

Parish Council Liaison Forum

A meeting of Parish Council Liaison Forum was held on Monday, 15th December, 2008.

Present: Cllr David Coleman (Chairman), Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Barry Woodhouse

Officers: M. Clifford, J. Dixon, S. Edwards, J. Edmonds, M. Robinson (DNS) M. Jones (LD)

Also in attendance: H. Atkinson (Billingham Town Council), T. Bowman (Ingleby Barwick Town Council), W. Feldon (Ingleby Barwick Town Council), T. Hampton (Kirklevington & Castle Levington Parish Council), G. Rees (Grindon Parish Council), J. Walker (Egglecliffe & Eaglescliffe Parish Council).

Apologies: Cllr Mrs Jennie Beaumont, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr Miss Barbara Inman, Cllr Terry Laing, Elton Parish Council, Long Newton Parish Council

PCL 20/08 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no interests declared.

PCL 21/08 **Minutes of the Meeting Held on Monday 15th September 2008**

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held 15th September 2008.

The Forum was updated on the advice to Redmarshall Parish Council regarding their issue with a member of the public raising questions with the Audit Commission and incurring subsequent costs. Redmarshall Parish Council were advised to contact the regional office and request that the issue be dealt with by the National Audit Commission office.

Ingleby Barwick Town Council queried the School Travel Plans for Conyers and Egglecliffe schools. The Head of Technical Services stated he would ensure that the Technical Services Senior Road Safety Officer would contact Cllr Bowman.

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held 15th September 2008 be agreed as a true record.

PCL 22/08 **Landscape Character Assessment and Green Infrastructure Strategy**

The Environment Development Officer informed that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) had commissioned a Landscape Character Assessment to be undertaken. The study would build upon the previous studies undertaken of the whole of the British Isles, characterising this area as Tees Lowland, by the Countryside Commission. The study would feed into a variety of strategic aims SBC were working on including the Local Development Framework, the Environment DPD, The Green Infrastructure Strategy Development Briefs and Land management objectives. The study would also complement the Historic Character Assessment that was being led through Tees Archaeology.

The scope of the study included all rural, green wedge and urban fringe areas, and it would comprise of a desktop study, field survey work, draft report, and final reports. The officer noted that as part of the process there would be a questionnaire sent out in mid January 2009 to Town and Parish Council as part

of the desktop study stage, and further consultation at the draft report stage, timetabled for mid April 2009. The final report was timetabled for completion in mid June 2009.

It was queried whether the questionnaires would be sent to all Parish/Town Councillors, or just one questionnaire sent to each Parish/Town Council. The Officer stated that the questionnaire would be sent to Parish/Town Council Clerks, and she would prefer one questionnaire per Parish/Town Council. The deadline for completed returns would be two weeks, and members suggested that this would not give enough time for Parish/Town Councils to complete the questionnaire. The Officer agreed to revise the timetable for the consultation.

The Environmental Development Officer also informed that SBC was leading on the development of a Borough-wide Green Infrastructure Strategy, in partnership with other organisations including Natural England, Environment Agency, Groundwork South Tees and Tees Valley Wildlife Trust. The study would include all open spaces and water bodies within and between the towns and villages. It would also include individual features such as street trees, and consist of both public and private assets. The aim of the strategy was to help manage and develop networks for the future, and build on the Tees Valley Green Infrastructure, focussing on local issues and priorities. The draft Green Infrastructure maps for the Borough, which would identify the priorities and issues for the key features, sites and/or corridors would be consulted on in April 2009, and Town/Parish Councils were invited to take part in the consultation.

Some possible green corridors routes and issue for their improvement were discussed and it was commented that such improvements would be expensive. The officer noted that there was some financial backing for the project, therefore the aim was to prioritise what to do with that funding.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.

PCL Housing Stocks Options Appraisals

23/08

The Housing Strategy Manager gave a presentation regarding Housing Futures: Stock Option Appraisal.

It was explained that SBC Cabinet had granted approval to undertake a comprehensive Option Appraisal (OA) of the housing stock in August 2007. The purpose of the OA was to appraise and evaluate potential investment options and ensure that SBC was in a position to respond to key local, sub regional and national agendas.

The potential options available to SBC were:

- * Stock retention within the current subsidy system
- * Stock retention outside the current subsidy system
- * Stock transfer
- * Private Finance Initiative (PFI)
- * Regeneration/Development delivery vehicle

These were evaluated against ten criteria, which included securing appropriate investment, meeting housing need, tenants right to be protected, and continued service improvement. It was concluded that at the present time stock transfer

was the only viable option. Cabinet endorsed this conclusion at its meeting in November 2008 and approved the next stage of the project.

The next steps would be to seek tenants views on what was important to them, work directly with tenants via the 'Homes for the Future Customer Group', develop the landlord specification and selection of landlord. Pending Cabinet approval, tenants would be asked to vote on the proposal. The Forum was assured that the stock transfer would not go ahead without a tenant ballot. It was also assured that the stock transfer would not go ahead if tenants voted against it in the ballot.

It was queried what would happen if tenants voted against stock transfer. The Officer informed that each tenant would receive an offer document detailing the process and possible outcomes. If tenants voted against stock transfer then decisions would have to be made regarding the service that tenant received. Concern was raised with the readability of the offer document and consultation process. It was explained that it was a legal requirement to distribute an offer document to each tenant, and they would have 28 days to make comment before the ballot. However, in addition there would be information leaflets and fact sheets that were more user friendly distributed, roadshows, DVD's, and officers going to each home to highlight the information and answer any questions. There was no minimum turnout for the ballot to be valid, however SBC would be monitored by outside agencies. It was expected that the earliest possible date for a ballot following the consultation process would be Spring 2010.

It was queried whether there would be any guarantees in place that ensured the new landlord would keep up the standard of the homes. The officer explained that there would be a legally binding agreement between SBC and the new landlord detailing what would be delivered and when. SBC would ensure that the chosen landlord had a sufficiently robust business plan in place, thereby being assured that they had enough resources to carry out the agreement. The new landlord would be brought to account by SBC, and other organisations that monitored social housing, if they did not deliver.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.

**PCL
24/08**

Planning the Future of Rural Village Update

The Spatial Planning Officer presented a report regarding the completion of the 'Planning the Future of Rural Villages' study.

The study would form part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework (LDF) and would give clarity in the implementation of Core Strategy Policy 1 (CS1) point 5; 'In catering for rural housing needs, priority will be given to the provision of affordable housing in sustainable locations, to meet identified need. This will be provided through a rural exception site policy'.

In order to establish the levels of facilities available within the Borough's rural villages, an audit, several consultations, and analysis were carried out.

Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development (2005) stated that "planning authorities should seek to provide improved access for all to jobs,

health, education, shops, leisure and facilities on foot, bicycle or public transport rather than having to rely on access by car, whilst recognising that this may be more difficult in rural areas". Therefore villages were ranked in terms of their sustainability under the following categories:

- Employment
- Health
- Education
- Shops
- Leisure
- Ancillary facilities
- Access

This provided a clear hierarchy of sustainability amongst the villages and divided into tiers:

Tier 1 (40 sustainability score points plus)
Stillington - 41

Tier 2 (30 to 39 points)
Long Newton - 36
Carlton - 33
Maltby - 33
Kirklevington - 32
Wolviston - 30

Tier 3 (25 to 29 points)
Redmarshall - 29
Hilton - 28
Elton - 27
Thorpe Thewles - 25

Tier 4 (24 points and less)
Wynyard - 22
Whitton - 21
Cowpen Bewley - 20
Aislaby - 12

As an evidence base for policy documents emerging as part of the LDF the report made a number of recommendations:

- * Development Limits should be maintained around all villages
- * Infill Development would be appropriate within Tiers 1 and 2. However, it would not be supported in Tiers 3 and 4 where residents had a greater reliance on the private car to access facilities. Infill development should respect the rural character and density of development in the villages.
- * Where a need for rural affordable housing had been identified through detailed studies, it would be essential that rural exception sites were located in areas where facilities were present or could be accessed by sustainable means. This allowed occupants of affordable housing to be able to access the services and facilities they required to live and not become marginalised.
- * Limits of development should be placed around Wynyard in order to define the

boundary of the village and created a policy stance in accordance with Hartlepool Borough Council. As Wynyard lay within tier 4 further housing infill development would not be supported until services and facilities were in place to rate the village within tiers 1 or 2 and thus reducing reliance on the private car.

* Update of the facilities and services audit should be undertaken every two years, in conjunction with Parish Councils, in order to reassess the hierarchy of villages and direct development away from the least sustainable locations.

Affordable housing was discussed and there was concern that this would encourage an influx of families moving into villages. It was noted that affordable housing would only be built if it meets a genuine and proven need for people with a demonstrable local connection. It was also noted that the possibility of undertaking a Rural Housing Needs Survey was under consideration. The officer explained that if a survey was undertaken then this might involve engaging the services of a Rural Housing Enabler. The officer added that a Rural Housing Enabler was a specialist in undertaking this kind of work and would involve rural communities and Parish Councils in the process.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.

**PCL
25/08** **Highways Maintenance Scheme**

The Head of Technical Services presented a report on Highway Maintenance Schemes. The report listed highways suggested for improvement which included those put forward by Parish/Town Councils as part of a consultation for the scrutiny of highways. Councillors were advised that the process to prioritise and develop next years work programme was to commence in the new year and asked to ensure that all there requests had been accurately captured and to advise technicalservices@stockton.gov.uk if there were errors or omissions.

It was noted there were some highways that Northern Parishes had highlighted but were not included on the list. The list supplied was the return from the questionnaire to Parishes as part of the scrutiny review. There were over 400 schemes in the long term programme, and it was felt that this was too much for the report. The Head of Technical Services stated that he would ensure the relevant parish were contacted to clear any confusion. It was further noted that Marsh House Avenue was in Billingham Central Ward.

CONCLUDED that: -

1. The highways noted by Northern Parishes be included on the list of Maintenance Schemes
2. The information be noted and Councillors to forward any further requests over the next few weeks.

**PCL
26/08** **Members' Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure**

The Forum noted information regarding the Members' Code of Conduct Complaints Procedure. Any queries regarding this should be forwarded to the Monitoring Officer, David Bond.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.

PCL **Issues Raised by Parish/Town Councils**
27/08

The responses to the questions raised by Parish/Town Councils were discussed.

Ingleby Barwick Parish Council raised concern with the responses to their queries on carriageway drainage channels and the inspection of footpaths. It was reported that there were large potholes in Queen Elizabeth Way in need of repair. The Care for Your Area Manager had responded that a Borough wide weed spraying service took place from March - October, and weeds were also removed manually. With regard to footpaths, the officer had informed that footpath inspections were carried out at least twice a year, and in some cases on a more regular basis. Intervention levels on footpaths were 20mm. The Head of Technical Services stated that an officer would walk the area with the Town Councillor so that he could highlight the sections that were causing concern. Egglecliffe and Egglecliffe Parish Council questioned whether it was the responsibility of SBC to check the re-instatement of highways following work carried out by the utility companies. The Head of Technical Services explained SBC carried out random sample checks, and held regular meetings with the gas contractors, but stated that officers would ensure a check was made in the Egglecliffe area where there had been recent works by Gas contractors.

Ingleby Barwick Parish Council questioned whether schools paid for salt to clear their paths from ice. The Head of Technical Services stated he would check this.

The question posed by Grindon Parish Council regarding the Thorpe Thewles bus service was discussed, and the placement of bus stops were raised. The Head of Technical Services noted that this was a commercial service and therefore while SBC could raise issue they could not dictate route. Officers would meet Grindon Parish Councillor to discuss service maps and answer any queries.

CONCLUDED that: -

1. a Care for Your Area Officer and Ingleby Barwick Town Councillor walk the area of Ingleby Barwick causing concern
2. A check of re-instated highways be made in Egglecliffe
3. A meeting be arranged with Grindon Parish Council to discuss bus routes
4. The information be noted