

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
HEDNESFORD COMMUNITY FORUM
WEDNESDAY 11 DECEMBER AT 7.00 P.M.

AT THE MUSEUM OF CANNOCK CHASE, VALLEY ROAD, HEDNESFORD

PRESENT:

Councillors:

Pearson, A. (Vice-Chairman)

Ball, G.D
Gamble, B.

County Councillors:

Mrs C. Mitchell (Hednesford Division)

Officers:

T. McGovern, Corporate Director
G. Watson, Planning and Economic Development Services Manager
M. Berry, Senior Committee Officer
Ms. K. Miles, Communications Officer
Ms. S. Green, Consultation and Engagement Officer

Also present:

Chief Inspector Carl Ratcliffe, Staffordshire Police
Mark Keeling, Community Infrastructure Liaison Manager, SCC
Cindy Faulkner, Friends of Hednesford Park
Lynn Evans, Friends of Hednesford Park
Dave Wiseshall, Heart of Hednesford Restoration Project

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors. G. Adamson (Chairman) and Mrs S.M. Cartwright.

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 09 September 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

4. Questions for Staffordshire Police

Mr David Wisehall, Chairman, Heart of Hednesford Restoration Project:

“What steps are being taken and will be taken to combat the growing drug problem in Hednesford Town Centre?”

Chief Inspector Carl Ratcliffe, Staffordshire Police, provided the following response:

Enforcement action has been undertaken in Hednesford over the last few months in respect of drugs activity, which resulted in 5 search warrants being executed in Hednesford Town Centre and 4 being executed within the wider Hednesford area. Offenders were subsequently issued with warnings or disposal orders or charged. The Police have a team in place consisting of 1 Sergeant and 3 Police Constables who will deal with drugs enforcement action as required.

Cindy Faulkner, Friends of Hednesford Park – What was happening in schools in respect of this issue?

Chief Inspector Ratcliffe replied that the aim was to prevent drug use and drug dealing happening in the first place; however drugs issues were discussed in schools through PHSE lessons and Police Officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) visiting local schools to give talks to students.

David Wisehall – Have received complaints from traders in Hednesford Town Centre about drug dealers and users hanging around and breaking into properties. There had also been problems with dealers and users living above commercial properties in the Town, so would like to know if action can be taken against landlords who let out their properties to these individuals?

Chief Inspector Ratcliffe replied that the Police had been dealing with certain individuals in the Hednesford area who had been involved in drugs and wider criminal activity, and taken action against them, which led to one individual being imprisoned recently.

In respect of landlords, there were difficulties around how they can legally vet potential tenants before letting them a property. For example, the District Council and Police have a strict information sharing protocol in place which means the Council could only request information from the Police about a potential Council tenant if they had specific concerns about the individual.

The key aim was to try and give drug users some stability, which included a place to live, so they that can be directed towards different support mechanisms to help them recover and feel part of the local community.

Councillor Gamble –

1. What was the proportion of people growing their own drugs now?
2. Can the issue of cannabis smells in public be tackled?
3. As part of Christmas drink-driving campaigns, do people also get asked if they have taken any illegal substances?

Chief Inspector Ratcliffe responded as follows:

1. *The number of home growers has increased in recent years. The use of community intelligence and drugs dogs was helping to tackle the issue.*
2. *Where people were seen to be smoking cannabis in public, they would be dealt with as necessary.*
3. *The drink-drive campaign did also take account of drug-driving – officers look out for specific visual signs of drug use as well as being able to smell it.*

David Wisehall – Traders had been advised to report to the Police anything they see that could be construed as criminal activity. Do individual reports get allocated individual crime numbers?

Chief Inspector Ratcliffe replied that if the same offender committed more than one offence in separate locations, each offence would be given a unique crime reference number, as each incident had a separate victim, however if several offences were committed at one location, only one crime reference number would be given.

David Wisehall – Please can PCs and PCSOs be encouraged to visit traders in the Town to update them with the Police are doing to tackle the drugs issues.

Chief Inspector Ratcliffe replied that Hednesford had been set as a priority area, and allocated a designated Town Centre Police Constable, PC Dan Trupp. A Public Engagement Day was going to be taking place in the Town Centre on 17 December between 10am-3pm, which will give people the chance to meet PC Trupp, PCSOs and other partner agencies.

Tony McGovern, Corporate Director, advised that in respect of Council housing tenants, they had to sign a tenancy agreement in order to reside in the property. The Council's Private Sector Housing Team also had arrangements in place to go and inspect private sector properties where they have fallen below required standards.

5. Notice of Proposed Post Submission Main Modifications to Cannock Chase Local Plan (Part 1) – November 2013

The Chairman drew attendees attention to the Notice enclosed with the Agenda in respect of proposed modifications to the Council's Local Plan.

The Corporate Director advised that the Local Plan was the Council's key

document in respect of future planning provision for the District, and the development of it had been consulted on for a number of years. The Plan had been subjected to public examination in September 2013, and the proposed modifications were a result of that process.

6. Questions for Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services

No questions were received.

7. Questions for Staffordshire County Council Highways Department

Mr D. Chappell, local resident:

“Please could a road safety issue, mainly in respect of speeding traffic and traffic obstruction, be addressed? The area concerned is the Victoria Street entrance to Hednesford Park, near the Victoria Street/Rugeley Road traffic lights. On the left hand side of the road traffic is turning from the junction for the Aldi store and Rugeley Road, and on the right hand side of the road traffic is approaching from Tesco further along Victoria Street and coming around a blind bend.”

Mark Keeling, Community Infrastructure Liaison Manager, Staffordshire County Council, provided the following response in advance of the meeting:

“We understand there have been issues on previous occasions with some vehicles parking on-street adjacent to the new businesses on Victoria Street. At this time there are no restrictions to prevent parking however this may be considered in the future if problems persist.

As there is a signalled junction within close proximity of the bend and car park speeds are not expected to be high, however we are working in conjunction with the District Council in terms of the provision of additional lining in the area.”

Mr Chappell was not in attendance at the Forum meeting, however Mark Keeling advised that he had spoken with Mr Chappell and discussed the concerns raised, and it was mentioned they would meet up on site in the near future, however no specific date or time had yet been arranged.

Councillor Gamble commented that a light controlled crossing should be installed in place of the zebra crossing on Victoria Street.

Mark Keeling replied that a safety audit had recently been undertaken in the area, but there were no plans as yet to make any changes.

County Councillor Mrs Mitchell advised that she had been in contact with County Highways officers about the issues raised in the area, and had asked Mark Keeling to undertake a review.

Glenn Watson, Planning and Economic Development Services Manager queried whether the traffic lights could be altered to include a pedestrian phase?

Mark Keeling replied that there were already three locations along Victoria Street to cross the road at a controlled crossing point, and there was also a need to take into consideration traffic flow issues if traffic had to keep stopping and waiting between short distances.

Councillor G. Ball - Update on Speeding Traffic, Keys Park Road, Hednesford

Mark Keeling provided the following response in advance of the meeting::

“The Safety Camera Team continues to carry out enforcement at this location as part of a rolling program in the area. It is worth noting that the number of intended prosecutions has fallen dramatically over the last twelve months which is a good sign that regular enforcement is having the desired effect.”

8. Questions for Cannock Chase District Council

Mr D. Chappell, local resident

“Please could I have an explanation regarding how the decision was made for relocating the Hednesford Number 1 Signal Box, as I have concerns over the chosen option?”

Mike Edmonds, Head of Commissioning, provided the following response in advance of the meeting:

“The No. 1 Signal Box was built in 1877 and was one of two signal boxes served in the locality. Over the past months Council officers have been in discussion with Network Rail over its preservation following its decommissioning.

The decision to relocate the No. 1 Signal Box in Hednesford Park and its proposed location on site was made following consultation with the Crime Prevention Design Advisor at Staffordshire Police.

The proposed location near the current pavilion is considered to be the best for natural surveillance and therefore less likely to encourage anti-social activity given its proximity to this building and the main Rugeley Road. This location also means that it is close to utilities (power etc) to enable the future alarming and protection of the building.

This location was also considered more appropriate than other locations in the Park and the other possible alternative site at the Museum Of Cannock Chase.

The decision to relocate the Signal Box in Hednesford Park also fits in with the longer term vision for the park in that it will contribute to the local heritage as well as providing education and learning opportunities and in attracting more visitors.”

Further to the above response, Tony McGovern provided the following additional information:

- *Arrangements were being made to transfer the Signal Box from the railway line to Hednesford Park. As a result, road closures would be required, which the Council were in discussions with the County Council about.*
- *Expected that the Box will be moved during the first three months of 2014. Network Rail has indicated they are happy to look after it in the meantime.*
- *As part of the Heritage Lottery Fund bid, a programme of events will be organised in Hednesford Park, and the Signal Box was planned to be part of that programme.*

David Wisehall – As well as the renovation of the Station Signal, which was being undertaken by Chasewater Railway, were there any plans to also renovate the Box?

Tony McGovern replied that upon advice from the Police, the windows in the Box would be replaced. Otherwise, a balance needed to be met between renovation work and heritage retention.

David Wisehall – The Box will be a fantastic asset to have in the park for education purposes. Could it be turned into a heritage centre for Hednesford Railway?

Tony McGovern replied that this option was unlikely to be pursued as there was no current intention to develop a railway museum.

Councillor G. Ball – Update on Hednesford Town Centre Regeneration

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

- *Card Factory had now opened in one of the units adjacent to Tesco.*
- *Pure Gym will shortly be opening in the unit underneath the Aquarius.*
- *Pizza Hut home delivery had recently opened in Victoria Street.*
- *Only a few empty retail units now left in the area, commercial agents had seen increased enquiries over the past few months.*
- *Rugeley Road car park – implementation of the 4 hours parking restriction between 8am to 3pm should have commenced on 09 December, however it was now delayed due to issues between Aldi and Parking-Eye not having the appropriate signage available in time.*

Lynn Evans, Friends of Hednesford Park – How will Parking Eye affect the car park behind the B&M store and the Council owned section of the Rugeley Road car park, and will there be a clear distinction between the Aldi and Council sections of it?

Glenn Watson responded that Parking Eye had been made aware of the issues, so equipment would be positioned appropriately for monitoring purposes, and that clear signage and road markings would be in place to identify the distinction between the two sections of the car park.

Cindy Faulkner, Friends of Hednesford Park – Who was responsible for deciding which businesses would take on vacant units? Disappointed by the Card Factory moving into by Tesco as it will take trade away from retailers in the Town Centre.

Glenn Watson replied that it was a commercial decision and for the owners of the units to determine which businesses would be most suitable for the premises. The only other restrictions which could limit the proposed use were those relating to licensing and whether a change of use would be acceptable via a new planning permission.

Councillor G. Ball – Update on Hednesford Park

Tony McGovern, Corporate Director, provided the following update:

No physical work currently taking place on site, however there were several developments behind the scenes:

- *A drainage survey was going to be undertaken of the entire park to measure the robustness of the draining facilities;*
- *An notice had been issued for the recruitment of an architect to design the pavilion;*
- *Two fixed term posts were being advertised, a Community and Education Officer and a Landscape Assistant. If successfully appointed to, both roles would commence from early 2014;*
- *Specifications were also being drawn up for tree planting and reconfiguration of footpaths;*
- *Plans for a number of trees to be felled have also been drawn up, with the primary aim to open the view of the park and war memorial.*

Councillor Gamble – Heard it announced at the recent Remembrance Day service that the war memorial was going to be redesigned. Was this definitely the case?

Tony McGovern replied that a colleague from the Royal British Legion (RBL) made the announcement, and although he was correct in stating that changes were going to be made, the scheme was not yet finalised as discussions still needed to be held with the RBL and Memorial Society.

10. Mid Staffs NHS Foundation Trust Update

Deborah Neal, Head of Communications, Mid-Staffs NHS Foundation Trust, provided the following update in advance of the meeting:

“The Trust Directors have concluded that, as the Trust continues to be going through the Trust Special Administration (TSA) process, it would not be appropriate for them to attend the Community Forums at this time. The Directors would like to assure local people that services at both Cannock Chase and Stafford Hospitals continue as usual and would encourage people to continue to use them as appropriate. If there are any questions on the day-to-day business of the hospitals, we would be very pleased to email you answers/updates from the Directors.

The TSA has been granted an extension of a maximum of 40 working days before submitting its final report to Monitor, who will then have a maximum of 20 working days to consider the report and lay it before Parliament. At that time the report will become a public document. The Secretary of State then has a maximum of 30 working days to announce his decision. Because these are all ‘maximum’ numbers of days permitted, we do not know when each stage will be reached.

If you have any questions around the TSA process and future of services, these would need to be addressed to the TSA”.

11. Forward Agenda for Future Meetings

The Chairman reported that the next Forum was scheduled for 03 March 2014. Any questions would need to be submitted on the forms supplied.

12. Date of Future Meeting

The Chairman confirmed the date of the final Hednesford Community Forum for 2013/14 year as being 03 March 2014.

Dates for the 2014/15 Forums will be confirmed and publicised in due course.

The meeting closed at 8.20pm

CHAIRMAN