

NEWHALL AREA MEETING

12th August 2003

PRESENT:-

District Council Representatives

Councillor Mrs. Mead (Chair) and Councillors Bambrick, Dunn, Mulgrew, Richards and Wilkins.

T. Neaves (Chief Finance Officer), S. Batchelor (Community and Leisure Development Manager), N. Betteridge (Democratic Services Officer) and B. Jones (Helpdesk).

Member of Parliament

Mr. M. Todd, M.P.

Members of the Public

M. Adams, P. Bambrick, M. Biddle, T. Biddle, A. Blyth, M. Coulson, M. Dent, M. Dunn, I. Fern, L. Gadsby, C. Gillespie, W. Greenfield, G. Hall, J. Hansford, D. Hardwick, M. Hardwick, A. Heath, D. Heath, R. Holden, R. House, R. Hughes, T. Leech, C. Maddock, D. Mansfield, E. Orpwood, C. Paling, M. Perry, M. Richards, P. Thompson, E. Tunnicliff and B. Woods.

NA/1. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR**

The Meeting noted the appointment of Councillor Mrs. Mead as Chair of the Area Meeting at the Annual Council Meeting.

NA/2. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from County Councillor Routledge, the Derbyshire Constabulary and Mr. W. Parker.

NA/3. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR**

It was agreed that District Councillor Richards be appointed Vice-Chair of the Area Meeting for the remainder of the municipal year.

NA/4. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Area Meeting held on 5th February 2003 were noted.

Residents were advised of progress on several issues contained in the Minutes which had been pursued by County Councillor Routledge. With regard to the HGV restriction signs on the A444, additional large restriction signs indicating "7.5 tonne – 1 mile" had now been erected on this road.

There was the possibility of a mini-roundabout at the junction of the A511/Wood Lane, Newhall on a trial basis if funds became available. If the trial period was unsuccessful, further alternatives would be considered, possibly traffic lights.

With regard to road humps, it was hoped that future road humps installed would be constructed from tarmac, rather than the premoulded type.

The issue of street lighting at Matts Yard was still on the list for future consideration if the necessary funds became available.

Finally, the landfill site at Newhall Tip was due to finish during late September 2003 before capping in October. However, the Civic Amenity Site would remain open until after this date.

NA/5. **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair invited the Chief Finance Officer to address the Meeting in connection with the recent installation of new shelters at Swadlincote Bus Station. Mr. Neaves advised that following works by Derbyshire County Council to install new shelters at the Bus Station, maintained by the District Council, there had been several complaints relating to reinstatements together with reports of several accidents. During the morning of 12th August 2003, a meeting had been held between Officers of the District and County Councils and the following action by the County Council and its contractors had been agreed:-

- (a) The unacceptable reinstatements around the old bus shelter posts would be made safe immediately by the contractor who demolished the old shelters. Any remaining small variations of level which may present a trip hazard, especially to older people, would be marked in yellow paint so that they were readily visible.
- (b) The "new shelter" contractor would visit the site on 14th August 2003 to make good the reinstatements around the posts to the new shelters.
- (c) The main obstacle to the completion of the work to the shelters related to the completion of repairs to electrical cables underneath the shelters for shelter lighting. Unfortunately, the electricity company could not undertake this work for three to four weeks.
- (d) When this work had been completed, the County Council would resurface all the area around the shelters so that the patchwork of the reinstatements was made good. At that time, a decision would also be made on whether seats would be provided as well as the "perch" currently in the shelters. The County Council also intended to install a fence between the shelters and the car park to protect pedestrians from parked cars and prevent cars from overhanging the footpath next to the shelters.
- (e) All claims from the public for accidents during this period would be handled by the County Council via the contractor.

The District and County Councils had worked together to improve the facilities at the Bus Station and it was regrettable that this unsatisfactory situation had developed. However, the District Council had now received the above assurances that should ensure that the improvements would be satisfactorily completed as soon as possible.

NA/6. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE LOCAL DISCUSSION ITEMS**

A resident referred to the forthcoming closure of the landfill site at the Newhall Tip and queried the site at which refuse would then be disposed. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the main disposal site would be at Raynesway in Derby and the Derbyshire County Council had agreed to meet the reasonable additional costs. The new site at Moira would be ready next year so the use of Raynesway was only on a temporary basis. It was noted that the disruption to properties in the vicinity of the site at Newhall associated with the refuse disposal site should cease after September and the site would then be landscaped in due course.

It was reported that barriers had not yet been erected around Fairmeadows School at Newhall to prevent access by motor cycles. Arising from this matter, a resident advised that the area of the proposed new golf course was now in regular use by motor cycles. The matter had been reported regularly to the police and it was understood that repairs to a hedge would be undertaken shortly, which should alleviate the problems. It was noted that the land was in the ownership of UK Coal and the District Council's Community and Leisure Development Manager advised that under the Crime and Disorder initiative, an anti-social active team had been formed which was currently considering ways to reduce problems caused by motor cycles in the area.

District Councillor Mulgrew expressed serious concern at the recycling scheme introduced in Upper Midway. He felt that the scheme was not operating effectively as the normal refuse bins were only collected once per fortnight and this had led to unpleasant smells and other associated problems. Accordingly, he felt that the scheme required reconsideration by the District Council and intended to raise the matter further at the earliest opportunity.

A resident referred to a particular hedgerow along Park Road, Newhall which required cutting back and it was understood that the area concerned was to be identified to the County Highways Authority at a site meeting on 13th August 2003.

Reference was made to the barrier on the barrier controlled car park at the Civic Offices, Swadlincote being vandalised and subsequently repaired on a regular basis and the District Council's Chief Finance Officer advised that the repair cost was covered under the Council's Insurance Policy. Other items of repair undertaken by the District Council were often part of a programmed repair scheme.

The current status of the Memorial Hall at Newhall was discussed as it was claimed that the plaque confirming that the premises had been donated to the people of Newhall had recently been sandblasted. This would be pursued to ascertain the current situation.

A resident referred to damage to a new fence erected on a Council dwelling and queried whether regular inspections could be undertaken to ensure that properties were maintained in a satisfactory condition. The Chief Finance Officer advised that over a period of ten years, properties were expected to be brought up to a required standard and generally, the District Council's

dwellings were in a fairly good condition in comparison to other similar authorities. District Councillor Wilkins confirmed that a decision had been made that Officers should adopt a proactive approach to inspections and if residents advised the authority of any incidents of damage, the matter would be pursued.

In response to a query at the need for notice to be given of questions to be asked at Council Meetings, the Chair advised that this procedure enabled an accurate response to be prepared for the benefit of the questioner.

A resident expressed concern at internal improvements being made to Council dwellings when not necessarily required. The Chief Finance Officer advised that a survey of the Council's housing stock had been undertaken to ascertain repair needs and repairs were undertaken as part of a scheduled programme which was the most cost effective method. It was cheaper to undertake repairs in an entire area rather than undertake repairs to single houses as necessary in due course. A resident considered that if not required at the time, the funds allocated for the improvements could be spent on other more pressing needs but the Chief Finance Officer advised that the funds to repair Council homes were allocated by the Government specifically for that purpose.

A resident advised that vehicles were still parking on the bend at Robinsons Road, Newhall, considering that an accident at this location was inevitable and the police would again be requested to monitor this situation.

The Council Tax collection rate was discussed and it was reported that the District Council was positioned in the top 25% in the Country with a collection rate of 98.5%. This was considered to be a very efficient level and non-payers were pursued with legal proceedings, if necessary. The Chief Finance Officer advised that although the District Council collected the Council Tax, only approximately 15% was retained for the District Council's services, with approximately 15% being forwarded to the Police Authority and the remainder to the County Council.

In response to a query on the detection of any fraudulent claims within the District Council, the Chief Finance Officer advised that a team of internal auditors was in place to provide the necessary checks and balances.

A resident queried whether the District Council was meeting its recycling targets. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the Council had difficult targets to meet and if necessary, could review the speed with which recycling facilities were being emptied in certain areas or review the level of facilities at any particular location. In this regard, a resident considered that the facilities situated within the Jacksons Supermarket at Newhall required reviewing.

A resident referred to the dangerous condition of the highway at the bottom of Coronation Street, Swadlincote and it was hoped that it would be resurfaced upon the completion of the nearby residential development.

It was suggested that a presentation could be made to a future Meeting on the South Derbyshire Local Plan, which was currently the subject of a Public Inquiry.

District Councillor Richards advised that he had been requested to raise a current problem involving properties at the Fairways, Newhall, which were occupied mainly by elderly and disabled residents. The residents maintained their own lawns but children were causing problems by playing ball games on the lawns and there had also been dog fouling in the area. The Chair advised that she had also raised the matter with the Housing Department.

NA/7. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was reported that the date and venue of the next Area Meeting would be confirmed in due course.

NA/8. **BUDGET CONSULTATION**

A verbal report was made by Mr. T. Neaves, the Council's Chief Finance Officer who reminded residents that for the last two years, the Council had tried to seek the views of local people on spending priorities. Whilst resources were limited, the Council sought to allocate some new monies each year to deliver service improvements. It wanted to ensure that these resources were used to reflect the priorities of local people. Last year, the consultation had identified four main priorities, being economic development, caring for the environment, providing Best Value services and "managing our business". These were supported by secondary priorities of providing decent homes, community and leisure development, leading the community and supporting the National Forest. This year, the Council was trying to gather further information and residents were asked to complete a short questionnaire to provide feedback.

NA/9. **COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT**

A presentation was made by Mr. T. Neaves, the Council's Chief Finance Officer. He advised that the Comprehensive Performance Assessment was effectively a successor to Best Value. It was a Government initiative to help councils find out what the public wanted, to focus on the community's priorities and to improve services. The Council had produced a self assessment and was now asking people what they thought. It had identified some issues that the Council thought should be its priorities, called "key challenges". An external group had been asked to challenge the self assessment and this was known as a "Peer Challenge". The key corporate challenges were to agree with the community a shared vision and then deliver that vision through high quality, customer-focused services. The Council needed to manage its resources effectively, to listen and respond to its customers and improve service quality. It would be required to produce plans that delivered the improvements. The Peer Challengers felt that the Council was soundly managed and pragmatic. It was improving in many areas with a "can do" culture and making a difference to the people of South Derbyshire. However, the Council needed a more strategic focus and to act with greater confidence. A questionnaire had been circulated prior to the Meeting and residents were asked to complete and return it at the end of the Meeting.

NA/10. **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

It was reported that, as part of a local government review, a Scrutiny process had been introduced to District Councils. The arrangements in South

Derbyshire had been praised and were considered an example for other authorities in the East Midlands. A leaflet had been circulated to provide further information about the Scrutiny process. In South Derbyshire, it was delivered by an Overview Committee, supported by two Scrutiny Committees for Corporate and Community Services. The Chief Finance Officer expanded on the functions performed by the Scrutiny Committees and encouraged residents to attend the Meetings.

NA/11. **CRIME AND DISORDER PARTNERSHIP UPDATE**

The Area Meeting received a presentation by Stuart Batchelor, the District Council's Community and Leisure Development Manager. By way of background, Mr. Batchelor outlined the duties introduced by the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, including the establishment of local partnerships and the production of a crime audit and strategy every three years. The strategy for 2002-05 contained a mixture of priorities from Government, public service agreement and local targets. Mr. Batchelor spoke of the staffing and financial resources available to the Partnership and gave examples of the initiatives undertaken from covert police operations to partnership working, crime reduction projects to sports and arts development. Statistics were provided which showed the success of the Partnership, particularly in relation to house burglary and auto crime. In Newhall, a 60% reduction had been achieved in house burglary rates. Previously, Newhall had been the highest burglary area in the District. The Partnership's future proposals included the establishment of a Community Police Office in Newhall, making use of CCTV and establishing mediation services. Other target areas were reducing domestic abuse, a home security project and establishing local crime reduction groups, through Neighbourhood Watch. The disposal of abandoned vehicles, providing a BMX/ skateboard park and environmental improvements were further objectives. Discussions were also ongoing regarding improvements at Newhall Park.

Residents expressed concern at the regular unruly gatherings on Newhall Park which required litter-picking afterwards.

MRS. J. MEAD

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 8.35 p.m.