

ETWALL AREA MEETING

30th January 2002

PRESENT:-

District Council Representatives

Councillor Whyman (Chair), Councillor Hood (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Bale, Lemmon and Mrs. Walton.

F. McArdle (Chief Executive), K. Stackhouse (Financial Services Manager), P. Spencer (Members' Services) and B. Jones (Helpdesk).

Derbyshire Constabulary

Inspector Hargreaves, PC A. Smith and PC R. Frost.

Parish Council Representatives

N. Ireland and Mrs. J. Newton (Etwall Parish Council) and J. Chisnall and Mrs. L Nash (Findern Parish Council)

Members of the Public

S. Bell, W. Black, D. Brierley, B. Cowley, A. Crossley, J. Dove, N. Froggatt, R. Grimmett, H. Hague, M. Mason, D. Parkinson, M. Ross, I. Smith and G. Wale,

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the Meeting were received from County Councillor Mrs. Littlejohn, representatives of Hilton Parish Council and Mrs. S. Avery.

EA/19. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Area Meeting held on 21st November 2001 were noted. Further to Minute No. EA/13, Mrs. Cowley reported that the hedge at the Egginton/Etwall crossroads had now been cut and she recorded her thanks to the Area Meeting for its assistance.

EA/20. **CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair introduced Inspector Dick Hargreaves who had recently joined the Swadlincote Police Station. He also introduced PC Alan Smith, the Rural Crime Unit Officer. The Mobile Crime Unit would provide a high visibility presence in rural areas, enabling residents to report crimes and to seek advice. It would visit each parish on an eight weekly cycle and advance notification would be given to each parish council so that publicity could be provided. The Meeting was adjourned for five minutes to enable the vehicle to be viewed.

The Chair invited those present to submit other policing issues. There was concern about abandoned vehicles, with particular reference made to one vehicle abandoned between Etwall and Burnaston. An explanation was given of the respective powers and duties of the Constabulary and the Council together with the procedure which had to be followed to remove dangerous or abandoned vehicles. Councillor Mrs. Walton requested the Police to enforce the weight restriction through Hilton.

At 7.30 p.m., representatives of the Constabulary left the Meeting.

EA/21. REPORT BACK ON ISSUES RAISED AT THE LAST MEETING

The Chair reviewed those items raised at the last Meeting and explained the progress made in each case. A response was still awaited from the Highways Agency following the request for information about noise measurements. It was agreed to send a further letter to the Highways Agency to request this information.

Following the request made at the last Meeting, summary level information was provided on the compensation payments received by the Council for those properties affected by noise from the A50 trunk road.

An update was given on highway verge maintenance and the County Council's Policy regarding the treatment of ragwort on highway verges was reported. This was the first time that the County Council had provided a written policy. The District Council cut grass on behalf of the County Council and officers were to liaise on how problems with ragwort infestation could be communicated, so that the County Council could take action in line with its policy. Residents were encouraged to report specific problems to the South Eastern Area Office for Highways at Derbyshire County Council. Councillor Bale commented on the positive outcome of this lengthy campaign. He congratulated officers and the Area Committee for their persistence. The removal of cut ragwort and dealing with thistles were also discussed.

Councillor Mrs. Walton thanked the Head of Community Services and the Area Meeting following the resolution of problems with tree roots lifting the pavement in Percy Wood Close, Hilton. The Chair felt these outcomes demonstrated the effectiveness of the Area Meeting in resolving problems.

EA/22. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE LOCAL DISCUSSION ITEMS

It was reported that a letter had been received from Etwall Parish Council, setting out a number of detailed questions with regard to public toilet provision in South Derbyshire. Frank McArdle, Chief Executive at the District Council summarised the issues raised, the financial constraints which lead to the review of toilet provision and the current partnership approach. He felt that partnership working gave economies of scale and enabled services to be refocused and reprioritised, with funding directed to provide new services. An example was the recently established "Clean Team" which would provide a responsive service to such problems as litter.

Mr. McArdle explained the differing needs for toilet provision in the urban and rural areas, how these issues were addressed and wider issues including tourism and economic development. He gave a categorical assurance that the public toilets in Etwall would not close whilst the partnership agreement was in place. A comment was submitted about the costs of improving toilet facilities in Swadlincote Town Centre but it was noted that special provision was needed for the densely populated urban core. Parish Council representatives referred to the precepts paid by residents in villages and the closure of rural facilities. A contrary view was expressed by Councillor Bale who spoke about the cost per head of population for services such as public toilets and play equipment. The Chief Executive reiterated the benefits of partnership working, explaining the direct benefits resulting from initiatives like the Crime and Disorder Partnership

and the opportunities for parish councils to deliver a wider range of services through such partnership arrangements.

It was agreed that a formal written response be provided to the issues raised by Etwall Parish Council.

Councillor Mrs. Walton reported a number of problems on behalf of Hilton Parish Council. There were concerns over the condition of Back Lane, Hilton. A written request had been made to Derbyshire County Council, but no action had yet been taken. It was agreed to write to Derbyshire County Council on this matter. The Parish Council was concerned about winter maintenance to footways and had requested that Percy Wood Close and Bloomfield Close, Hilton be given greater priority for snow clearance and winter gritting. The Chair agreed this to refer this to appropriate Officers at the District Council with a view to a report being submitted to the Environmental Services Committee. The condition of Council properties in New Road, Hilton was also discussed. These properties were considered to be in a poor state of repair and it was agreed that the Council's Head of Community Services research this issue and submit a response to the next Area Meeting.

It was understood that Ashe Farm, Etwall was no longer used as a composting facility. Whilst the compostable materials had been transferred to the Biffa site, problems were being experienced with semi-compostable materials littering the site and its surrounding area. It was agreed that this matter be researched and a further report submitted to the next Area Meeting. A request was submitted for a future discussion item on the White Paper on Local Councils.

EA/23. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was noted that the next Etwall Area Meeting would be held on Wednesday, 30th January 2002 at 7.00 p.m. at the Frank Wickham Hall, Portland Street, Etwall.

EA/24. **BUDGET CONSULTATION**

The Area Meeting received a presentation from Kevin Stackhouse, Financial Services Manager at the District Council. This was the first year that the Council had consulted on its budget proposals and it was hoped to develop the process further in future years. Mr. Stackhouse explained the financial crisis which the Council had faced in 1999. Since that time, measures had been taken to ensure sound financial management, including a Best Value Review of Financial Management and Control. Details were given of the Council's medium term financial strategy, the service and financial planning process and strengthened budgetary monitoring in place.

The Council's financial position had stabilised and there was an adequate level of Reserves. However, caution was still needed and it was proposed to refocus and reprioritise the services provided. Information was submitted on the financial constraints imposed by Government and the implications of expenditure above Government guidelines. The revenue budget proposals for 2002/03 were reported. These sought to maintain existing services, provide additional resources for service improvement which were in part offset by savings in existing services. There was the potential for a lower Council Tax increase than in previous years. Details of the proposed service developments and budget reductions had been circulated.

The capital spending proposals for 2002/03 were also reported. For this year, there was a single capital allocation which would give authorities greater freedom in allocating resources. Overall, Government allocations were falling and authorities were becoming more reliant on generating their own resources. The presentation concluded with a summary of the Council's financial position, an outline of how the feedback from the consultation meetings would be incorporated into the budget process and proposals to undertake further consultation during the summer on spending priorities for 2003/04.

Mr. Stackhouse gave an outline of feedback from some of the earlier consultation meetings. The Chair reiterated the strengthened budgetary monitoring in place to ensure the reallocation of any underspends and to prevent a budget overspend. To provide a context he explained the proportion of Council Tax used by the District Council and that forwarded to Derbyshire County Council for its services. He advised that for each half percent increase in the level of the Council Tax it would only generate approximately £16,500 for expenditure on District Council services.

Following a question submitted, there was a discussion on the pension scheme and contributions required. It had been identified that there was a shortfall on the pension fund of approximately 12% which meant that the Council would have to identify additional contributions of £50,000 for the coming financial year.

B. WHYMAN

CHAIR

The Meeting terminated at 9.10 p.m.