

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CANNOCK COMMUNITY FORUM

WEDNESDAY 17 JUNE 2009 AT 7.00 P.M.

AT BRIDGTOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE, BRIDGTOWN

PRESENT: Councillors:

Freeman, M. P. (Chairman)
Bennett, Mrs. D. J. (Vice-Chairman)

Alcott, G. Kraujalis, J. T.
Dixon, D.I. Thomas, D.
Davis, Mrs. M. A.

Other Councillors in Attendance

Councillor J. F. Jillings

Cannock Chase Council Officers:

Mr. D. Hoare, Director of Service Improvement
Mr. T. Walsh, Parks & Open Spaces Manager
Mrs. C. Bowker, Committee Officer

Also Present

Mrs. M. Darbyshire, Staffordshire County Council
Inspector P. Shannaghan, Staffordshire Police (Chase Division)
Representatives from the Press
Local Residents (approximately 50)

(Apologies for absence were received from Councillors F.W.C. Allen, M. R. Green, C. W. J. Morgan and Mrs. H. M. Sutton)

1. Appointment of Chairman and Vice Chairman

Councillor M. P. Freeman was appointed as Chairman and Councillor Mrs. D. J. Bennett was appointed as Vice Chairman for the forthcoming Municipal Year.

2. Notes

The notes of the meeting held on 24 February, 2009 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:-

Minute 29, paragraph 8 should read:-

'Mr. Nick Hackney, Community Safety Manager reported on the work of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. He stated that they had been measuring the increase and decrease in alcohol litter and a peak had been noted during October/November which significantly decreased following the deployment of operation 'Matrix'. He also provided information on the licensing checks carried out within the District.'

A further amendment should be made to Minute 29, paragraph 3. The last sentence of the paragraph should read:-

'She stated that evidence had been gathered from the park keeper and diaries maintained of any incidents and there had been significant problems over the last 6 years.'

Update on Plan for Langbourn House

Arising from the Minutes the Chairman welcomed Miriam Darbyshire from Staffordshire County Council Social Care and Health. Miriam reported that unfortunately the current situation remained the same with respect to Langbourn House. The County was evaluating the usage of the site for the benefit of residents. As soon as information was available she would ensure that it was reported to the Forum.

Residents considered that it should not have been closed in the first place.

3. Chase Shaping Consultation – Core Strategy Preferred Options

The Chairman read out the following statement from the Planning Services Manager:-

'For anyone who hasn't seen the Chase Shaping Consultation pull-out in the Chronicle or the smaller advertisements in the Mercury & Post, it is not too late to have your say about the future planning of Cannock Chase District to 2026. Copies of the Preferred Options summary consultation documents are available to take away this evening and the full document is on the website www.cannockchasedc.gov.uk/planningpolicy . Comments are welcome until the end of June'

The importance of the preferred options consultation process was stressed as it related to proposed developments across Cannock Chase until 2026 and gave residents the opportunity to have their say on what was planned.

4. Update – Bus Service 31

At the last meeting it was requested that an update be provided on No. 31 bus service. The following statement was read out which had been provided by Adrian Hunt from Staffordshire County Council:-

'The meeting referred to took place on 18 May 2009 with local Members Councillors Davis and Dixon, together with Arriva Managers and myself.

Following full debate it was concluded that the current route network would remain, but that a publicity exercise would be undertaken to ensure that local residents in the Blackfords/Chadsmoor area were aware of all local services, including those operated by Cannock Cabs which serves Cannock Road.

I have another meeting on the evening of 17 June so regret that I shall be unable to attend. No doubt the local Members who attended the meeting will be able to provide further information

relating to the discussions which took place'

Councillor Dixon reported that Arriva would not reroute the bus service and the District and County Council had no powers to enforce them to do this.

It was reported that Arriva had withdrawn the bus service as they had stated that only one person had been using it. However a Member had undertaken a survey and the number of people using the service was averaging about 9.

Councillor Davis explained that Adrian Hunt would be writing to residents between Cannock Chase High School to the Central to inform them of what means of public transport was available. Ward Councillors would be monitoring that this had been done.

A Member considered that when the County Council was considering renewing the franchise for bus services that they should take into consideration that residents in Cannock Chase had been let down by Arriva.

5. Update on the Closure of Cannock Park Gates

Mrs. M. Heaton informed the Forum that she was Chair of the Friends of Cannock Park and at their Annual General Meeting held on 18 May 2009 they had voted against the closure of Cannock Park Gates. At a meeting of the Cannock Public Recreation and Pleasure Ground Working Group held on 19 July 2006 they had recommended that there be 24 hour access at the Park Road entrance to the Park which was agreed by the trustees at a meeting held on 9 August 2006.

The press reported it as an unsafe area and demonised the park and young children. There had been incidents of bad behaviour and the Police and operation 'Matrix' had dealt with them, but this did not equate to a 'crime wave'. During 1995-1999 more severe incidents had occurred, including benches being damaged. The park had received a green flag award and it was hoped that this would again be awarded this year and staff should be congratulated for this. Police needed easy access to the park to enable them to deal with incidents when they occurred. Particularly in winter the early closure of the gates was unfair to the decent people who used the park. Mrs Heaton considered that it should have been the Trustees who asked for the consultation and not the Council

Mr. Rainsbury considered that Officers were not aware of what went on in the park at dusk and the hours of darkness. He had logged many incidents and the area of the gates was often used as a urinal. One incidence related to drunks in the rose garden failing to get their car out in time who had come back with a heavy grinder to grind away at the gates. He had telephoned the Police but the culprits had escaped. However they returned and Mr. Rainsbury had telephoned the Police and the culprits had been apprehended. He considered that those carrying out ASB should be prosecuted further to set examples. A prowler was also behaving badly towards a resident using a laser light in the early hours of the morning. The Joint Operations Groups (JOGs) had identified Cannock Park as a 'hot spot'. Mr. Rainsbury considered that the park should revert to being closed and that the gates should be erected where there were gaps and in his opinion was the only way to reduce the crime that had become common in the Park.

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager gave a brief overview of the consultation process that had been undertaken. It was explained that a debate relating to 'open' access to the park had been ongoing for in excess of 10 years. A survey had been carried out by both face to face interviews and a postcard despatch to users of the Park. Of those questioned 167 (76%) wanted it locked, 52 (23%) did not and 2 (1%) were undecided.

So as to present a balanced view of the arguments a selection were given.

The reasons sited for wanting the park locked were:-

- Alcohol, ASB, Noise
- Clear up for Park Staff after vandalism
- Dog fouling – all dogs to be banned
- Who would want to use the park outside normal hours
- Fireworks being set off for weeks at a time
- Bowls, Football matches being held at night-would this be taken into account

Those against considered:-

- 9 am was too late to be opened
- By keeping people out would mean fencing being broken down and the need for it to be replaced
- Tolerance levels needed to be raised for those not causing problems
- Problems would be relocated to other areas

The way to move forward was to hold discussions with partners, consider associated costs and budgetary implications, take into account human and social issues and, when decisions had been made, provide feedback.

A resident who lived by the park reported that he did not experience any problems and regularly used the park late in the evenings during both summer and winter months. ASB was an endemic problem and was not just related to the park.

The Director of Service Improvement explained that the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership wanted to obtain more information relating to what might be undertaken at the park and to listen to those that wanted the park closed and those that wanted it left open. Costs would be incurred whatever was agreed should be done and provision would need to be included in next year's budget. Key partners would be involved in the decision making process.

A local resident informed the Forum that the park land had been provided for the poor people of Cannock to use, particularly those that did not have gardens.

Inspector Shannaghan was asked if his Officers would climb fences to get into the park if incidents were taking place. He explained that the Officers would have to make a risk assessment at that time and he would not allow them to put themselves at risk.

A Member explained that he, as a trustee, had considered the matter of the gates in 2006 and the matter had been raised as people were parking on the car park and leaving their car there all day. No mention of vandalism issues had been discussed. The gates were replaced in consultation with the Friends of Cannock Park but felt that this was a matter for the Council and not CISWO. CISWO had been involved in issues relating to boundaries because there were many plans showing this Trust Land some of which were ambiguous. It was reported that technically the golf course was not part of the park, it had originally been bought by Cannock Chase Council to be used as a cemetery, but had been used as a pitch and putt course and then turned into a golf course to earn money.

Inspector Shannaghan informed the Forum that good partnership working was being carried out to

tackle ASB problems. Culprits were caught, however, the Police had to work to Home Office guidelines, problems did not just occur in the park.

A local resident expressed concern regarding the closeness to the park of the office which dealt with drug user problems.

The Director of Service Improvement informed the Forum that there were two groups of people, some wanting to close the park who believed this would solve the problem of ASB. Other people wanted to use the park early morning or in the evenings. The park should be available to those people who wanted to use it appropriately including young people but equally local residents should be protected from ASB caused by the minority. Options to reduce or prevent ASB will be developed. As stated associated costs would have to be considered and the various options would be fully debated by all parties. Options would then be intended to be considered as part of the Council's annual budget process which commences in September.

6. Forward Agenda for Future Meetings

Consideration was given to items to be included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Forum. Inspector P. Shannaghan requested that a standing item be included on agendas relating to Police issues, and this was agreed. Updates on Cannock Park and the No. 31 bus service to be provided. A resident requested that the County Council be invited to discuss the condition of certain roads and whether there were any plans for repairs to be carried out to Stafford and Old Fallow Roads and Hamelin Street.

7. Dates of Future Meetings

The Chairman advised that the next meetings was scheduled to be held on 15 September 2009 at the Civic Centre. Clarification would be sought and provided at that meeting on the date of the following Forum.