

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
HEDNESFORD COMMUNITY FORUM
MONDAY 03 MARCH 2014 AT 7.00 P.M.

HELD AT THE AQUARIUS, VICTORIA STREET, HEDNESFORD

PRESENT:

District Councillors:

Adamson, G. (Chairman)
Pearson, A. (Vice-Chairman)

Ball, G.D
Cartwright, Mrs. S.M.
Gamble, B.

Other District
Councillors:

Mrs. L. Whitehouse (Rawnsley Ward)

County
Councillors:

Mrs C. Mitchell (Hednesford Division)

District
Officers:

T. McGovern, Corporate Director
G. Watson, Planning & Economic Development Services Manager
M. Berry, Senior Committee Officer
Ms. K. Miles, Communications Officer

Also present:

Local residents x 5
Chief Inspector C. Ratcliffe, Staffordshire Police
PC G. Arries, Staffordshire Police
PC J. Taylor, Staffordshire Police
D. Ballett, Brindley Heath Parish Council
and Friends of Hednesford Park
Mrs. B. Yates, Chair, Hednesford Traders' Association
D. Wisehall, Heart of Hednesford Restoration Project
M. Allsopp, The Aquarius
Ms. C. Lilley, Express and Star

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Mrs. D. Grice and B. Todd.

2. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

There were no interests declared.

3. Notes

The Notes of the meeting held on 11 December 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

Minute No. 7 – Road Safety Issue, Victoria Street/Rugeley Road

Councillor Gamble raised that since the last Forum meeting there had been continued road safety issues along Victoria Street which needed addressing urgently.

Councillors Adamson and Cartwright both reported they had received complaints from residents about these issues.

Councillor Pearson and County Councillor Mrs. Mitchell reported they had brought the issues to the attention of M. Keeling, Community Infrastructure Liaison Manager for the County Council, but no update had been received.

G. Watson advised that he would contact M. Keeling and arrange a meeting to discuss such issues. He suggested that they should have been picked up as part of the County Council's safety audit.

The Chairman advised he would also contact M. Keeling to report the concerns raised by the Forum.

4. Questions for Staffordshire Police

No questions had been submitted in advance of the meeting; however Chief Inspector Ratcliffe, PC Arries and PC Taylor were in attendance to take questions from the floor.

Councillor G. Ball – What was being done to tackle the continued problem of drug taking/dealing on premises within the town centre?

PC Arries replied that such issues would be looked into if reported, and dealt with where possible; also advising that reporting could be done anonymously via Crimestoppers.

Councillor G. Ball – What was being doing to alleviate parking issues around the Hednesford Raceway?

PC Arries replied that the provision of additional parking was being looked into on racedays, which included liaising with Kingsmead school about opening their car park for a small fee.

M. Allsopp – Have suffered problems recently of anti-social behaviour, criminal damage and burglary in The Aquarius which were recorded on the CCTV and reported to the Police; however the police officer involved determined that they should only be addressed as anti-social behaviour issues rather than reported as crimes.

Chief Inspector Ratcliffe apologised for the response received from the Police, as the right customer service had clearly not been provided. Stills of the CCTV footage would be circulated amongst the local policing teams as the perpetrators may already been known in the area. Will speak to the Inspector at Cannock Police Station and ask him to report back directly.

Councillor Whitehouse – As one of the business owners in the town centre, have seen an increase in drugs problems and suffered abuse from youths in the area in recent months. Also know there has been an increase in thefts from local businesses, which has resulted in at least 3 owners looking to move out of the town.

Chief Inspector Ratcliffe replied that PC Arries, PC Taylor and PC Trupp were all working regularly in Hednesford, so the area was well served, but it may be necessary to look at alternative courses of action under legislation, such as injunctions and banning orders, to be able to better deal with the problems reported. The Police were also waiting for legislation to be passed which would give greater scope for tackling anti-social behaviour.

D. Wisehall stated that more could be done by the traders to help protect the area, such as the introduction of 'Shopwatch', which so far only had a low take up.

Chief Inspector Ratcliffe replied that a 'Business Crime Partnership' was in place with Stafford Borough with the aim of reducing business crime and providing support to the day and night time economies in across the two districts. In respect of the 'Shopwatch' scheme, aware of the financial constraints businesses which may restrict traders from joining the scheme, however the cost of membership should be weighed up against any potential losses/costs suffered as a result of criminal activity.

D. Wisehall reported that in the first of the scheme a membership discount was offered through S106 funding, however no traders took up the offer.

B. Yates raised that the traders were looking to work more closely together and liaise better with the local police to report crime and support the town.

The Chairman thanked the Police for the hard work they have done to improve the safety of Hednesford, making clear that all parties had to work together to keep this going.

5. Questions for Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services

No questions had been submitted in advance of the meeting.

6. Questions for Staffordshire County Council Highways Department

No questions had been submitted in advance of the meeting.

7. Questions for Cannock Chase District Council

Bev Yates, Chair, Hednesford Traders' Association

“There are a number of signposts in the town that direct people/traffic to Market Street. Whilst we appreciate that this is the main street in Hednesford, there are no signs for the town centre or shops.

Would it be possible to amend the signs to read ‘Town Centre’ or Shops’?”

G. Watson, Planning and Economic Development Services Manager replied that the directional signage had referred to ‘Town Centre’ when they were first erected by the County Council. However, as the signs were already located in the town centre, the County Council were asked to amend the signage and ‘Market Street’ replaced ‘Town Centre’ on the signs. In order for the signage to be amended, the County Council would have to be contacted as it was their responsibility.

Councillor G. Ball – Update on Hednesford Town Centre Regeneration

G. Watson, Planning and Economic Development Services Manager, provided the following update:

- *Pure Gym had recently opened in the unit underneath The Aquarius;*
- *There were still some units at the top end of Market Street which were vacant, but regular liaison was happening with the agents to try and get the units filled;*
- *An additional unit was going to be created on the Victoria Shopping Park, next door to Card Factory;*
- *Hednesford had bucked the national trend in respect of town centre issues, as the development scheme had been successfully delivered through a sustained period of recession.*
- *The restrictions at Rugeley Road car park scheme had been in place since the end of 2013, and Aldi may consider implementing further restrictions on their side of the car park. It has been noticed that the number of spaces available on the car park over weekday lunchtimes had been tight.*

Resident – car park had been a nightmare recently, particularly on Saturday afternoons. Vehicles used by the Meat Market on site were regularly obstructing the pathway and road access around the car park.

G. Watson replied that the Council were aware of the issues caused by the Meat Market, and wanted the County Council to take strong action against the owners to resolve the problems. In respect of general problems with the car park, these were exacerbated by the closure of the railway bridge, so hopefully traffic flow would be less of an issue once the bridge reopened. Have also the County Council to look at installation of a box junction on Victoria Street outside the car park to help vehicle movements.

The Chairman advised that a meeting would be arranged with M. Keeling, G. Watson and County Councillor Mr Mitchell to address the concerns raised.

Councillor Pearson – Could Cardigan Place be used an alternative access road in/out of the car park?

G. Watson replied he would be reluctant for this to happen, as it could create problems in the long term and would need to be agreed by Aldi.

M. Allsopp – Could the traffic wardens operating in the area issue parking tickets for highways obstructions?

G. Watson replied that this had been discussed with colleagues, however current Parking Order did not cover issues of loading/unloading and waiting, so a new Order would have to be created.

Councillor G. Ball – Update on Hednesford Park

T. McGovern, Corporate Director, provided the following update:

- *The Hednesford Signal Box had now been installed in the Park, but it needed to be renovated before it could be brought into public use. This work was scheduled to happen over the next 6 to 8 weeks;*
- *Once the works had been completed, the Box would become an education centre for the Park;*
- *The Education Officer and Landscaping Officer had both been recruited and recently commenced employment;*
- *Drainage survey had also been completed. The Council was now engaged with Severn Trent Water to see how to fix any problems raised;*
- *An extensive tree-planting programme had commenced, including the planting of a 'Queen's Oak'. These Oaks had been produced for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, and the Council were successful in receiving one.*
- *Contracts were being secured to complete the next phase of the project, which included installation of fencing around the park, and refreshing the fencing around the War Memorial; Work to the Memorial fencing would be scheduled to ensure it did not clash with planned Remembrance Day events;*
- *The redevelopment of the park was a long term project, with a*

timeframe of completion of 3 to 5 years.

Councillor Pearson – Where there were trees being cut down, need to be aware of when bird nesting happened, so as not to disrupt wildlife.

T. McGovern replied that the trees referred to were on the opposite side of Rugeley Road and contractors had been secured to crown/prune/fell the trees as necessary. A public information event was planned to take place to explain why the tree cutting was happening.

Resident – Can a car park be installed at the main entrance to the Park to allow families to park inside it, thus avoiding having to cross over the busy road outside?

T. McGovern replied that there was also provision for a car park, which was situated at the Rugeley Road entrance to the Park. As the children's play area was going to be moved, the existing car park was going to be enhanced, but this was unlikely to happen until 2015.

D. Wisehall commented that the Tesco car park was a long stay, public car park, which had gated access to the Park.

Resident – gated access had been closed recently, so families still had to cross over the busy road to access the Park.

G. Watson replied that once all the redevelopment work had finished there would be three different access points to the Park from the town centre.

8. Mid-Staffs NHS Foundation Trust Update

In place of the Trust update which had been included on the Forum Agenda, the Chairman read out a new update (detailed below) which had been supplied by Deborah Neal, Head of Communications at the Trust:

“On 26 February 2014 the Secretary of State for Health approved the Trust Special Administrators’ (TSAs) principal recommendation, to dissolve Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust.

The TSAs have been working closely with Maggie Oldham, Chief Executive of the Trust, Mark Hackett, Chief Executive of University Hospital of North Staffordshire NHS Trust and David Loughton CBE, Chief Executive of The Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust to ensure that they would be prepared to implement the dissolution of the Trust as quickly as possible, should the Secretary of State approve it. The announcement of his decision means their joint working will intensify over the coming months as the TSA process moves into the next phase.

It is important to note that the Trust is not yet dissolved. Both Cannock Chase and Stafford Hospitals are operating as usual and patient services continue to be provided in the normal manner.

The TSAs remain in charge of the Trust at this time, as required by the TSA process.”

The Chairman then raised the following additional points:

- *Announcement was good news for Cannock Hospital, as it would see usage increase from approximately 40% at present to over 80% once the changes had been finalised;*
- *Still expected that shuttle buses would run between New Cross and Cannock Hospitals and vice-versa;*
- *Announcement was less positive for Stafford Hospital, however provision of maternity services were still under review;*
- *Important to remember that services at both hospitals were still being provided as normal whilst the TSA process continues.*

Resident – local newspaper has reported that New Cross Hospital can expect to receive £14m for providing support to Cannock patients.

D. Ballett – Do the changes proposed mean that Cannock residents won't be able to use Stafford Hospital in future?

The Chairman replied that this was not the case, as patient choice was still in place as to which hospital people wanted to use.

D. Ballett – Would specialists currently based at Cannock also have to provide services at Wolverhampton and Stafford and would patients have to travel elsewhere once Cannock Hospital becomes part of the Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust?

T. McGovern replied that where GPs referred patients to Cannock Hospital, it would be unlikely to have to then go to Stafford as it would no longer be part of the same NHS Trust.

Councillor Gamble commented that once the TSA process had been completed, it would be important for clear information and signposting about locations of services to be given to residents to avoid confusion.

9. Forward Agenda for Future Meetings

The Chairman reported that the next Forum was scheduled for Tuesday 01 July 2014 and advised that any questions would need to be submitted on the forms supplied.

10. Dates of Meetings for 2014/15

The Chairman confirmed the meeting dates of the Hednesford Community Forum for 2014/15 as follows (all starting at 7:00pm):

- Tuesday 01 July, 2014

- Wednesday 17 September, 2014
- Tuesday 02 December, 2014
- Monday 16 March, 2015

The venue for the July 2014 meeting would be confirmed in due course.

The meeting closed at 8:00pm

CHAIRMAN