

CANNOCK CHASE COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
HEDNESFORD COMMUNITY FORUM
WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH, 2008 AT 7.00 P.M.
AT OUT LADY OF LOURDES RC COMMUNITY CENTRE, UXBRIDGE STREET, HEDNESFORD

PRESENT: Councillors

Burnett, J. (Chairman)

Ball, G.D. Grice, Mrs. D.
Burnett, G.

Cannock Chase Council Officers:

T. McGovern, Director of Organisational Improvement
B. Phillips, Head of Planning and Regeneration

Also present:

Press
Members of the public – approximately 20
Hednesford Town Council representative
Staffordshire County Council representative

(An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mrs. P.Z. Stretton).

30. Notes

The Notes of the meeting held on 14 January, 2009 were agreed as a correct record.

31. Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Services

The Chairman welcomed Fire Fighter Kenny from Cannock Fire Station who gave a talk on fire safety in the home.

He reported that a service was available and free to members of the public to have a fire risk assessment carried out in their home. Checks would be carried out and smoke detectors and extension cables would be checked and replaced free of charge if needed.

Members of the public were keen to know about checks carried out on electric blankets. Fire Fighter Kenny advised that checks were carried out on electric blankets at the Fire Station and blankets replaced if needed.

32. Updated regarding Hednesford Town Centre

Mr. Bob Phillips, Head of Planning and Regeneration reported on the following phases:

Phase 1 Rugeley Road. He stated that confirmation had been received from the Secretary of State who was minded to confirm the compulsory purchase order which was necessary for land assembly. Approval was published on 23 February, 2009 and a 6-week legal challenge period had commenced which would expire early April. Following this, the scheme would then be finalised, with the intention, subject to market conditions of being in a position to commence in the summer.

Phase 2 Victoria Street Site. Mr. Phillips reported no significant change on the Victoria Street site where the Council and St Modwen Developments are in advanced negotiations with a large food store operator.

Phase 3 Lightworks. Mr. Phillips reported that the 'lightworks' was now open for business lettings which included shops and apartments. The scheme was due to be opened officially on 23 April, 2009.

A local Ward Member was keen to know if the negotiations with the food store operator for phase 2 would hold up the plans for the bingo hall. Mr. Phillips stated that both the bingo hall and the phase 2 development was interlinked, however he indicated that subject to negotiations a new site was being considered for the bingo hall.

33. Update regarding Cannock Stadium Site

Mr. Phillips reported that Council on 22 December, 2008 considered a report and agreed that the Stadium be demolished. Following this, Cabinet on 12 February, 2009 considered a report and agreed a scheme to demolish the Stadium and turn the site into open space use.

He reported that the playing pitch in the centre of the former stadium would be protected so it could be bought back into use for a football pitch. The hard surface area used for basketball and other informal sports would be retained and the area of the former children's play area would be made available for this use to be re-introduced if appropriate. In terms of timescale for the demolition, this would have to follow the conclusion of a bat survey. A local resident had reported a sighting of bats on the site and the Council's ecologist had been to the site and whilst there was no evidence to suggest roosting bats. A survey would be required to be carried out from April/May time when bats became active subject to the results of the survey, the earliest that the stadium could be demolished would be from July/August onwards.

A Staffordshire County Councillor was disappointed with the decision that had been made and stated that promises had been made with regard to continuity with provision. Mr. Phillips stated that replacement sports facilities had always been dependent on planning consent for the site.

34. Update regarding Stafford Lane Speed Reducing Measures

The following update had been received from Mr. D. Botfield, Divisional Highway

Manager, Staffordshire County Council.

"Please accept my apologies for not being able to attend at this forum meeting.

As the meeting will know the introduction of the proposed traffic calming features for Stafford Lane is linked to the construction of the Pye Green Valley distributor road (subject to planning consent).

The intention is to start works on the road in the 4th quarter of the 2009/10 financial year. Expressions of interest will be sought from contractors within the next few months and this will be followed by a tender being priced in late summer of this year.

Despite the present economic climate the scheme is being progressed on the basis that by the time the distributor road is completed, approx two years from now, it is believed that there will be an upturn in the property market.

Additionally the cost borrowing for capital projects is at a very low rate at the moment and construction inflation is likely to rise at a rate above inflation in the coming years which would mean that each year the project is delayed the construction costs are likely to rise by 8-9%.

Whilst there is no obligation on the authority to implement the off site highway improvements to Stafford Lane before the distributor road is open to traffic it is recognised that this is an important local issue and following the recent consultation it is fully intended to introduce the calming scheme within the next twelve months.

I trust this information is of interest but should anyone wish to discuss the matter further then please do not hesitate to contact either Dave Botfield (Divisional Highway Manager) or Wayne Mortiboys (Project Manager for the scheme) via the Customer Service line on 0800 23 23 23".

35. Question Received from Member of the Public

The following question was submitted by Mr. J. Turner, local resident.

"The stadium has now gone; facilities are not to be completed at Blake. Are facilities to be provided anywhere?"

The following statement was attached with the Agenda which provided a response to the question.

"The provision of a new replacement athletics track and supporting facilities has always been dependent on the sale of the stadium site. Until such time as planning permission can be secured and the site sold, no funds can be made available for a replacement track.

The Cannock and Stafford Athletics Club is using Rowley Park Stadium and other facilities in the interim period.

England Athletics and Sport England are both aware of the current position on a replacement athletics track facility".

36. Questions Received from Member of the Public

The following questions were submitted by Mr. T. Leese, local resident and the following statements were attached with the Agenda which provided responses to the questions.

- Q1. "I understand that the current Liberal Democrat/Conservative Alliance intends to totally remove the Members Grant Aid Scheme and the Pensioners and Disabled Persons Concessionary Travel Pass Scheme is to be slashed - comment please".

The General Fund Budget for 2009-10 was considered by Council at its meeting of the 25 February 2009. The Council faced one of its most difficult budget situations for some time with a budget deficit of £870,000 per annum to be addressed. These were addressed by efficiency savings, streamlining of its senior management structure and changes to front line services. The latter included the deletion of the Members Grant Aid provision and a review of the Concessionary Fares Scheme.

Council agreed that the:

- The Bus Travel Passes would revert to the National Scheme
- The Chase-line Discount would be replaced with a discounted railcard, and
- The Token Scheme would revert to the National Scheme subject to the following enhanced services
 - A Dial a Ride Scheme would be provided for eligible Disabled including the Blind and partly sighted.
 - Discounted Rail Cards would also be available.

Exact details of the scheme are to be considered by Cabinet

- Q2. "What exactly are those in control of Cannock Chase District Council intending to do with the Stadium, the Leisure Centre, the Prince of Wales etc and exactly where is the money going to come from to finance these schemes?"

Stadium

This will be addressed under Agenda Item 5: Update regarding Cannock Stadium at the same meeting.

Leisure Centre (Cannock)

The priority on this site is to replace the existing 33m pool, trainer pool and supporting facilities. Built in 1974, the pool facility is now showing significant signs of aging and does not fully comply with current standards, e.g. disability access.

The following progress has been made to date:

- An architect has been commissioned to design a new pool facility.
- A design plan has been produced.
- Consultation on the design plan has taken place with the Amateur Swimming Association for Staffordshire and the two swimming clubs in the District (Chase

- and Phoenix).
- The Staffs ASA are satisfied that the design meets the national standards of Sport England and both clubs have confirmed their support for the design.
- Planning permission has been secured at the Council's Planning Control Committee on 28 January, 2009.
- A bid for funding was submitted to the national Free Swimming Modernisation Fund but was unsuccessful; no bid from Staffordshire was shortlisted.
- Further consultation with the public on the proposals is due to take place later this month.

Prince of Wales Theatre

A report will be considered by the Council's Cabinet in the next three months which will identify options and issues associated with the location and financing of a redeveloped theatre.

Financing

In the Council Budget meeting held on 25 February, 2009, a fund of £1.1m was established to support, amongst other initiatives, the delivery of new leisure facilities. This is the Economic, Cultural and Leisure Regeneration Reserve. The Council's medium term budget also anticipates that future year budgets post 2011/12 will generate a financial surplus of nearly £400,000 per annum which could be used to finance new leisure facilities if Council so determines.

Finally, the Council is also exploring the possibility of working with a private sector partner and also establishing a charitable trust for leisure services which may provide further resources for investment in leisure facilities. However, no decisions have yet been made by the Cannock Chase Council Members on these matters.

Q3. "Who has been consulted as part of the budget and how were they chosen?"

Cannock Chase Council ensures that all of its consultation exercises are co-ordinated, robust and inclusive. We make great efforts to consult with a wide cross section of the community relating to age, gender, background, working status, ethnicity, and faith for example.

Our recent Budget consultation included:

- A questionnaire in our publication Chase Matters of which 40,600 copies are distributed to every household in the district
- A local College received 100 copies of the questionnaire and it was completed by a selection of students from each year; covering ages from 11 - 17
- Over 1,000 copies of a questionnaire were distributed randomly throughout the district by our 10 Street Wardens
- A focus group was facilitated at the Council offices, participants were recruited from our Citizens Panel which consists of 1350 members randomly selected from the district and who represent a wide cross section of age, gender and working status. The panel is refreshed annually and those retired are replaced with new panel members of a similar profile. We recruited 55 people to attend the focus

group and participants were asked to set an agreed level of Council Tax and consider options put forward to Cabinet as a result of the Delivering Change process.

Cannock Chase Council endeavour to plan and co-ordinate all of our consultation exercises to ultimately provide the best possible services for our residents and to ensure that the views of our stakeholders are taken into account when decisions are being made.

Mr. Leese, local resident referred to the first question and reported that there had been confusion within the District regarding the times that bus passes could be used.

Mr. T. McGovern, Director of Organisational Improvement reported that a Cabinet meeting would be held tomorrow which would consider a report on concessionary travel provisions. He informed the Forum that the appropriate information would be relayed to the public following the Cabinet meeting.

37. Question received from Member of the Public

The following question was submitted by a local resident.

“What is the future of the Aquarius Ballroom?”

Mr. Phillips reported that safety checks such as electric testing would need to be carried out to bring the building back into use. He stated that any parties who were interested in leasing the venue should contact the Council.

Ward Members were keen to know who would finance the improvements to the Ballroom. Mr. Phillips stated that the Council had certain responsibilities to maintain the Ballroom as the landlord. However, any improvements would be a matter for the lessee. He suggested that these discussions should wait until there was more information on costs and potential lessees/users had been identified.

A Hednesford Town Councillor sought clarification on the position regarding re-letting of the Aquarius Ballroom. Mr. Phillips stated that in order for the Ballroom to be operational and re-let it would need to undergo safety checks such as electric testing. He indicated that the relevant tests would shortly be carried out and reports would be available in a few weeks outlining any implications and whether or not the Ballroom could be bought back into use.

Local residents and Members discussed various items with regard to the future of the Aquarius Ballroom.

38. Additional Item

The Chairman reported that an additional item had been received in respect of parking charges at Hednesford train station and the Co-op car park. A letter was then read out from Mr. Dolphin, local resident and the Chairman reported that the item would be placed on the next Agenda for the Forum meeting scheduled for Thursday 11 June, 2009.

39. Forward Agenda for Future Meeting

Questions for the next Forum scheduled for Thursday 11 June, 2009 were required to be submitted on the forms supplied by Friday 22 May, 2009.

40. Dates of Future Meetings

The Chairman reported the following dates of future meetings:

- 11 June, 2009
- 16 September, 2009
- 10 December, 2009
- 11 March, 2009