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NORTHERN AREA COMMUNITY FORUM

Notes of the Forum held on 5 November 2007 at 7.00pm at the Agricultural Business Centre, Bakewell

PRESENT

Derbyshire Dales District Council

Councillor Judith Twigg (in the Chair)

Councillors James Bentley, Tracy Critchlow, David Hoskin, Cate Hunt, Andrew McCloy, Geoff Stevens and Carol Walker

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

Chief Inspector Pat Walker and Sergeant Lee Richards

Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service

Ian Copstick (Area Commander)

Peak District National Park Authority

Jim Dixon (Chief Executive)

Members of the Public

Sue Mounsey (Resident, Haddon Road), Roger Taylor (Bakewell Chamber of Trade), Janet Bailey (Resident, Birchover), Jonathan Hall (Student), Pat Lunn (Resident), Leonard Twigg (Resident), Ian Daniel, Ivan Lockwood (Derbyshire Traffic Warden), Pam Russell (Bakewell Town Council), Stan & Hilda Codd, Hugh Wright (Great Longstone Parish Council), Neil Moulden (Derbyshire Dales CVS), George Challenger (Bakewell & District Civil Society), David Walker (Bakewell Town & Community Trust), Sally & Mike Dakin, Colin Smith, Peter Couldwell (Court Close, Baslow Road), John Riley, K.R Fox, J Hearnshaw (Calver Parish Council), D Jones, B Carter, Dave Teare (Litton Parish Council), Chris Cartledge (Hathersage Parish Council), Pauline Whitney (Outseats Parish Council), Dan Zamoyski (Bakewell Resident) and a representative from Bakewell Chamber of Trade (29 in total)

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WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Councillor Judith Twigg welcomed everyone to the Forum and encouraged their participation.

DE-CRIMIALISATION 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: -

- In response to a question from a member of the public, Mike confirmed that the contractors would be paid according to the number of successful prosecutions made. A flexible approach was being insisted upon. If there was a particular problem at a particular time, resources could be targeted appropriately.
- Concerns were expressed that if the contractor sets their own targets, this could be open to abuse, but Mike gave his assurance that appropriate management by both the County and District Councils would be put in place.
- Stan Codd commented that if everyone adheres to the restrictions, no enforcement would be required.
- Hugh Wright asked if there would be a consultation process on where the new restrictions would be? Would Parish Councils be consulted? And would meters be put in place?

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- Mike did not anticipate a significant increase in waiting restrictions – existing ones were currently being looked at to see if they were still relevant. He confirmed that if new ones were proposed, consultation would take place with Town & Parish Councils, the public and statutory consultees. There were no particular plans for the installation of meters.
- A representative from Bakewell Chamber of Trade asked if the contractors would be contributing to the maintenance costs of the demarcation lines to which Mike replied that surplus funds may be used for this purpose, but the County Council retain the statutory duty to maintain the lines.
- In response to a question from Mr Walker, Mike replied that the only parking the County Council has in the county was on-street. Mike felt that Mr Walker had made a good point when he went on to query why he had never been approached for proof of identity when using the disabled parking bays by the Co-Op in Bakewell. Off street parking enforcement was still a police matter at the moment, but the Civil Enforcement Officers would have the power to check the blue badge scheme.
- Sue Mounsey experienced difficulties with parked cars blocking her drive on an access only road. The police had responded to these problems, but Sue queried if it would be a job for the Civil Enforcement Officers in the future?
- Mike explained that enforcement of 'Access Only' orders had to be carried out by the police. The offence was a 'moving' traffic one i.e. when the vehicle is being driven off, not when it is parked.
- Mike admitted that the County Council had, probably unfairly, introduced a lot of 'Access Only' orders. Residents parking schemes were being considered which would allow more parking opportunities for local residents and are offered at reasonable rates.
- In response to a question from Barry Carter as to how free restricted parking would be monitored, Mike replied that this would be on a 'rota' system similar to the current one.
- Ivan Lockwood advised that, in his role as a traffic warden, he had confiscated 3 disabled permits. Mike commented that quite a large proportion of blue badge users do not use them correctly.
- Dave Teare had concerns that there would not be the level of enforcement that there had been in the past. Mike anticipated that things would be better because of the flexibility within the contract, resources could be targeted and deployed at peak times where needed. Town and Parish Councils had a part to play in making it known where there were problems or demand eg special events.
- Mike agreed with Mr Walker that better car parking signage might encourage more visitors to park at the Agricultural Business Centre, particularly if it was highlighted that the facilities were in close walking distance to the town centre.
- In response to a question from a member of the public, Mike hoped that the contractors would be employing people with local knowledge.
- Councillor Twigg asked about the financing of the service which Mike was still a little unsure of and particularly as the penalty had not yet been set (£50 or £70).

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DEVELOPMENT OF A SUSTAINABLE 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: -

- Chris Cartledge was aware that negotiations were taking place on the Council's level of support for Hathersage Swimming Pool and sought reassurance of that support. Phil commented that the Council was committed to the future of the Pool as long as it was viable and sustainable.
- Ian Daniel also sought a guarantee that the Pool would remain open, particularly as he had concerns that the District Council provided little support to the Hope Valley. Phil clarified that Hathersage Parish Council ran the Pool and any decisions on its future would lie with them. The District Council's proposed reduction in grant aid by £8,000 would be offset against a grant of £10,000 from the Primary Care Trust.
- Mr Daniel asked where Bradwell residents would take their additional waste if the Saturday morning waste collection service ceased? Phil advised that there were no plans, at present, to reduce this service in the Hope Valley.
- Stan Codd had concerns that if the Saturday morning waste collection service was reduced or discontinued, fly tipping would increase. Phil recognised this as a concern, but discontinuation of the service in Ashbourne had worked and hopefully any change to the Saturday morning service would not be introduced until the civic amenity site at Rowsley was open.
- In response to a further question from Mr Codd, Phil replied that compost collected from Dales' residents is processed at a plant at Ashbourne, Vital Earth, and some of the products are used by the Council eg in parks.
- Mr Riley asked if the proceeds from the future sale of the Bath Street Offices in Bakewell and from land sold in Rowsley would benefit Bakewell? Phil explained that monies from these sales, known as capital receipts, are pooled and set aside for ambitious projects like the central area sports centre. Some monies will be ploughed back into Bakewell for example improvements to the play area.
- Mr Riley made a comment about the Council's pension scheme to which Phil replied that the fund had been recently increased by approximately 2%, which was below the inflation rate. Increase levels can vary depending on contributions made and are reviewed every three years.

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- David Walker acknowledged the £2.8 million efficiency savings identified, asked about previous savings and were the efficiency savings an indication of the Council previously operating inefficiently? Surely it could not all be blamed on the poor level of government grant as the Conservative controlled District Council could surely predict a poor grant from a Labour government.
- Phil replied that they were viewed as efficiency savings for example using more streamlined IT systems that had perhaps not previously been available.
- David Wheatcroft explained that a poor government settlement was not just down to the Labour controlled government. A few years ago, the element of grant which contributed towards the cost of tourism, for example street cleansing and public toilets, was removed. There are other factors too, such as the high percentage of older people, this has a knock on effect with concessionary fares which take up a large part of the Council's budget. Responsibilities are also being shifted to local Councils such as licensing, for which there are no additional resources to run the service. He feared that government grant aid would only get worse and that there was no 'easy money' although the District Council had been successful in attracting a lot of funding in recent years, most notably £9 million towards housing initiatives.
- Janet Bailey enquired about the value of lost revenue from non-payment of Council Tax and if the District Council pursued prosecution? Phil was pleased to report that Derbyshire Dales District Council had one of the best Council Tax collection rates in the country, had lost only £60,000 last year as a result of non-collection and did prosecute.
- A representative from Bakewell Chamber of Trade asked if proceeds from the sale of the Haddon Road depot could be ploughed into improving toilets in the town which he had concerns about, particularly in view of the high number of visitors. Phil replied that he could not give this assurance and in any case neither toilets nor tourism had been identified as Council priorities.
- Dan Zamoyski sought clarification on the Saturday morning waste collection vehicle in Bakewell and withdrawal of recycling facilities in Bakewell once a civic amenity site was established at Rowsley. Phil advised that no changes were planned to either recycling facilities or the Saturday morning waste collection service in Bakewell at the present time, but things may change once the Rowsley facility is open.
- In response to comments made by a member of the public, David Wheatcroft advised that the recent initiative at Hurst Farm, Matlock, had been a one off community safety initiative to tidy up the area. There had been more rubbish than anticipated, but this had been cleared up.
- David Wheatcroft advised that the Council's priorities are set following extensive consultation with the public and that whilst some services are not a priority, the Council still funds them for example the Council spends £0.5 million per annum on tourism even though it is not a priority area.
- Ivan Lockwood feared that fly tipping would increase if the Saturday morning waste collection service were reduced or withdrawn, as had been the case in Nottingham. David Wheatcroft recalled that an increase in fly tipping had been

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anticipated when a charge was introduced for the bulk waste collection service, but this had not been the case, so he was hopeful that fly tipping would not increase and if it did, swift action would be taken.

- Sue Mounsey asked what percentage of Council Tax had to be paid on second homes to which Phil replied that the Council charged the maximum rate of 90%.
- In response to a query from Hugh Wright, Phil confirmed that there were no plans, at present, for the Council to reduce or withdraw reimbursable expenditure to Parish Councils for closed churchyards. Comments will be invited from Parish Councils on the implications of reducing reimbursable expenditure for playing fields well in advance of a decision being made (February 2008).
- Leonard Twigg congratulated the District Council for its continued weekly refuse collection service when many other Councils had opted for fortnightly and asked if the Council had any plans to alter its refuse collection service provision to which David Wheatcroft replied that there were no plans, for the foreseeable future, to alter the service.
- Chris Cartledge commented that he appreciated the Council's continued support to Hathersage Pool provided that a high level of subsidy was not required, but pointed out that it is not a high level of subsidy per resident and is the only facility in the Hope Valley.

QUESTION TIME

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

Public Conveniences

- Sue Mounsey had heard on Radio 4 that many Councils will not, in the future, fund public toilets and the emphasis will be on local businesses to manage them with a fee from the local authority for cleaning. This system may work in urban areas, but David Wheatcroft assured that there were no proposals for this system in the Derbyshire Dales. He accepted the demand for a high quality service, but the District Council, in its current economic climate, could not afford to maintain and improve all 34 toilet blocks. Perhaps a change in approach is necessary, for example have an on site attendant and make a charge.
- Jim Dixon echoed these comments and agreed that better quality was needed, but that public toilets are expensive to provide and maintain.
- Councillor Stevens added that the Council has got to be prepared to look at what it has got and maybe make some sacrifices such as having better, but fewer toilet blocks.
- A member of Bakewell Chamber of Trade urged the Council to lock the Granby Road toilets at night because vandalism was the main problem there. However, the Council had never been able to secure any local help to do this (eg Town Council, local businesses).

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- In response to a question from Dan Zamoyski, David Wheatcroft advised that there were discussions at central government level to devolve responsibility for public conveniences to Town and Parish Council.

Agricultural Business Centre

- Barry Carter expressed concerns over the distress suffered by animals left overnight at the Agricultural Business Centre (ABC). David Wheatcroft advised that animal lairage was carefully regulated and that the District Council's Environmental Health Officers were looking at noise issues. The foot & mouth and blue tongue outbreaks had affected business at the ABC recently.

Police Matters

- Pam Russell was of the view that drivers using mobile phones was appalling and was pleased to hear (from Chief Inspector Walker) that fixed penalty notices could now be issued for the offence and 3 points. He added that it is enforced rigorously it is a priority and that he particularly had concerns with professional drivers offending.
- Mr Codd was awaiting a response from the police about an incident near his house at Broad Walk, Darley Dale, when the road had almost been completely blocked by parked vehicles. Chief Inspector Walker undertook to follow this up with the Matlock Sergeant.
- Chief Inspector Walker confirmed that the procedure is for incidents to be recorded through the call centre. He stressed the need for incidents to be recorded and explained the difference between incidents and community intelligence. This was in response to Councillor Walker who had had cause to report an incident (6 sheep lose on the A6 in Bakewell on Saturday night), but her name was not taken when she reported to the police station and she was not given an incident number.

Pavements

- In response to a question from Pam Russell, Chief Inspector Walker advised that the police are and would continue to be responsible for obstructions on pavements. Mrs Russell felt that this was a big problem in Bakewell. Chief Inspector Walker noted that it was a national problem and urged local neighbourhoods to let the police and Councils know what their priorities were and where they wanted resources focussing. She believed that District and County Council drivers caused a lot of damage to pavements. Mike Ashworth urged Mrs Russell to report such incidents.
- Hugh Wright had concerns with the state of the pavements in Great Longstone and cited a recent incident where someone had fallen because of the bad repair of the pavement. Mike Ashworth urged people to contact 'Call Derbyshire' if pavements were felt to be in a dangerous condition and remedial works would be undertaken. Repairs and maintenance work is carried out in accordance with priority. Councillor Twigg added that she had walked some of the footpaths around Great Longstone with a County Council officer and that she had seen worse in other areas.

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- Mr Fox was awaiting a response from Derbyshire County Council (Neil Hickman) about his concerns with the dangerous state of Bakewell Bridge / Castle Street for wheelchair users.

Allotments

- Dan Zamoyski was leading a campaign to increase the number of allotments in Bakewell and had the support of the Peak District National Park Authority and the Town Council and was awaiting a response from the District Council. Over 30 people had expressed an interest in having allotment so there was clearly a shortfall as there are only 7.5 in Bakewell and turnover is virtually zero. David Wheatcroft undertook to chase up the response, although there was no intention to provide any additional allotments in Bakewell.
- Mr Fox noted that if the Haddon Road allotments are not statutory, which means they could in theory be sold, how could the Town Council safeguard them? David Wheatcroft advised that the Town Council could take them over which would fit in with government thinking of functions being devolved to Town and Parish Councils. Mr Fox went on to ask if there were any proposals to sell off the allotment site (for example to property developers) which could fund the Town Hall, to which David Wheatcroft replied that there were no such plans.

Fire Authority Matters

- Dave Teare asked for condolences to be passed on to the Warwickshire Fire Authority following the recent fatal incident. He then sought clarification, from Area Commander Copstick, on the differing maintenance arrangements for fire hydrants (Fire Authority responsibility) and wash outs (Water Authority responsibility).

Peak Park Matters

- Mr Walker asked if there was a definitive answer yet as to whether solar panels could be installed in the Peak Park? Jim Dixon advised applicants to talk to the planning officers, as it was dependent on factors such as style and location.
- Chris Cartledge felt the Peak Park needed 'to get real' and think about renewable energy, otherwise people will just take matters into their own hands as they had with satellite dishes. Jim Dixon defended the Peak Park's policies, which are about protecting the special features of the Peak District. There were lots of things that could be done in terms of renewable energy; the important thing was to strike a balance between this and protecting the park.

Waste and Recycling

- Pam Russell applauded the District Council for its efforts in recycling, but raised concerns about the amount of rubbish left by market traders and asked if this was disposed of at landfill sites. David Wheatcroft advised this waste was currently taken to landfill sites, but negotiations were taking place for the cardboard waste from market traders to be composted.

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CONCLUSION AND THANKS

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

Meeting closed 9.25 pm

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