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## **SOUTHERN AREA COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Notes of the Forum held on 31 July 2007 at 7.00pm at Ashbourne Leisure Centre**

### **PRESENT**

**Derbyshire Dales  
District Council**

Councillor Andrew Lewer (in the Chair)

Councillors Ian Bates, Albert Catt, Simon Spencer, Lewis Rose OBE and Carol Valentine.

David Wheatcroft (Chief Executive), Peter Corke (Consultation and Community Planning Officer), Simon Beynon (Housing Strategy Officer), Barry Thacker (Partnership Sergeant) and Ros Hession (Overview and Community Engagement Officer)

**Derbyshire County  
Council**

Neil Hickman (Area Manager - North Western Area) and Kay McIntyre (Democratic Services Officer)

**Derbyshire  
Constabulary**

Detective Chief Inspector Sam Slack, Inspector Glynn Bevan, PCSO Sarah Wells

**Derbyshire Fire and  
Rescue**

Group Manager (Western Area) Steve Wells

**Peak District National  
Park Authority**

John Lomas (Director of Strategy and Development)

**Members of the Public** S Brass (Offcote PC), Claire Pegg (Green Road), Judith Pilkington (Windmill Lane), M Billings, J Turpin, Ron Taylor (Clifton Parish Council), A Taylor (Shirley Parish Council), Tim Sadler (LETS – Litter Eradication Team Scheme), Hedley Alcock (town resident), Graham Jackson (Longford P C), Geoffrey and Stephanie Cole, Diane Steeples (Ashbourne), Theresa Calladine (Ashbourne), Hilton Price (Resident), Christine Price (Resident), Lesley & Geoff (School Lane / Church Street), Andrew Pegg (Ashbourne Partnership), Dorothy & Peter Bishop (Belle Vue Road), Guy Millington (Cubley P C), Andrea Cooke, D J Cooke, Barbara Bowman (Cromford), Arnold Crosby (Cromford), John Harrison (Ashbourne Partnership), Marcus Pegg (Ashbourne Partnership), Danielle (Ashbourne News Telegraph), Mrs K L Radburn plus 3 others – Total = 33

## **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

Councillor Lewer welcomed everyone to the Forum and encouraged their participation.

## **COMMUNITY CONSULTATION**

Peter Corke gave a presentation on feedback from recent Community Consultation Surveys which included two Citizens' Panel Surveys and also the Public Satisfaction Survey.

The February 2007 Citizens' Panel Survey had focused on Community Safety and Quality of Life and the May 2007 included Local Parking.

The 2006 Public Satisfaction Survey had received a 56% response and had been very positive with a 67% satisfaction with overall service provided by the District Council.

The presentation slides are attached at the end of these notes.

Following the presentation, questions and comments were taken from the floor: -

- In response to a query from a member of the public, Peter confirmed that where satisfaction level statistics did not total 100% (eg enough parking – 40%, not enough – 46%), the remainder (in this case 14%) would have answered 'don't know'. The ratings were a simple 'satisfied' or 'not satisfied' rating.
- Barbara Bowman questioned whether the satisfaction levels with leisure facilities would have been so high, had the survey been carried out following last week's decision to close the Sherwood Hall Leisure Centre in Matlock. A similar question was posed in relation to the state of the Ashbourne Recreation Ground. Councillor Lewer asked the questioner to raise these topics for discussion during the Question Time session later on in the Forum agenda.
- A member of the public commented that a 35% satisfaction level with the way in which the Council dealt with complaints was poor and how was the Council addressing this to increase satisfaction? David Wheatcroft explained that the

figure did not relate to complaints received about services on a day-to-day basis, but only those processed through the official complaints procedure, which could be classed as the 'hard end' of complaints. The bulk related to planning matters, often lodged because of dissatisfaction with the outcome of an application, which then tended to develop into a complaint about the process. Last year, 18 out of 24 official Ombudsman complaints related to planning applications. In comparison to other councils, Derbyshire Dales has a low level of complaints.

- In response to a query raised by a member of the public, Peter confirmed that if 70% were satisfied with the police.
- A member of the public did not feel it fair to compare crime rate statistics with some other areas such as inner cities. Peter explained that national averages are used so that they can be compared. Statistics can also be further broken down to be more area specific. David Wheatcroft commented on how grant distribution to the police was flawed because more funding goes to areas such as London, Liverpool and Manchester because there is crime to target and hence more funding required, whereas Derbyshire's B Division (covering Derbyshire Dales and the High Peak) do not benefit from a similar level of funding.
- A member of the public commented that, compared to the national average, you would expect Derbyshire Dales to be doing well. Peter confirmed that this was the case and David Wheatcroft added that out of 387 local authorities, Derbyshire Dales rated 9<sup>th</sup> on overall performance.
- A member of the public questioned how valid it was to compare Derbyshire Dales with other Councils and felt that comparisons should be made with similar local authorities. David Wheatcroft advised that a fairer comparison is the Audit Commission's 'family comparator', which breaks down figures in a variety of ways.
- Peter undertook to provide segmented area figures to the member of the public who requested them.

## **AFFORDABLE HOUSING, HOME-OPTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS**

In his presentation, Simon Beynon demonstrated the District Council's commitment to providing Affordable Housing which had included attracting £20million between 2002 and 2008 for the provision of such. This had enabled the provision of almost 400 new homes and in addition, since 2004, 90 empty homes had been brought back into use and 325 improved.

Simon went onto talk about Home-Options, the District Council's new choice based letting system that exhibits the following: -

- § Property advertising
- § Marketing information is published for each property
- § Customer applications
- § Ranking of applications
- § Customer feedback
- § Choice
- § Information

He highlighted the 5 steps within the procedure which are: -

- Step 1 – Membership
- Step 2 – Registration

- Step 3 – Choosing
- Step 4 – Offer
- Step 5 – Feedback

Simon advised of the priority bands, the success of the system so far and different housing options available.

Simon concluded his presentation by talking about how homelessness is being tackled and prevented in the Derbyshire Dales area.

A copy of the slide presentation is attached at the end of these notes.

Questions and comments from the floor were as follows: -

- Councillor Lewer noted the partnership working between High Peak and Derbyshire Dales for housing and arrangements for Home Options and questioned the Council's working relationship with the Staffordshire authorities given that residents in the south have affinity with areas such as Rocester and Uttoxeter. Simon advised that whilst the scheme does work cross boundary, no sub region has yet been established.
- A member of the public applauded the effective Home Options scheme, but commented on the lack of available housing. Simon re-iterated the Council has attracted £20.2 million grant aid in recent years and whilst this could be regarded as 'a drop in the ocean', the Council will continue to pursue all opportunities and avenues in its provision of affordable housing. In order to 'fill the gap', initiatives such as shared ownership are an option in some cases and the Council is working closely with Registered Social Landlords and private landlords. Those who approach the Council who do not need social housing are directed elsewhere.
- In response to a member of the public, Simon confirmed that, on average, about 75 people are registered with the District Council as homeless. On the Home Options register, about 40% merely have a desire to move, rather than an accommodation need.
- Councillor Lewer asked what reassurance could be given to private landlords who might be considering providing social housing. It was still early days for an accreditation scheme, advised Simon, but nevertheless, steps would be taken to ensure that criteria match up and tenants are appropriately placed.
- A member of the public asked how disabled people fell within the statistics and were their needs recognised? Simon replied that such needs were addressed and that specific questions were asked about mobility to allow appropriate matching of properties with people.
- A member of the public talked about future planning of the whole life situation and consideration should be given to lifetime building. The development on the former Nestle site would include some lifetime buildings, Simon advised. He went on to talk about other initiatives that addressed the needs of older residents such as 'Should I stay or should I go' and Age Concern's work.
- A member of the public highlighted the specific case of her 88 year old mother who had been waiting for adaptations (inside toilet) to her house for 18 months. Simon undertook to look into the progress of this particular case. David Wheatcroft explained that this would be part of the Disabled Facilities Grant Scheme, which was operated by Derbyshire County Council's Social Services who conduct the initial assessment. Derbyshire Dales were also involved in the scheme which

included a financial input – the Council had decided to put profit from Council Tax on second homes into schemes to support people, particularly long term care needs which included ‘topping up’ the mandatory contribution of the disabled facilities grant.

## QUESTION TIME

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

### Street Cleansing and Litter in Ashbourne

- Diane Stevemore (???) , who had been born and bred in Ashbourne, felt that the town was not as clean as it used to be. At one time, there were 3 sweepers, now there only appeared to be one and yet the town had got bigger with more houses. David Wheatcroft advised that a team of cleaners operate in Ashbourne with a specific ‘Clean Team’ to target hot spots or react quickly to specific problems. Surveys are frequently undertaken to gauge cleanliness, these are not showing levels of dissatisfaction with Ashbourne, but would be interested to know the specifics. Once District Council staff are sufficiently trained and accredited, they will have the power to issue ‘on the spot’ fines for litter offences. Business premises will also be targeted to ensure that adequate provision is made for the disposal of litter generated from their premises. In response to a plea for more cleaning operatives, particularly on a Sunday morning, David Wheatcroft advised that the street cleansing contract was due to be renewed and whilst containing costs, the Council would strive to get as much out of the contract / contractor as possible. Derbyshire Dales was putting a bid in for its own work force to undertake the contract.
- Councillor Spencer, as Chair of the Partnership and Regeneration Committee, which had responsibility for street cleansing, recognised the points made. He had raised the matter with the contractors who had worked to address specific areas, but realised that there were still areas to focus on which would be approached in a systematic way. Sunday litterbin emptying had been looked into and carried out this week. The contractor (FOCSA) had given their assurance that issues raised would be focussed upon and Councillor Spencer advised that the District Council officer with responsibility for street cleansing would be visiting Ashbourne within the next 10 days.
- Tim Sadler, inspired by a local school’s sponsored litter pick, had established an organisation known as LETS – Litter Eradication Team Scheme. 239 people had ‘signed up’ to the scheme and promised to pick up one piece of litter each day and there was already a noticeable improvement in the town. The ultimate objective was to become nationally recognised as the cleanest town in Derbyshire. There was great enthusiasm for the scheme and Councillor Lewer knew that the Ashbourne Partnership and Derbyshire Dales District Council gave their support.
- Councillor Spencer applauded and appreciated efforts being made by local residents.
- The ‘Clean Team’ had commented to Tim Sadler that they believed Ashbourne to be the least clean town within the Dales. Tim hoped that efforts now being made would be district wide and sustained. Councillor Spencer recognised the need for an overall district wide standard and concerns raised would be taken into account

when finalising the new contract, which Councillor Spencer undertook to go through 'with a fine toothcomb' prior to its acceptance.

## **Police Matters**

- Arnold Crosby felt that Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are quite capable of being police officers and should be given the same powers and salary. Whilst appreciating that it was a nationwide problem, he was quite disgusted with the level of policing in Cromford and urged for more police presence. Detective Chief Inspector Slack advised that the number of police officers in the Derbyshire Constabulary had significantly increased in the past few years due to the efforts of the Chief Constable, Mr Coleman. PCSOs are not paid the same as police officers as they do not carry out the same work nor have the same powers. They compliment the work of police officers, providing a link with the community and a visible police presence. Despite an increase in officers, resources were still spread and tight budgetary constraints applied, but Chief Inspector Slack hoped he had given some reassurance.
- Councillor Spencer added that despite best efforts of the countywide force, Ashbourne was still under resourced with the police office opening hours reduced. Inspector Bevan advised that there was presence at the police station 24 hours a day, but the front desk was not always open. Despite staffing levels being low, the local Ashbourne police team were managing well and meeting performance targets. Councillor Spencer fully acknowledged that the local police do a great job, but there's a limit to what can be done with stretched resources.
- Ron Taylor asked how many tickets the police in Ashbourne had issued for illegal use of mobile phones by drivers. Inspector Bevan did not have these figures at his disposal, but the Central Ticket Office would have them. Officers were instructed to enforce when on patrol, but he would not place an officer on Market Place specifically for this purpose.

## **Traffic network, congestion and road works**

- Councillor Bates raised concerns about the increased use of Windmill Lane as a diversion due to the current closure of The Green Road for sewer repairs. This minor road had become a 'rat run' and he asked if temporary traffic lights could be installed. Neil Hickman advised that Windmill Lane was not being sign posted as an alternative route / diversion, but it was the 'luck of the draw' that locals know the road and chose to use it. In response to further concerns from Councillor Bates about traffic weight and volume, Neil gave his assurance that the road would be fully reinstated once the road works had finished.
- In response to a suggestion that HGVs be diverted over Carsington Water way, Neil advised that the diversion was not routed that way. Neil went on to re-iterate that whilst traffic was not being diverted along Windmill Lane, but the public have a right to use it and there is no weight restriction.
- A member of the public felt that the inevitable increased use of Windmill Lane wouldn't be so bad if the County Council had taken steps beforehand to improve conditions eg trimming back the hedges.
- In response to a suggestion that the grammar school bus park be used as an alternative route, managed by traffic lights, Neil advised that the area could not be used as a diversion as it was not a public highway and hence not under the police's jurisdiction.
- John Harrison on behalf of the retail sector of the Ashbourne Partnership felt that the signage surrounding the current diversion (due to the closure of the Green

Road) really had not been thought about. One local resident had taken upon himself to place additional signs.

- Marcus Pegg, Chair of the Ashbourne Partnership, added his concerns about diversion signs and had asked the contractors (Whitehouse Construction) to ensure adequate signage at the Matlock end too.
- John Harrison highlighted the closure this weekend of the Market Place car park to allow it to be used for the 750<sup>th</sup> celebrations of the charter being granted. Again he felt that signage was inadequate and would lead to confusion and increased congestion. In general terms, there had not been a review of signs in Ashbourne for about 17 years, but Neil agreed to look into this as a matter of urgency. David Wheatcroft gave assurance that the District Council would work with the County to improve signage in and around the town, but that it was important that a comprehensive approach was taken and took account of what arose from the Ashbourne Economic Impact Study.
- Lesley, who lives on the corner of Church Street and School Lane, found her wall knocked down last week when she returned from a short break away. This is not the first time that she has had to re-instate the wall and expressed concerns that there could have been a fatality if her grandchildren had been playing outside. Vehicles were frequently travelling in the wrong direction and using the road as a turning circle, which led Lesley to question whether signage was adequate and / or bollards could be installed to restrict turning. She asked if an 'Access Only' restriction could be introduced. Neil replied that 'Access Only' orders are seldom put into place, but he agreed to review the signs in the very near future. Neil also highlighted incidents of satellite navigation systems issuing in appropriate directions.
- Claire Pegg recalled asking DCC to re-surface Green Road when she was a 19 year old, she was now 36 and had grave concerns about large vehicles, buses, caravans and HGVs that can be nose to tail some days.
- Claire went on to cite an accident that had taken place the previous week when two buses had collided whilst trying to pass on Green Road. Due to traffic congestion and parked vehicles, pedestrians are 'taking their lives in their hands' once they set foot on the pavement. Inspector Bevan, who had attended the accident and was thankful to report that it had not been too serious, shared concerns raised, but highlighted that residents did park on Green Road and remedial measures such as yellow lines were not really an option. A member of the public added that they believed many of the parked cars belonged to town workers who did not want to pay parking fees.
- It was suggested that the bus companies be asked to operate a one-way system on Green Road to alleviate the congestion problems, which Neil agreed to look into with the school transport section.
- John Harrison described the revised layout of Shaw Croft car park as 'a disaster waiting to happen' because the main road going in and out is exactly where pedestrians want to walk. Ron Taylor added that if the entrance were widened by a few feet, the situation would be vastly improved.
- In response to a query from a member of the public, Neil gave his assurance that Ashbourne was getting a 'fair slice' of money and a traffic study would be conducted in Ashbourne this year. Fruition of the by-pass would be many years to come, but if 'pressure points' were identified, this would allow something to be done, if even on a small scale, to improve traffic flow in the town.
- Dorothy Bishop felt that new signs on the A515 (Darley Moor / Snelston Caravan Park) must have cost a lot of money and were not vital. Neil advised that the

signs would be to the national standard. Councillor Lewer was able to provide more information from a reply he had received from the County Council in response to similar concerns.

### **Ashbourne Recreation Ground**

- John Harrison felt that the Recreation Ground could be ‘the jewel in the crown’ for the town, but was a disgrace, particularly when compared to areas such as Matlock. The high, unsightly hedges made the area look grey and unattractive. David Wheatcroft admitted that this was the first time he had heard about the hedges and felt that the Council could certainly carry out some works to improve the situation. He took the point about Matlock, which had benefited from funding for the Matlock Parks Project. The Council had been successful in attracting lottery funding towards play areas and equipment for Ashbourne.

### **General**

- Hilton Price hoped that frustrations raised would be looked into and fed back to the community. David Wheatcroft stated that what is said at these meetings is taken seriously and feedback provided. Issues that cannot be addressed on the night will be followed up. We try to provide honest and realistic answers and will find practical solutions to address issues as far as possible.

### **CONCLUSION AND THANKS**

Councillor Lewer thanked everyone for attending and participating. The evening had been interesting and informative.

**Meeting closed 9.30 pm**