

## Parish Council Liaison Forum

A meeting of Parish Council Liaison Forum was held on Monday, 21st March, 2011.

**Present:** Cllr David Coleman (Chairman), Cllr Miss Barbara Inman, Cllr Barry Woodhouse (Stockton BC); H. Atkinson (Billingham T.C.), G. Colling (Egglescliffe & Egglescliffe P.C.), T. Bowman (Ingleby Barwick P.C.), T. Hampton (Kirklevington P.C.), C. Algie (Maltby P.C.), J. Lithgo, J. Wills (Stillington P.C.).

**Officers:** N. Laws, Ms R. Young (DNS); N. Hart (LD).

**Also in attendance:**

**Apologies:** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs Beaumont, Laing (Stockton B.C.), Cllr Walker (Egglescliffe & Egglescliffe P.C.), Cllr Rees (Grindon P.C.), Cllr Felden (Ingleby Barwick P.C.), Cllr Smith.

### **PCL 22/10**      **Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest declared.

### **PCL 23/10**      **Minutes of the Meeting held on 24th January 2011**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24th January 2011 were agreed as a correct record.

### **PCL 24/10**      **Matters Arising**

It was noted that consultation on the Environment Development Plan Document Issues and Options had completed on the 14th March 2011, and all authorities present were happy with the process undertaken.

### **PCL 25/10**      **Stockton Town Centre Consultation-Presentation**

Nigel Laws, Projects Regeneration Manager (SBC), introduced members of the Forum to the content of the Prospectus for the future development of Stockton Town Centre, which was launched for public consultation on the 10th March 2011 with details available on the Council's website and manned displays of information available within the former Johnsons Cleaners retail unit on Stockton High Street. Comments were invited on its content until the end of March, although late comments may also be incorporated if possible. Parish/Town Councils were encouraged to share the content of the Prospectus with their interested constituents and invite them to submit their comments.

It was explained that the Prospectus was a visionary document of both funded and aspirational schemes designed to achieve the future regeneration of Stockton Town Centre over the next five years and beyond. It was explained that the projects contained within were based on principles and concepts at this stage, and were not guaranteed to happen, but reflected a vision of how it was hoped the town centre would develop in the future as schemes, partners and funding were secured.

The document had been produced to counteract the effects of the recent decline of the town centre, affected commercially as a result of numerous factors, not least alternative retail facilities and development available in Middlesbrough, Teesside Park and beyond, the growth in internet shopping, the

harsh fabric and appearance of the High Street itself, and the effects of the global recession. Other factors, such as the inability of the Council to set the business rates to be collected from commercial premises, and instead only collect the rates on behalf of the Government, were also a factor, although the forthcoming Localism Bill did seem to offer an opportunity for this to be redressed in the future should legislation follow.

A summary was provided of existing projects contained within the prospectus, along with other schemes that were being worked towards. These included schemes for the development of the entire High Street from its northern end featuring the redevelopment of the Globe Theatre open from Autumn 2012 and the provision of limited short stay parking on the high Street, to its central area with the proposed development of a new focal point or square designed to attract shoppers, and to its southern end with schemes proposed for the southern gateway, including the consolidation of the market into this area with more available space, short stay parking and rationalisation of the taxi ranks provided.

Other cultural and business developments such as the new Stockton Central library and the creation of a Business Centre in Dovecot Street, were also highlighted, as was the importance of public realm and the appearance of the fabric of the buildings within the High Street. In this last regard, English Heritage funding had already been utilised to improve the condition and appearance of properties behind the High Street, and a further £1.7M of Heritage Lottery grant had now been secured to improve the frontages of properties in the High Street.

Representatives of the Forum commented on the opportunities to revert commercial properties into residential properties, the potential advantages/disadvantages of allowing parking in the High Street and securing a bus station within the town centre; as well as questioning how this proposed development would affect/compliment other retail development, such as that envisaged for Billingham Town Centre.

It was explained that the message behind the Prospectus was based on not one but multiple themes, including specialist independent retail provision, supplemented by cultural, historic, business and other developments, maximising existing facilities such as the market, the Globe theatre and the town centres links to the riverside development.

RESOLVED that the content of the presentation be noted and Parish/Town Councils be encouraged to share the content of the Prospectus with their interested constituents and invite/submit their own comments.

## **PCL Neighbourhood Development Plans**

**26/10**

Rosemary Young, Spatial Planning Manager (SBC) provided the Forum with a summary of her initial interpretation of the implications of the Localism Bill and its possible effects on future Neighbourhood Planning.

It was noted that the Bill, whilst not actual law yet and therefore subject to change, envisaged much of its detail to be left to subsequent regulations. In terms of its focus on future Neighbourhood Planning, it envisaged a freedom

from top-down controls, an empowerment of communities and individuals to prepare Neighbourhood plans based on the priorities they saw for their own area, thereby allowing decisions to be taken as close as possible to people they affect, and sought to inspire innovation and creativity, rather than regulate and obstruct development.

It was noted that whilst other areas of neighbourhood planning were envisaged within the Bill, such as Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders; each led by the neighbourhood not the local authority, this presentation predominantly explained the purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Only 'qualifying bodies' could prepare such a plan, and these 'bodies' included Parish/Town Councils, thereby allowing the neighbourhood to decide what the plan was to include. Constraints to permitted development, such as that provided by national planning policy, conformity with strategic policies and proposals in the local plan, compliance with European law and compatibility with other adopted neighbourhood plans, were noted.

The process for preparation of the plan was outlined, leading to its conclusion of agreement by public referendum. It was noted that the estimated average cost of preparing such a plan was between £17-63k, which would be required to be provided by the 'qualifying body', i.e parish/town council, although the Government had indicated it would fund sources of help and advice for communities. The cost of the required Examination in Public and Referendum would have to be met by the Borough Council.

The Spatial Planning Manger advised that any authority giving thought to the production of such a plan should firstly consider the content of the existing Local Plan and Local Development Framework primarily to ensure that the Borough Council were not already committed to doing something similarly envisaged by a proposed Neighbourhood Plan.

Kirklevington Parish Council indicated that it was already underway in preparing such a plan at an estimated cost much less than the average cost quoted, and that it had received valuable help and advice from the Tees Valley Rural Community Council. Reference was however made by other representatives present of the impact of such costs being borne by parish/town councils, the reliance upon the expertise of volunteers to prepare such plans, and the possible negative effects on community harmony should proposals be resisted.

RESOLVED that the presentation be noted.

**PCL**  
**27/10**      **Parish/Town Council Issues**

A response was provided to the enquiry made by Ingleby Barwick Town Council regards the cost of their participation in a joint scheme with the Borough Council to plant and maintain bulbs in their area.

Eggescliffe & Eggescliffe PC undertook their own bulb planting scheme and clarification was requested as to whether this too would incur any similar charges.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and clarification be provided for

Eggescliffe & Eaglescliffe PC regards their own bulb planting scheme.

**PCL  
28/10**

**Any Other Business**

Maltby P.C. made reference to the implications of a recent H.M.R.C. announcement regards employment regulations to be introduced conferring full employer status on parish/town councils in terms of their employment of their parish clerk and all other officers. The negative effects of this particularly on small authorities in terms of increased national insurance and PAYE contributions were emphasized, and it was questioned whether any advice/assistance was available to authorities that would struggle to absorb such costs, or retain existing staff.

It was noted that advice could be sought directly from SBC Payroll regards the implications of tax regulations, and that further advice may be available from either the Cleveland Local Councils Association or the National Association of Local Councils.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.