

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE NORTH AREA FORUM
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 14 NOVEMBER 2007

Present: **Representing District of Easington**
Councillor C Walker (Chair)
Councillors Mrs M Baird, B Burn, P Campbell
R Davison, Mrs S Forster, D Myers, C Patching
and F Shaw

Representing Town/Parish Councils
Mrs J Bell – Seaham Town Council
K Younger – Seaham Town Council
B Allen – Seaham Town Council

Also Present
M Hepplewhite – Dalton-le-Dale Community Association
D B Glover - Resident
W A Place – Resident
R Blair – Dawdon Regeneration Partnership
D Consitt – Resident
P Black – Hawthorn Square Residents Association
L Black – Resident

Police
B Dawson
C Hutton

Apologies
Councillors A Napier, R J Todd, Mrs S Mason
Mrs G Bleasdale, Mrs J Maitland

1. **CHAIRS COMMENTS**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the District Council's North Area Forum and introduced himself and the Officers present. A representative from the Customer Services Section was also present to take any individual queries at the end of the meeting.

2. **CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES**

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 1 August 2007, were **AGREED**.

3. **MATTERS ARISING**

(i) **Junction of North Railway Street/Vine Place (Minute No. 3(i) refers)**

Mr D Glover referred to a property at the junction of North Railway Street and Vine Place which had an old sign erected on its gable end which had deteriorated and had now been painted over. Mr Glover explained that for over two years he had expressed concern at the deterioration of the sign and the loss of a piece of Seaham's history.

North Area Forum – 14 November 2007

Mr Glover pointed out that at no time before the sign was painted over had anyone approached the owner of the property to discuss the situation with him.

The Chair advised that originally this issue was referred to Seaham Town Council who had discussed the sign with the owner and the Story of Seaham Group. The Story of Seaham Group subsequently investigated the possibility of repairing the sign, however, the cost of repairs were so high it was decided not to proceed.

Councillor D Myers pointed out that the property in question was in private ownership and as such the Council were unable to take any action.

Councillor Myers explained that he had personally contacted the owner of the property and discussed the sign with him. The owner explained that he was tired of the ongoing situation and as it was his property he had taken the decision to have the sign painted over. The District Council were not in a position to force the owner to repair the sign or prevent him painting over it.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) **Mine Water (Minute No. 3(ii) refers)**

At the last meeting Mr Glover expressed concern that since the pit closures in County Durham mine water was rising at both Horden and Dawdon.

Mr Glover explained that if the mine water was allowed to continue to rise it would result in contamination of the Durham aquifer.

Mr Glover advised that a number of years ago he had raised concerns regarding the drinking water being poisoned by the rising mine water. He went on to explain that each year Northumbrian Water discharged 2 million tonnes of sewerage, the Port of Tyne discharged 65,000 tonnes of toxic waste and this was in addition to the Coal Authority discharging 2 million tonnes of mine water. Mr Glover was aware that Northumbrian Water carried out some testing, however the Port of Tyne and the Coal Authority did not carry out any testing. Mr Glover was concerned that the combination of all three types of waste being discharged would create a poisonous mix, which would destroy the coastline. In addition the land along the coastline was mainly arable and Mr Glover was concerned that the pesticides being used on the land were being washed into the sea and were causing further contamination.

The Chair advised that a meeting was held with DEFRA and the Coal Authority to discuss what was being discharged into the North Sea. The Coal Authority had originally given an assurance that the discharge pipe would be approximately 1.4 km in length, however the two pipes subsequently installed were only 75 metres long. Pressure was being applied to have the pipes lengthened to the original length promised and representation had been made to the Prime Minister, however the District Council had very little control over the situation.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(iii) **Excess water – Former Seaham Colliery Site/Mill Inn Bank (Minute No 4(i) refers)**

Mr Glover reported the problem of excess water running off the former Seaham Colliery site during heavy rainfall and flooding the surrounding areas of Station Road and the Mill Inn. The site, which was owned by One North East, had had all the field drains removed. However, following problems further drainage was installed along part of the site to address the issue of potential surface water run off.

It was explained that during heavy rainfall flooding occurred at the Mill Inn and this was due to the fact that the road gully was in the wrong location. Mr Glover felt it was only a matter of time before an accident occurred at the Mill Inn as it was a busy junction and there was also a bus stop in the vicinity.

The Chair advised that the District Council's Highways Engineers had reported this on numerous occasions to Durham County Council who were the responsible authority.

AGREED that the matter be referred to Durham County Council.

(iv) **Speeding Traffic – Dalton-le-Dale (Minute No 4 (ii) refers)**

Mrs Hepplewhite, representing Dalton-le-Dale Community Association reported that the problems being experienced by residents in Dalton Le Dale with speeding traffic through the village had not improved.

The Parish Council had previously requested that traffic calming measures be introduced to slow the traffic. Durham County Council's Highways Department had advised that very little could be done as there was no history of problems at this location.

In addition, residents were concerned that vehicle satellite navigation systems were directing heavy traffic through Dalton-le-Dale as the shortest route to Seaham Town Centre.

The Chair advised that following the last meeting the matter was referred to Durham County Council who had advised that they would contact Mrs Kennedy, the original complainant, direct.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

4. **DISTRICT OF EASINGTON BENEFITS SERVICE**

P Routh, Benefits Officer was in attendance to discuss residents feedback on the Benefits Service. He briefed Members and residents on his role as Benefits Manager within the Council and the Benefits Take Up Campaign.

He explained that there were a large number of residents in the district who were entitled to benefits but did not currently claim them. The campaign aimed to encourage more people to seek advice on what benefits they were eligible to claim. As part of this, a number of roadshows had been held across the district and benefits officers had talked to a number of local organisations and groups.

North Area Forum – 14 November 2007

The purpose of attending the forum was to find out if there were other groups the Council could meet to promote benefit take up and seek ideas from residents on how to get the message across.

Leaflet drops had been carried out in areas where it was felt that the benefit take up was low. The Council were trying to make it easier to apply for benefits and had a visiting officer who could visit claimant's homes and fill in the form and take all the necessary details at the property. War pensions were now disregarded for benefit purposes but generally the public were not aware of this.

Mr R Blair, Dawdon Residents Association, outlined problems related to contacting the District Council and asked if this had a detrimental effect on the benefits service.

Councillor D Myers, Executive Member for Customer Services explained that the Council had introduced a Customer Relations Management System (CRMS) which meant that anyone contacting the authority were asked a series of questions to help populate the database. It was explained that the District Council were also still receiving East Durham Homes (EDH) calls. EDH were in the process of establishing their own Customer Services which should improve the situation. Staff were also being instructed to give friends and family their direct dial numbers to help reduce the amount of calls that went through Customer Services.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

5. YOUR QUESTION TIME – YOUR SAY IN SERVICE DELIVERY – YOUR CALL

(i) Hawthorn Square, Seaham

Mr P Black, resident explained that there had been four bonfires in Hawthorn Square on Bonfire night, one as high as 25 Feet. Mr Black had reported the bonfires to Envirocall to have them removed but no action was taken. It was explained that youths were regularly congregating in Hawthorn Square causing a nuisance and damaging property.

K Parkinson, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager advised that the Council had aimed to reduce the number of bonfires and apologised if Hawthorn Square had been missed.

With regard to youths drinking and causing a nuisance he explained that there was a process to be followed. In the first instance Street Wardens would normally move the youths on, if a crime had been committed then the Police would be informed. If the situation continued then Anti Social Behaviour Orders could be sought. It was explained that the authority relied on members of the public to report incidences so that a data base of information and evidence could be put together.

The Street Wardens advised that Hawthorn Square was a "Hot Spot" area. With regard to bonfires it was explained that leading up to the night there had been no evidence of any until they all appeared on the actual night. Last year the fire brigade had put a number of fires out but this had caused more anti social behaviour. This year if there was

North Area Forum – 14 November 2007

a responsible adult supervising the fire then it was left but if it was only youths then the fire brigade would put it out.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) **Underage Drinking**

Councillor F Shaw asked the Police what the situation was with regard to underage drinking and identifying where cans of alcohol were being sold to underage youths. The Police advised that they were aware of the situation and whilst they could identify where the alcohol was sold they also had to identify who it was sold to.

AGREED that the information given, be noted

(iii) **Blitz Bus**

Mr R Blair advised that the Blitz Bus was currently touring the district. Many agencies were involved and they were distributing free light timers.

Mr Blair suggested that it would be helpful if the schedule of the Blitz Bus was publicised.

The Chair advised that he would arrange for an e-mail or flyer to be widely circulated.

AGREED that the Chair arrange publicity in relation to the Blitz Bus.

(iv) **Local Government Re-organisation**

Mr B Blair queried the position with regard to Local Government Re-organisation in County Durham.

The Chair advised that it was anticipated that elections would be held in May 2008 to elect the shadow authority and the demise of the District of Easington Council would be complete by April 2009.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(v) **Dawdon Church**

Mr D Glover asked what the current situation was with regard to Dawdon Church.

It was explained that the Church would be closing on 16 December 2007.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(vi) **Seaham Promenade**

Mr W A Place, resident advised that a large boulder had fallen onto Seaham promenade and could have caused serious injury if it had hit someone. Mr Place had taken photographs of the incident which were circulated at the meeting.

North Area Forum – 14 November 2007

K Parkinson suggested that the matter be referred to G Reed, Head of Planning and Building Control Services.

AGREED that the matter be referred to G Reed, Head of Planning and Building Control Services.

(vii) **Speeding Traffic – Edith Street**

Mr D Consitt, resident expressed concern at the speed of traffic in Edith Street, Seaham and asked if traffic calming measures could be introduced at this location.

The Chair suggested that this matter be referred to Durha County Council.

AGREED that the request for traffic calming measures at Edith Street, Seaham be referred to Durham County Council.