which Mike Ashworth responded that they would be available to be deployed in such a way.
- In response to a question from Juan Thompson, Mike advised that residents' parking should take priority where there is a need and that preferential residents'

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parking was an option for a modest sum (£26 per annum). He acknowledged the need for a balance between on and off street and residents' parking.

DEVELOPMENT OF A SUSTAINABLE BALANCED FINANCIAL PLAN

The District Council's Finance Manager, Phil Colledge, gave a presentation on how the Council was working towards achieving a sustainable financial plan. His presentation included details of: -

- Financial challenges
- Recent service improvements
- Targeted savings
- Employee savings
- Service and other savings
- Shared services

A copy of the presentation slides are attached to these notes. Phil went on to invite questions, comments and suggestions from the floor and issues were raised as follows: -

- Kath Potter cited an example of visitors to the area (who had stayed in her Bed & Breakfast establishment) spending £15 within 24 hours on car parking charges. Are there no incentives to encourage overnight visitors? She understood that currently only 9% of visitors stay overnight. Mr Wheatcroft advised that the government had suggested that the District Council attracts more income by increasing car parking charges and revenue from tourists. He added that Rover Parking Passes were available which offered unlimited use on District Council car parks and were available for 7 (£15) or 3 day (£8).
- Kath had concerns about the proposed new civic amenity site at Rowsley, but was pleased to see work in progress at the toilets at Station Road, Darley Dale.
- Judith Green posed the question; did the Council want people to use buses? Phil confirmed that the Council did wish to see people using buses and pays out a lot of money towards the concessionary fare scheme.
- David Wheatcroft added that the concessionary fares scheme is a national one and yet is subsidised locally. This year the contribution is around £600,000, some of which is government funded, but the Council funds some.
- In response to a question from a member of the public, Mike Ashworth confirmed that the concessionary fare scheme funding is not based on usage.
- David Wheatcroft emphasised how Derbyshire Dales District Council is penalised because of the formula applied to calculate the level of government grant allocation. It would be more transparent if the District Council had specific grants awarded for specific projects / services.
- Rob Hudson asked if the £0.5 million shortfall would be met by increasing Council Tax. Phil Colledge advised that the Council could only increase Council Tax by a maximum of 5%, otherwise it would be subject to capping by the government. The Council needed to look at other ways of saving money such as efficiency savings.

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- David Wheatcroft added that shared service arrangements were also being explored as a way of making savings.
- John Lowe was interested to know how tourists are consulted on District Council services because they use some of them eg public conveniences, as much, if not more, than local residents do. David Wheatcroft advised that consultation with tourists would be undertaken by the Peak District and Derbyshire Destination Management Partnership, which the Council is part of. He added that the District Council spends about £0.5 million on tourism annually even though it is a non-statutory service.
- In response to John Lowe quoting a comment made by a District Councillor in the Matlock Mercury, stating that he was unaware of any cost savings exercises being undertaken, Councillor Stevens highlighted that the District Council is an open council where full debate, with all Councillors, has taken place on financial management.
- David Wheatcroft demonstrated that Councillors were fully involved in decisions and gave the example of them not cutting any of the £1.7 million annual spend on leisure centres and sports courses, but asked that other areas such as back office and energy costs be targeted for savings.
- A member of the public questioned use of energy resources and a common sense approach in citing an example of attending a blood donor session at Sherwood Hall Leisure Centre on a reasonably warm day to find the heating on in the centre.
- David Wheatcroft noted the concerns raised and added that renewable energy systems were now integral to new buildings and that new houses have to meet an eco standard. The Council is committed to these initiatives, but they can often be costly (particularly where volume is low such as a small housing development).
- A representative from Matlock Bath Parish Council expressed concerns about the future of Matlock Bath Illuminations, particularly if the Event Manager's post was not being re-filled. He also highlighted revenue brought in to the district from Matlock Bath car park revenue and how Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) had paid for improvements to the Illuminations' infrastructure.
- David Wheatcroft confirmed that the Event Manager would not be replaced, but other staff now had the experience to run the event and had been doing so this year. He went on to point out that works to the Illuminations' infrastructure had been paid for by match funding from the District Council, not HLF. The Council has had concerns, over the last few years, about the increasing costs of the Illuminations, coupled with the need to meet strict health and safety criteria. The Council is looking at other ways of funding the event for example through grant aid and sponsorship from local traders.
- Revenue from car parking goes into a central car-parking budget, which is used to support various services across the district and is not broken down into areas, as this would be disproportionate.
- Belinda Heaney commented that she would like to see the procurement of the electrical contract reviewed with other partners and interested parties being considered for the Illuminations.

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- A member of the public asked when would there be extra spending ploughed into attracting more people back to Matlock Town Centre. David Wheatcroft advised that the Council is trying to improve services and is lobbying the government about problems encountered specifically in rural areas. He also added that the new relief road and Sainsbury's store had only been open a few weeks and were part of a wider Matlock Masterplan.

QUESTION TIME

Questions and comments were then invited from the floor on the responsibilities of the participating partners. Issues were raised as follows: -

Planning Advice and Guidance

- Councillor Burfoot explained that Matlock Town Council is having difficulty with advice given by Derbyshire County Council, as the highway authority, on planning applications. They seemed to be encouraging on-street parking because they are limiting the number of parking spaces assigned to new housing developments. Mike Ashworth could not comment on individual applications, but views given were based on the national and countywide guidance and aim to reduce car usage and encourage development of the public transport infrastructure.

Enthovens Fire

- In response to a question from Kath Potter, David Wheatcroft advised that the Council's target for replying to correspondence was 10 working days and he undertook to chase up a response to an email she had sent on 25 October regarding the fire earlier in the year at Enthovens, Darley Dale. He was not aware that the report on the incident had been published and in any case it was a matter for the Fire Authority and Health & Safety Executive.
- **Post meeting note** – Mrs Potter has received a response to her letter of 25 October and has been contacted by the Fire Authority.

Matlock Town Centre Re-Development

- A member of the public, who is a Gold Card holder, felt that the recent road alterations and re-location of the bus station had 'split Matlock in two'. It was too far for some people to walk into town from the bus station near Sainsbury's.
- In its role as the transport authority, Mike Ashworth reported, the County Council was working hard with the bus operators to persuade them to operate more social links. He realised that there was still some work to be done in making people aware of the new town centre layout and that things had yet to 'settle down'.
- Mike acknowledged that there was room for improvement with the pedestrian links and, although it would require major investment, posed the question that should the bridge eventually be pedestrianised?
- Laura Stevens thought it would be fabulous to see something like this in Matlock.
- In response to a question from a member of the public as to why the other bus station had not been retained, Mike Ashworth pointed out that it was not in a good

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condition and the developer had offered the brand new bus station as part of the scheme.

- David Wheatcroft explained that the Councils were looking forward to an integrated transport system.
- He took on board comments and concerns (such as Laura Stevens who felt that people would just go to Sainsbury's and not visit the rest of the town), but compared the redevelopment of Matlock to Bakewell some years ago, noting that projects took time to settle down. This was part of the wider Matlock Masterplan development for the whole town.
- Councillor Stevens added that there are positive ways forward and that Matlock is a great and beautiful town. Derelict land was being used and investment by a multi national company (Sainsbury's) may attract other large companies for the area.

CONCLUSION AND THANKS

Councillor Stevens thanked everyone for their attendance and contribution which had been interesting and informative.

Meeting closed 9.00 pm

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