

Parish Council Liaison Forum

A meeting of Parish Council Liaison Forum was held on Monday, 17th December, 2007.

Present: Cllr Terry Laing (Chair), Cllr David Coleman, Cllr John Fletcher, Cllr Andrew Sherris (vice Cllr Mrs Jennie Beaumont)

Officers: G. Clingan, M. McLone, M. Robinson, G. Small, R. Young (DNS), N. Hart, M. Jones (LD)

Also in attendance: Parish/Town Councils: H. Atkinson (Billingham Town Council), J. Walker (Egglecliffe & Eaglescliffe Parish Council), G. Rees (Grindon Parish Council), W. Feldon, I. Machin (Ingleby Barwick Town Council), T. Hampton (Kirklevington Parish Council), L. W. Hodley (Stillington & Whitton Parish Council)

Apologies: Cllr Mrs Jennie Beaumont, Cllr Eileen Craggs, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Barry Woodhouse

PCL 6/07 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Fletcher declared a personal/non prejudicial interest as he was also a Parish Councillor for Egglecliffe and Eaglescliffe Parish Council.

PCL 7/07 **Minutes of the Meeting Held 18th September 2007**

The Chair noted an update that T. Beckwith, Head of Support Services, had forwarded regarding secondary school transport for the Ingleby Barwick area. The update stated that the new arrangements for transport to Conyers School had settled down well. There had been two further complaints from parents about the length of the school day but remained of the view that this solution was the best that could be offered. However the matter would be kept under review for the beginning of each term.

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18th September 2007 be agreed as a correct record.

PCL 8/07 **A New Model Code of Conduct for Local Authority Members Update**

The Team Leader - Democratic Services presented the Forum with an update on the New Model Code of Conduct.

All local authorities, including Town and Parish Councils, had until 1 October 2007 to adopt the new Code. After that time, members of authorities that had not adopted it were automatically covered by it. As previously explained, whilst the Code was, for the most part, applicable equally to all authorities, the right to make representations, answer questions and give evidence like a member of the public, when a member had a prejudicial interest (paragraph 12(2) of the Code) was not mandatory for Town/Parish Councils. The implications of this included that the right would only apply to such authorities if paragraph 12(2) of the Code was specifically and overtly referred to in the relevant decision/resolution, adopted by them. Simply adopting the new Code's mandatory provisions would not suffice.

For the provision to be operable, and for it to enable a member with a prejudicial interest to speak, the public must also be allowed to attend the relevant meeting for the same purpose. The Standards Board advice was that a Council's

Standing Orders should specifically provide for this right to be available in relation to the Authority's meetings. Where it was not available, paragraph 12(2) would not be able to be applied.

The Team Leader - Democratic Services explained that guidance on the Code continued to be provided on a regular basis to all Town/Parish Councils, one to one discussions regarding the Code had taken place or were planned with Clerks, together with attendance at formal meetings of their Town/Parish Councils, and a Stockton Code of Conduct evening training event was planned, which would be opened up to Town/Parish Councils.

The advice to Town/Parish Clerks had been that, as the register of interests form has changed with the introduction of the new code, each Town/Parish Councillor should complete, sign, date and return a new form to their Clerk. SBC was awaiting returns from eight Parish/Town Councils.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.

**PCL
9/07**

Neighbourhood Enforcement Service

The Security Services Manager and Enforcement Surveillance Coordinator noted the correspondence sent to all Parish/Town Councils in October regarding the Neighbourhood Enforcement Service (NES). This correspondence followed a scrutiny review of NES by the Housing and Community Safety Select Committee and raised the question of whether Town and Parish Councils wished to 'buy into' the Service in any way. It was noted that Ingleby Barwick Parish Council funded additional coverage from the NES for their parish, and SBC wished to make similar purchasing of coverage available to other Parish/Town Councils.

NES dealt with 17,000 calls in its first year, and 16,000 calls between April - December 2007. It worked on a four shift system across all sites. There had been a 25% reduction in anti-social behaviour interventions on the streets by Enforcement Officers, 23% less verbal warning given, 22% reduction in alcohol seizures on the streets from minors, and 43% less Nuisance/untaxed/abandoned vehicles compared with 2006/7. The Enforcement Surveillance Coordinator added that within a few short years Stockton-on-Tees had changed from being the second dirtiest town in the country to being in the top ten cleanest towns.

It was queried what was the minimum unit of additional coverage that could be purchased. The Security Services Manager explained that Parish/Town Council were not limited to buying into additional coverage on the same large scale as Ingleby Barwick Town Council, and that several Parish/Town Council could create a consortium to purchase the time of one additional officer. It was noted that due to the additional coverage in Ingleby Barwick, it enabled other officers to be alerted to issues in the area quicker and therefore these were resolved faster.

Ingleby Barwick Town Council recommended the purchasing of additional services, and noted that the additional cost for each household was 13p per annum.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.

**PCL
10/07** **Local Development Framework**

The Forum Considered a report that outlined the Parish/Town Council involvement in the Local Development Framework (LDF). LDF was the new system for preparing plans which set out the SBC's proposals for growth and development in the Borough. The Spatial Planning Manager explained that all plans needed to be underpinned by a robust evidence base, and there were two studies underway: a Village Study which would look at services and facilities in the villages and how villages related to each other; and a needs survey for leisure and recreation facilities which created evidence for the production of a supplementary planning document, Open Space, recreation and Landscape, designed to provide detail and guidance to other documents in the LDF.

The Spatial Planning Manager informed that Parish/Town Councils were key consultees in the development plan process and would be contacted at all stages of preparation and submission to the Secretary of State. It was noted that Rural Parish Councils had been contacted via their clerk for the Village Study, in regards to checking the accuracy of the information gathered, and a workshop was to be held in the January 2008 to get feedback on how the SBC should progress with the issue. The Spatial Planning Manager requested the help of Parish/Town Councils in collecting evidence for the Open Space, Recreation and Landscape document by completing both a general questionnaire and an open questionnaire, which was distributed, that would allow Parish/Town Councils to use their local knowledge to provide information about particular open spaces in their area and their local needs for open space and recreation provision.

The Forum discussed the possible day/times of the workshop, and it was requested that Parish/Town Council contact Jane Elliott, Principal Planning Officer (email jane.elliott@stockton.gov.uk or telephone 01642 526053), with their preferred times. The Forum also discussed the dissemination of consultation documents to Parish/Town Councils, and how this should be dealt with. It was noted that electronic copies of documentation were too large to download and print, and it was suggested that one copy of each document sent to the each clerk would suffice. This copy could then be either distributed among the Parish/Town Councillors, or passed to a working group which had been formed to look at the issue. Representatives from Ingleby Barwick requested two copies of each document.

Parish/Town Council representatives raised the six week timeframe for consultations, particularly when the timeframe occurred during school summer holidays. The Spatial Planning Manager informed that these timeframes were inline with the statutory requirements but it was foreseen that there may be some change in legislation allowing for differing lengths of time for consultations. It was noted that an eight week consultation period would be more appropriate.

CONCLUDED that

1. the information be noted
2. Parish/Town Councils to complete Open Space, Recreation and Landscape open questionnaire.
3. Parish/Town Councils contact the Principal Planning Officer to indicate a time for a Village Study Work Shop.

**PCL
11/07** **Tees Valley Bus Network Improvements**

The Head of Technical Services presented a report which noted the progress of the Tees Valley Bus Network Improvements.

A review of the operation of bus services in the Tees Valley sub-region was carried out in 2004 which proposed a network that was based on a hierarchy of services ranging from fast, frequent, commercially operated, 'Super Core' and 'Core' urban routes to low frequency, financially supported, Tertiary and Rural services meeting social accessibility needs. Alongside the network review, work had been going on to develop a complementary package of measures aimed at improving the whole journey by bus, known as the Tees Valley Bus Network Improvements. These proposed improvement measures would not only provide longer term stability within the Tees Valley bus network, by allowing other funding streams to be concentrated on the Tertiary and Rural routes, but would offer a 'step change' in public transport provision to the passenger in terms of frequency, reliability, quality and convenience, with a coordinated approach to public transport provision.

The first order estimate showed the total cost of the proposals to be around £39.2 million (2006 prices). The project would be delivered through one or more Statutory Quality Partnership schemes, in line with the draft Local Transport Bill published in May 2007. This would enable sustainable delivery of the required improvements and ensure significant local investment from both the public and private sector partners, as well as providing an ongoing legacy of targeted investment across the network. The preferred delivery timescale assumed a project start in April 2008 and completion by March 2011. The detailed implementation programme was currently being finalised prior to inclusion within the revised Business Case that was being prepared for submission to the Department for Transport in January 2008.

The Forum discussed the bus routes that were in operation, and the Head of Technical Services explained that bus operators were only providing routes that they perceived as being commercially viable. He stated that the Tees Valley Bus Network would ensure that revenue from the commercially viable 'Super Core' and 'Core' routes would be reinvested to provide routes that were not commercially viable but met a social need, and therefore a better service would be provided for the area. The location of bus stops was raised, with Grindon enquiring why there were stops on the A177 dual carriageway, and not near services or residential areas.

CONCLUDED that:

1. the Head of Technical Service would provide a response to the query regarding bus stops on the A177
2. the Head of Technical Services would update the Forum on the progress of the Tees Valley Bus Network Improvements
3. the information be noted.

**PCL
12/07** **Issues Raised by Parish/Town Councils**

Long Newton Bus Service

Long Newton Parish Council had submitted a question regarding the provision of a bus service to and from Long Newton once the A66 road works were completed.

The Head of Technical Services informed that a meeting to discuss bus services in the context of the new interchange and the contract to support services to the airport expiring in April 2008 with Arriva was to take place on Monday 7 January 2008.

SBC was aware of issues related to overcrowding on the 20 Service on parts of its route, particularly in the morning peak hour and Arriva had re-allocated one larger bus to the route following representations. As well as the implications of continuing funding for services to the airport and the opening of the new interchange, SBC was mindful of the needs of residents in Hartburn and Elton as well as Long Newton. The possible impact of planning applications on the demand for public transport in areas currently served by the Arriva 20 service also had to be considered. The recent change of ownership of bus services in Darlington also presents an opportunity for Arriva to re-assess its services.

The Head of Technical Services noted that SBC had no powers to direct bus operators in respect of the provision, route, frequency and timing of their commercial services, but every effort would be made to see if any improvements can be negotiated with Arriva.

Tree Planting at Romano Park

Ingleby Barwick Town Council raised concerns with the proposed tree planting on the land at the rear of All Saints Secondary School. The Strategy and Development Manager informed that the site was considered for possible tree planting and he had received feedback from the Parish Council highlighting this particular issue. It was therefore agreed that no scheme would be implemented at that time although future tree planting in Romano Park could not be ruled out. The Strategy and Development Manager stated that he would be pleased to consider possible alternative locations for tree planting, as part of an on-going programme of tree planting in Ingleby Barwick which had been funded by SBC and the Parish Council.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.

**PCL
13/07**

E-genda System

The Trainee Democratic Services Officer distributed a 'How To Guide' which illustrated the information available within the SBC's E-Genda System accessible through the Borough SBC's website. The information was provided under the heading of 'Councillors and Council Meeting Information' on the Council's home page; and included details of:-

- Councillors Contact and Committee Details
- Meeting Dates of all Committees; Copies of Agendas, Reports & Minutes
- Forward Plan
- Cabinet Decisions
- Officer Executive Decisions
- Topic Alerting Registration
- Councillors Ward Surgery Details

Accessibility to the democratic information was discussed and it was noted that Democratic Services had sought to make this available in all public libraries within the Borough; and intended to include all SBC building as an information outlet. Several Parish/Town Councils with their own websites, had agreed to have a link to the E-Genda system on their website thereby providing almost a 'one stop' facility for democratic information. Democratic Services also highlighted the importance of democracy and citizenship via their work with schools, the voluntary sector, hard to reach and other community groups.

The Parish/Town Councils were invited to contact Team Leader-Democratic Services (Nigel Hart) if they wished to know more about the system. The Chair noted that, if there was enough interest, a demonstration of the system could be given at a future Forum meeting.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.

**PCL
14/07**

Work Plan

The Chair tabled the SBC Statutory Forward Plan. The Parish/Town Council were encouraged to forward any issues that were on the Forward Plan that they were also looking to be considered as agenda items.

CONCLUDED that Parish/Town Councils to forward any cross issues from the Statutory Forward Plan for agenda items.

**PCL
15/07**

Any Other Business

A member raised the work of the Shaw Trust Horticultural, which was part of a national charity that provided training and employment services to disabled and disadvantaged people. The Trust carried out small scale horticultural work, and their leaflet was tabled for Parish/Town Councils who were had plans to contract any jobs.

Egglecliffe and Eaglescliffe Parish Council noted the large amount of paperwork that was being sent to Parish/Town Councils from SBC and requested that this be kept to a minimum.

Ingleby Barwick Town Council raised issues regarding election costs and a youth cafe. The Chair noted that the Forum was not the appropriate place to raise the concerns and stated that these would be taken to the appropriate officer to respond direct.

Training for members of Parish/Town Councils was discussed. The Developmental Plans Manager noted that there would be planning training in 2008 which such Councillors would be invited to attend. It was also noted that while SBC was responsible to train Parish/Town Councils on the New Model Code of Conduct, it was not responsible to offer other training. However, where possible, it has been SBC practice to invite Parish/Town Councils attend training sessions that were provided for SBC members.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.