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SOUTHERN AREA COMMUNITY FORUM

Notes of the Forum held on 16 March 2009 at 7.00pm at Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Ashbourne

PRESENT

Derbyshire Dales District Council

Councillor Albert Catt (in the Chair)

Councillors Ian Bates, Stephen Bull and Lewis Rose OBE

Dave Brooks (Director of Planning & Development Services), Rob Cogings (Head of Housing Services) and Ros Hession (Overview and Community Engagement Officer)

Derbyshire County Council

Ian Stephenson (Strategic Director of Environmental Services), Catherine Mills (Principal Librarian – West Area) and James Adams (Local Area Liaison Officer – Highways)

Derbyshire Constabulary

Chief Inspector Dick Hargreaves, Inspector Bryan Hall and Sergeant Steve Edwards

Police Authority

Carole Brister (Vice Chair)

Severn Trent Water

Margaret Burrup (Sewer Flooding Manager for the East)

Ashbourne News Telegraph

Gareth Butterfield

Derbyshire LINK

Claire Smith (Derbyshire Development Worker – Derbyshire Dales & Amber Valley)

Members of the Public and others

D J Cooke, A D Cooke, H Coates, A J Coates, Guy Millington (Cubley Parish Council), J Phillips, J Naylor (Osmaston and Yeldersley Parish Council), K H Elliott (Osmaston and Yeldersley Parish Council), J R Woodrow, Tim Sadler (Residents close to Henmore, Ashbourne), Ian Wakefield (Shirley), Anthony Taylor (Chairman Shirley Parish Council), Kevin Fradley (Ashbourne Community Transport), Simon Beales (Resident of Cavendish Drive, Ashbourne), Stuart Swalwell, M Billings (Kirk Ireton), Geoff Cole, Tim Scott (Doveridge Village Hall), Mary Dear (Doveridge Village Hall), Mrs W R Hall, Mr J Titterton, T J Hall (Osmaston and Yeldersley Parish Council), J Brown, Geoff Patmore, Lesley Radburn and Jonathon Barrs (Ashbourne Town Council) (26 in total).

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Councillor Albert Catt 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 a 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:

- A member of the public asked Catherine if she had any leaflets that could be distributed at a local mother and toddler group and / or if group visits could be arranged? Catherine advised that arrangements could be made via Ashbourne Library for visits and story telling sessions and also to collect information.
- A member of the public asked what assistance the library service could provide to set up a personal email account to which Catherine responded that assistance is provided to set up free accounts such as hotmail, but email accounts via the library network are not permissible. Wherever possible, assistance is given to people to use computers through initiatives such as the 'buddy' scheme.
- Tim Scott from Doveridge asked Catherine to outline what library services were provided in the village. Home visits formed part of the service in Doveridge and the mobile library van also made regular visits. Catherine also reminded that B Line and Gold card double up as library cards.
- Mary Dear, also of Doveridge commented that the library van used to stay until 4.30 pm which allowed school children to use the facility, whereas now the van left at 3.15 pm. Catherine noted this observation, which she undertook to follow up.

- A member of the public found the library service very helpful, but questioned why fines could not be paid at the Derby Library to which Catherine replied that whilst the library service under Derby City and those under Derbyshire County Council (and indeed other authorities) try to work closely together, they are different organisations and are not allowed to take money on behalf of each other.

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:

- Councillor Bates noted that tourism had featured as quite a low priority for local residents, but may be that this was because people felt that tourism looks after itself, although tourism in Ashbourne would benefit from a better road network. Councillor Bates further noted the District Council's top priority of housing. James clarified that Forum members identified the priorities, but the data collected is not the only way in which to feed into the Derbyshire Sustainable Community Strategy 2009 –2014.
- James also advised that Derbyshire County Council is in the process of conducting a traffic study in Ashbourne from which schemes will be developed and consulted on. He explained that a by pass for Ashbourne was not included in the current study.
- Jeffrey Phillips noted the great significance of issues raised at Forums, such as previously, the Vital Earth fire, and flooding in Ashbourne and asked what reassurance could be given that these matters were receiving attention. James explained that wider issues such as the safety of waste sites and flooding will be used to direct the Strategy. Dave Brooks gave an assurance that a mechanism is in place to consider specific issues raised at Forums. These are directed back to relevant officers and / or partner organisations and matters are then followed up.
- Returning to the issue of flooding, James was aware that in some cases the condition of some drains and gullies exacerbated the situation, but advised that work was being done to address problems and Margaret Burrup added that groups had been established to tackle flooding issues.

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.

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:

- A member of the public appreciated that Derbyshire Dales District Council is doing well compared to other local authorities in the number of houses being built, but more affordable housing is needed in rural areas. Is it true that over 50% of houses must be affordable? Rob clarified that when submitting a planning application, a developer is required as a target to include 45% of affordable houses as part of that development. Rob advised that quite a few homes in the Ashbourne area had been set aside for shared ownership, but many were now being reverted for rent.
- The member of the public went on to note that surely this demonstrated that there was a need for local rented accommodation, a need that was currently not being fully met through the Home Options scheme. Rob noted that the market had recently changed, necessitating more rented accommodation, but that the District Council largely relied on turnover of existing properties and new builds to fill this gap.
- Tim Scott was pleased to hear the District Council's plans to improve the public conveniences around the town, which would help with tourism. He cited a high standard of public conveniences in Uttoxeter, but did note that the facility was manned and not open 24/7, apart from access for disabled persons (via a RADAR key).

QUESTION TIME

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

Derbyshire County Council Planning Matters

- James Woodrow mentioned a recent Derbyshire County Council meeting that the public did not appear to be aware of and then went on to ask Ian Stephenson if the County Council were aware that Vital Earth had breached their planning conditions and what measures were in place to monitor and enforce these conditions. Ian explained that planning permissions (the County Council deal with planning applications relating to waste) are monitored by specific officers and whilst it is not always possible to prevent breaches to conditions, where alleged breaches are brought to light, County Council officers will liaise with the company concerned to address the matter in question. Ian admitted that he was not familiar with the particular details of the example cited.

- James went on to ask if retrospective planning applications were encouraged to which Ian replied that it would depend on the individual case.
- John Naylor of Osmaston and Yeldersley Parish Council asked why the County Council had not informed the Parish Council about this meeting when they had been promised that they would be. Ian would look into the matter.

Flooding in Ashbourne

- Tim Sadler, whose house had been flooded on 6 September 2008, asked for an update on the Environment Agency's flood alleviation scheme in Ashbourne. Residents near Henmore Brook are extremely nervous of a flood re-occurring when there is heavy rainfall. Mr Sadler went on to seek Derbyshire Dales District Council's support to set up a meeting with Severn Trent Water to answer questions associated with the flow of water from Carsington into the Henmore Brook.
- Margaret Burrup had no problem with getting around the table to discuss these issues, but the Environment Agency would need to have an input as well. Dave Brooks undertook to write to Severn Trent Water and the Environment Agency with a view to setting up a meeting. Tim Sadler plus another local resident would be invited to act as representatives for the community and feedback.
- Ian Stephenson advised of the recently established Strategic Flood Board which involves several organisations, aiming, over the next few years, to map out where there are problems and what alleviation measures can be taken. The County Council would also be happy to be represented at the above meeting. Margaret added that there was also a need to work with the land owners and that it is important to share information.
- Lesley Radburn asked when work was likely to start on the barrier that forms part of the Environment Agency's Ashbourne Flood Alleviation Scheme (FAS). Dave Brooks suggested that this was something that could also be discussed at the above mentioned meeting to be arranged between the various parties. Lesley pointed out the urgency of this issue. Dave was aware of the FAS plans, but not the timescales.
- In response to a question from Councillor Bates about a manhole obstruction in Henmore Brook, Margaret Burrup undertook to pursue this with the Engineers, as she was not sure personally aware of the detail.
- Dave Brooks agreed to set up the requested meeting as soon as possible with representatives from Severn Trent Water, the Environment Agency, Derbyshire County Council, Mr Sadler and one other resident representative.

Road traffic matters

- A member of the public recalled the recent tragic accident on the A52 which had taken the lives of three local young people. He cited examples of recent experiences he had had whilst driving around Ashbourne which had horrified him and wondered if the police were working with youngsters to highlight dangers and encourage responsible driving. Sergeant Steve Edwards advised of the current 'Operation Travolta' which targeted nuisance driving.

- Also work was underway, in partnership with Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service and the Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, whereby a simulated rescue will be staged in a bid to raise awareness of what it might be like to be involved in an accident as a result of irresponsible driving. The exercise will involve other agencies and the media. Steve assured that the police were trying to engage with youngsters in a variety of ways and that reported incidents are investigated.
- Jonathan Barrs of Ashbourne Town Council noted that on Sunday there had been a lot of traffic on Buxton Road which had been virtually impassable due to two broken down vehicles. It was important that the police and highways are aware of such incidents and log them to add weight to the argument for a by pass for Ashbourne.
- Ian Stephenson explained that because funding for road traffic schemes is allocated over the East Midlands region as a whole, smaller schemes are often squeezed out by the larger infrastructure developments. The County Council, through the government office and the Department of Transport, is bidding to alter the Regional Funding Allocation to allow smaller schemes to progress as well as the larger ones. Ian undertook to keep the District Council informed of progress on this.

Highway maintenance around Doveridge Village Hall

- Tim Scott raised concerns about the state of disrepair of the pavement by Doveridge Village Hall which he had reported to the County Council (reference number 168930). He had not been able to get a statement from the highways department as to when remedial works would be carried out to the pavement and asked for this to be pursued (which James noted) as a distressing incident had occurred where a senior citizen had sustained a fall due to the state of the pavement.

Bus/coach parking in Ashbourne

- Kevin Fradley of Community Transport asked if signs could be installed in King Edward Street beyond Ashbourne Bus Station to indicate that the area marked with yellow lines could in fact be used by coaches for 'laying over' (staying for an hour or an hour and a half). Coach drivers were deterred from parking at the coach park by the surgery because it was too far out of town and too expensive, particularly if only a shorter stop was required. Dave Brooks advised that he was not sure if the area had been adopted by the County Council as Highway Authority, but would look into the matter. James added that if the road is adopted as public highway it would be the subject of a Traffic Regulation Order and that if changes were ever considered to the Order then these would need to be justified and would need to follow a formal and lengthy procedure. (Note: Subsequent to the Forum it has been confirmed that the road is adopted as public highway).

Tourism – brown signs

- A member of the public queried why brown tourism signs had not been taken down for the glass blowing/craft centre (Brass Rubbing Centre) and why there were not signs up for 'The Hug' (new piece of public art near to Waterside Park)? James Adams was not sure whose responsibility it was to take down the glass blowing/craft centre signs down given that the business no longer existed. Dave Brooks said that although the District Council is not responsible for brown signs,

he understood that no signs had yet been erected for 'The Hug' as it had only just been established and therefore visitor numbers could not yet be established. However, he suggested that as the 2-day Shrovetide Football match attracted thousands of visitors in itself and that as 'The Hug' was in celebration of this event, this should surely be taken into account?

Shirley Hollow

- In response to a representative from Shirley Parish Council raising concerns about water continually running on Shirley Hollow, James Adams undertook to look to this matter.

Residents Parking

- Geoff Cole sought clarification that residents could pay to 'top up' their free parking entitlement eg if wanted to park from 10 am until 12 noon, pay for one hour 11 am – 12 noon as up until 11 am is free. Dave Brooks undertook to clarify the position.

CONCLUSION AND THANKS

Councillor Catt thanked everyone for their participation in what had been a most interesting evening.

Meeting closed at 9.00 pm