

MELBOURNE AREA MEETING

22nd November 2006

PRESENT:-

District Council Representatives

Councillor Carroll (Chair), Councillor Pabla (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Atkin, Bell, Harrison, Jones, Shepherd and Mrs. Wheeler.

I. Reid (Deputy Chief Executive), P. Spencer (Democratic Services) and B. Jones (Helpdesk).

County Council Representatives

Councillors Ford, Harrison and Jones.

D. Tysoe (County Secretary), P. Leigh (Highways) and G. Duckworth (Democratic Services).

Derbyshire Constabulary

Sergeant Wright.

Parish Council / Meeting Representatives

C. Peck (Aston-on-Trent Parish Council), M. Sharp (Melbourne Parish Council), J. Barnes (Smisby Parish Council), R. Parker (Ticknall Parish Council) and P. Watson (Ingleby Parish Meeting).

Members of the Public

D. Bellis, J. Burden, D. Calvert, C. Ford, F. Hinds, J. Hinds, A. Madeley, R. Saxby, K. Whewell, A. Wood.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from District Councillors Bladen, Nalty and Mrs. Renwick, R. Wheat (Stanton-by-Bridge Parish Meeting) and D. Bayliss.

MA/9. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Melbourne Area Meeting held on 15th August 2006 were noted.

MA/10. **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair advised that declarations of interest had been added to all Area Meeting agendas and she reminded County, District and Parish Councillors of the need to disclose any relevant interests. The Chair also reported that the District Council's photographer was present and would be taking a number of photographs to publicise future Area Meetings.

MA/11. **REPORT BACK ON ISSUES RAISED AT THE LAST MEETING**

The Chair invited David Tysoe and Peter Leigh to provide an update on those County Council issues raised at the last Meeting. It was reported that the

request for removal of signage had been actioned. It was understood that an Officer would be attending Shardlow Parish Council to discuss the reinstatement of Long Horse Bridge. County Councillor Harrison advised that this meeting had been held and some progress made. Reference was made to speed limits in the Swarkestone area and the County Council was considering proposals to reduce speed limits between Chellaston and Hilton. This would include a lower speed limit along the Swarkestone Causeway, but Officers explained the difficulties in erecting signage on this ancient monument. A special dispensation was being sought to overcome the normal signage requirements. As part of these proposals, a reduction of the speed limit on Woodshop Lane was also being sought. Councillor Mrs. Wheeler thanked the Officer for the response to this major problem and referred to a recent road traffic accident on the Swarkestone Causeway.

It was questioned whether the Area Meeting could assist by supporting the proposals for the Swarkestone Causeway. It was agreed that a letter be sent to the Government Office for the East Midlands accordingly.

Mr. Watson felt there were already too many signs near the Swarkestone Causeway, publicising such things as weight restrictions and enforcement cameras. He suggested that these signs contributed to the problem and the Council should take a radical approach to remove all of this signage.

Another resident complained about the sunken gullies used along the length of the Causeway, which caused a problem for some motorists. The Officer was asked to investigate this issue.

County Councillor Ford advised that some signage had recently been removed, following consultation. County Councillor Harrison disagreed with Mr. Watson's suggestion, reminding of the efforts to secure the 7.5 tonne weight limit along the Causeway and the use of enforcement cameras. He believed that the warning signage was required to enable the prosecution of offenders. Mr. Watson considered that such signage should be relocated away from the Causeway. Presently, some large vehicles travelled to the Causeway before realising the restrictions in place and they then had to turn around. He considered the signage was an eyesore and spoke about the cost of signage to ratepayers. Another resident agreed, quoting examples in Weston-on-Trent. Mrs. Burden asked whether there were any restrictions on the length of vehicles. Officers confirmed that the limits imposed were on the maximum weight of vehicles. The difficulties of enforcement against drivers of foreign vehicles was also discussed. Mr. Leigh spoke about the requirements for advanced warning of such weight limits and to erect signage at the start of the weight restricted zone.

At the last Meeting, there had been a discussion about the cost of producing the Council's newspaper "The News". The Chair confirmed that the total cost of this publication was £65,000 each year, which comprised £10,000 per issue, plus a notional annual cost of £25,000 for all other costs, including staff time. Mr. Watson had raised this issue previously and confirmed that he had now received this information. He was critical of the time taken before the information was provided and equated the extra cost reported in terms of the level of the District's Council Tax. He was also critical of the publication and asked that the District Council consider seriously whether it should be continued. At the time of submitting his original request, he had also asked for the results of the consultation exercise on Council priorities.

He referred to the lack of support for the Council newspaper, when the exercise was undertaken at the previous Melbourne Area Meeting. He had requested the results of this consultation and was still awaiting the information. He then referred to a planned survey from the Council's Policy Division and hoped that this issue had been covered. If residents did not find the newspaper useful, the Council should discontinue the publication and reuse the funding for another purpose.

In reply, the Chair spoke about the positive feedback received about "The News". Previously, residents had complained about the lack of information provided by the Council and many authorities now produced such newspapers, including some parish councils. It was confirmed that the budget cost of The News was £40,000 each year. The other "notional" cost was for staff time. It was a requirement of accountancy codes of practice to quantify such costs, but it was confirmed that no additional staff had been employed.

The Chair then referred to the budget consultation exercise, which had been used as one, but not the only mechanism to inform Members when setting budget priorities. Officers explained that information from the consultation exercise was summarised, considered by a Member scoring panel and then prioritised. Officers were happy to provide further information to Mr. Watson after the Meeting. Mr. Watson replied that residents were told the exercise would be used to shape the budget. Ingleby residents suspected that the newspaper was not supported by the public and they were wasting their time, if their feedback was not taken into account.

In Smisby, the parish newsletter was generally well received and it cost only £40 to produce each year. It was questioned whether the District Council's newspaper had the right content or whether it should be altered to cover issues that affected residents. Reference was made to the size of the newspaper and the cost of colour printing, it being questioned whether something smaller and simpler should be produced. The Chair offered to take these views back to the editorial team, but felt that the pictures made the publication more interesting. The Council was trying to reach 84,000 residents over a very large geographical area. To provide a context, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that approximately 40,000 copies of each issue were produced. Most of the costs related to distribution rather than printing. Councillor Shepherd was a member of the Council's Editorial Working Panel. He was sure that many residents did not read this publication, but gave examples of how the Council could use the news to publicise issues that the press might not cover. He urged residents to read the newspaper. Councillor Ford explained that the newspaper cost approximately £1 per household, per year. If the Council sought to inform its residents through other mechanisms, this would cost considerably more.

Mr. Watson felt that the Council could include an article in the free Melbourne Village Voice. The Chair reminded that this publication only covered a small part of the District. Complaints were made that the publication was not being received in some parts of the District, specifically parts of Ticknall, Aston-on-Trent and Elvaston. Residents were asked to contact the Council if they were not receiving the publication. Following previous complaints, this issue had been pursued with the distribution contractor. Mr. Madeley of Elvaston was critical of the newspaper's content and had received only one copy of it. He questioned whether it had an

independent editor. The Chair confirmed there was an editorial team comprising Members and a specialist Officer.

MA/12. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE LOCAL DISCUSSION ITEMS**

Initially, questions were sought on policing matters. A resident complained about vehicles parking on pavements and verges between Aston and Weston-on-Trent. This caused difficulties for pedestrians and those using mobility scooters. Sergeant Wright confirmed that where a Police Officer observed someone parking on the pavement, or it caused an obstruction, this was an offence, which could be prosecuted. It was thought that the vehicles in question belonged to people working on a nearby construction site.

Sergeant Wright would ask the local Beat Officer to pursue this matter.

Mr. Ford sought further information about a recent incident in Aston-on-Trent, involving the Police helicopter. Sergeant Wright had no knowledge of the specific case. Mr. Bellis asked about the recruitment of Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) and Sergeant Wright gave an update. There were currently three Officers, two patrolling the Newhall area and one in Hilton. Four more had recently been recruited and by April 2007, another nine Officers would be in post. Contact details for the PCSO's would be published in due course. In response to further questions, details were provided of the powers available to these Officers, the roles they would undertake and their hours of operation.

Mr. Ford commented on the recent increase in crime in Aston-on-Trent. In recent months, there had not been the same level of visible presence within the Village. Sergeant Wright would report these concerns to PC Shirley Wakefield, the new Beat Officer for Aston-on-Trent. Mr. Whewell understood that many of the PCSO's were middle aged, but Sergeant Wright clarified that this was not the case. The Sergeant also reported that Inspector Fairbrother had now left the Swadlincote Station and would be replaced by Inspector Rick Cuttell. The new Inspector would attend the next round of Safer Neighbourhood meetings. The Chair confirmed that the next Safer Neighbourhood Meeting for this area would be held at 6.30 p.m. on 14th December 2006 at Smisby Village Hall. It was noted that this clashed with a Special District Council Meeting.

Councillor Harrison understood that the previous Inspector was seeking to merge the Police Liaison and Safer Neighbourhood meetings. This seemed to have been met with approval and should result in a higher level of attendance. Sergeant Wright confirmed that Senior Police Officers would now be in attendance at the Safer Neighbourhood Meetings. County Councillor Jones explained that the liaison meetings fulfilled a legal requirement, but it was hoped that move could be made towards the way suggested.

Questions were invited on other matters. A resident commented on the Council's energy efficiency aims, but felt these contradicted a recent planning approval to allow umbrellas for a public house patio area that had integral heating, which was not energy efficient.

Mr. Whewell submitted a request for drains in Elvaston to be cleared. It was confirmed that the District Council undertook these works on behalf of

Derbyshire County Council. **The resident was asked to leave details of the exact location with the helpdesk, in order that the works could be undertaken.**

For many years, flooding problems had been experienced in Weston Road, Aston-on-Trent. Councillor Harrison recalled this issue and he understood that some works had been completed, but that further attention was needed. **Peter Leigh of Derbyshire County Council offered to pursue this matter and the resident was asked to contact him after the Meeting to discuss this issue.**

Mr. Ford referred to the Council's newspaper and suggested that an article be included in each issue on energy efficiency, to give useful advice to the public. Councillor Shepherd agreed to submit this suggestion to the Editorial Working Panel. Mr. Ford then spoke about the Green Box Recycling Scheme, explaining that certain valuable metals could not be included. He requested a mechanism for recycling such items and the Deputy Chief Executive confirmed this was being considered. He spoke of the current arrangements for recycling and the Council's contractual commitments. However, from 2008 a more flexible approach would be sought. A further issue was the recycling of plastics and technology was now available to segregate different types of plastic materials. A report was due to be submitted to a District Council Meeting in February 2007 on this subject.

Mr. Saxby understood that the District Council did not take minutes of its Planning Committee Meetings. The Deputy Chief Executive and Democratic Services Officer gave an explanation of the Minutes produced and their publication arrangements. Information was provided on the operation of these quasi-judicial meetings, the consideration of objections and the availability of documents used in the planning process. Mr. Watson explained that some residents were now fearful of commenting on planning applications, because this process was so public. It was suggested that any comments on planning applications could be submitted via the local parish council, parish meeting or Ward Member.

A resident referred to the missing mile post at Cuttle Bridge and sought its reinstatement. County Councillor Harrison confirmed that the mile post was in safe storage, but it was difficult to comment on this matter further, as the County Council was pursuing legal action.

MA/13. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next Melbourne Area Meeting would be held on 7th February 2007 at Weston-on-Trent Village Hall.

MA/14. **GETTING YOUR IDEAS INTO ACTION – FEEDBACK**

The Area Meeting considered a report on Ideas into Action. Following the Council's consultation on its Corporate Plan, an Ideas into Action campaign, requesting ideas from individuals, parish councils, and community groups within the District had been undertaken. Over 64 ideas had been received, which included:-

- specific complaints about issues such as untidy land;

- requests for improved services to the whole District such as collecting plastics for recycling;
- ideas for local initiatives that required funding or other support to launch the idea; and
- suggestions where the Council had little influence, such as dismantling electricity pylons and laying the cables underground.

It was confirmed that all the ideas received had been acknowledged by letter and individuals would receive a detailed response when the most appropriate course of action had been determined.

Ideas for improving services across the District or developing local initiatives, that had budgetary implications would be considered in the Council's budget round. Where there was no cost, the idea would be investigated and if possible, implemented. Where the Council was not responsible for provision of the service, a suggestion would be passed to the relevant body or partner.

An analysis had been undertaken of the ideas received. The top issues suggested included:-

- Litter/cleanliness;
- graffiti;
- better recycling facilities and collections;
- untidy sites;
- more trees, flowers and spring bulbs;
- highway maintenance and improvements;
- support for Neighbourhood Watch; and
- better facilities for children and young people.

Arising from the consideration of this item, there was further discussion about the collection and recycling of valuable metals. Details were given of the arrangements made in Stenson Fields and Melbourne, to provide for the disposal of these and other items. Reference was also made to the Council's bulky collection service, the availability of a civic amenity site within South Derbyshire and the difficulties for some residents in using such facilities in neighbouring authority areas.

MA/15. **COMMUNITY SCRUTINY NEEDS YOU**

Councillor Bell introduced this item, advising those present that he Chaired the Council's Overview and Corporate Scrutiny Committees. He referred to the circulated report and an information leaflet, which explained the roles of scrutiny. These meetings had a fairly open agenda and community scrutiny could look at a variety of issues, as demonstrated by the report.

Councillor Atkin provided further information on the work of the Community Scrutiny Committee, which invited contributions from members of the public to participate in its projects. The aims of the scrutiny committees were to improve the Council's performance by monitoring, questioning and making recommendations on the way that Council services were provided and decisions were taken. A short guide to the membership, dates of meetings and work of the three scrutiny committees had been circulated.

It was confirmed that the Community Scrutiny Committee's remit focused on community and environmental issues, culture, leisure and the arts, housing, economic development and land use.

The Area Meeting was advised that the Community Scrutiny Committee had completed four projects to date relating to:-

- The Housing repairs and maintenance service;
- Homelessness services;
- Waste management services; and
- Planning application services.

These four scrutiny reviews had contributed to the Council's delivery of better, more efficient and more effective services to residents and they would ensure continued best value for money. During the period to May 2007, the Community Scrutiny Committee would be investigating the following projects:-

- The future of post offices;
- How health services will be delivered by the new Derbyshire County Primary Care Trust;
- Street Scene review; and
- Cleaner neighbourhoods.

In receiving the report, particular reference was made to Post Office closures and the Chair urged residents to make use of their local post office.

J. D. CARROLL

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 8.45 p.m.