

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SEAHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 9 JULY 2008

Present: **Representing the District Council:**
Councillors B. Burn, Mrs. G. Bleasdale,
F. Shaw, J. Haggan, E. Bell, M. Baird
and D. Myers

Representing the Town Council:
J. Walker – Seaham Town Council
J. Bell - Seaham Town Council
Mrs. W. Kennedy - Dalton le Dale Parish Council

Also Present: J.M.C. Soppitt, G. Soppitt, R. Blair, B.A. Fisher,
D. Consitt, C. McAvinnie, P. McAvinnie, I. Newton,
Mrs. D. Brown, J. Brown, J. Humphrey, F. Humphrey,
Mrs. M Caddick, S. Bresnen, Mrs. M. Hepplewhite,
Mrs. J. Jones, A. Jones and J. Howard

Apologies: E Mason, Mrs S Forster and B Allen

1. CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the District Council's Seaham Neighbourhood Forum and introduced himself and the Officers present.

The Chair advised that this Forum had been established to provide the community of Seaham with an opportunity to comment on and shape services provided by public authorities including the Police and the District Council.

The meeting would focus on the "Agenda for Action" document for Seaham which had previously been circulated.

2. **THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING** held on 21 May 2008, a copy of which had been circulated, were agreed.

3. SEAHAM AGENDA FOR ACTION

(i) Visible Police Presence

The Chair welcomed Inspector V. Addison and Sgt. R. Smith from Durham Constabulary to the meeting.

V. Addison advised that at the last meeting the Forum identified Blagdon Road as a priority area for Police action. Residents were advised that since the last meeting the Police had visited the area every Friday and Saturday night and had stopped a number of youths and seized alcohol. There had however, been times when the Police had visited the area and it had been quiet. The Police would continue to monitor the area.

V Addison gave details of recent incidences in Dawdon, particularly around the Welfare Park and suggested that whilst Blagdon Road would continue to be a priority area, it was felt that Dawdon also required this level of attention.

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It was however acknowledged that this type of problem occurred throughout the District over a weekend.

At the last meeting V Addison provided details of an operation which had resulted in the seizure of £100,000 worth of drugs and a number of arrests were made. Since the last meeting there had been a further seizure of over 350 cannabis plants with a high street value.

Mrs Brown referred to the areas of Dawdon and Blagdon Road and pointed out that there were very few residential properties in these areas. Mrs Brown lived in Essex Crescent, Eastlea, and was currently suffering nuisance as a result of mini motor bikes revving their engines in the street. Mrs Brown regularly rang the Police who advised her to ring the Street Wardens and when contacted the Street Wardens advised her to ring the Police. Mrs Brown had also been advised by the Police that there was little they could do as they were unable to catch the culprits.

Sgt R Smith advised that he had only been in post 3 weeks, however, he was aware of the problems in Essex Crescent. The Police were grateful for the information provided by residents and would continue to monitor the area.

Mrs Brown felt a Police presence on the streets was needed. V Addison advised that the Police were doing their best and regular patrols were undertaken in the area. Any evidence that Mrs Brown or other residents could provide would assist the Police in their job.

Mrs Brown explained that photographic and video evidence of the culprits had previously been passed to the Police.

Councillor Mrs M Baird confirmed that Mrs Brown had contacted her a number of weeks ago to report the problems being experienced. The Chair expressed his concern that this situation appeared to have been on-going for a long time.

J Davison, East Durham Homes, advised that he would speak to Mrs Brown following the meeting to discuss the problems reported.

Mr Humphrey advised that he had approached the occupant causing the problem and had received verbal abuse. The occupant then contacted the Police and made a complaint against Mr Humphrey. Mr Humphrey was then warned by the Police not to harass the occupant any further. Mr Humphrey had suffered various acts of anti social behaviour including broken windows and mud thrown at his windows.

V Addison acknowledged the level of anti social behaviour being experienced and confirmed that he would investigate the matter further.

Mr Humphrey advised that the Street Wardens had been present in his house when soil had been thrown at his windows, but no action was taken.

Mr Soppitt advised that he also suffered nuisance from motor bikes and often had to ring the Police. Mr Soppitt reported that youths were drinking behind the Police Station under the bridge. V Addison advised that he was unaware of this. The Police did respond to complaints of youths drinking where

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possible. V Addison provided residents with a telephone number they could call to report any further incidences

Mrs T McCourt queried what the Police were doing about drug dealers who were released from prison and subsequently re-offended.

V Addison advised that the fact that these culprits had been imprisoned was a positive outcome and demonstrated that the Police were doing their job. He appreciated that many culprits leaving prison did re-offend, however, the Police had to work within the system. V Addison suggested that Mrs McCourt speak to him following the meeting to discuss this further.

V Addison went on to explain the centralised communication room and how Seaham Police Station was manned.

AGREED that;

- (i) the information given, be noted
 - (ii) Dawdon be classed as a priority area for Police action
- (ii) **Affordable Housing/Private Landlords**

I Morris, Head of Housing, advised that the Council had adopted an Affordable Housing Policy which required that all new housing sites over 15 units must have a target of 20% affordable housing. This could be a mixture of housing for rent and affordable sale.

With regard to Seaham, it was anticipated that around 80 new affordable housing units would be sited on the Seaham Colliery site, of which around half would be for rent and half for low cost ownership. The Council were currently in negotiation with developers regarding the exact detail of the scheme, but the current issues around the national housing market made specific timescales difficult.

The supply of good quality affordable housing wasn't just an issue for new housing. The Council had been working with residents in Dawdon for a number of years on street by street improvement schemes and had just agreed to double the rate of investment by starting two new streets, Wynyard Street and Cottages Road. Residents of these two streets would receive one to one visits with staff to discuss their options regarding the scheme.

With regard to the issue of private landlords, the Council currently operated an Accredited Landlord Scheme, with approximately 90 private landlords signed up to the scheme covering around 520 properties. There were 21 landlords in Seaham covering 92 properties. In order to join the scheme, landlords had to prove they maintained high standards in their properties and the management of their tenants.

The Council had prepared an application to the Secretary of State for permission to adopt a Selective Licensing Scheme in Easington Colliery, under which private landlords would be required to apply to the Council for a licence to operate as a landlord in that area. The Council would carry out checks to ensure the landlord was a fit and proper person and that their properties were in good condition. Failure to stick to the requirements of the licence could

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result in a fine and the removal of the licence. If the pilot scheme was successful, the Council would consider rolling it out to other areas of the District.

The Council currently took enforcement action against any landlord who the Council received a complaint about i.e. where a tenant or neighbour complained about standards of repair or the availability of basic amenities such as heating and hot water. The Council did rely heavily on the local community as their “eyes and ears” and I. Morris urged residents experiencing problems with a private landlord to report it to the Council to enable the matter to be investigated. In the last 12 months there had been 54 complaints received regarding private landlords in Seaham, details of which were outlined.

In order to ensure there was adequate and decent social housing stock, the Council continued to work with housing association partners to provide new affordable social housing. Developments were on site in South Hetton and there were development proposals for schemes in Murton, Wheatley Hill, Thornley and Easington Colliery.

The Council continued to work with and support East Durham Homes as they worked towards a re-inspection in 2009 to secure at least a two star status which would allow the Company to draw down in excess of £116 million of government funding to improve the Council housing stock across the District.

In the meantime, East Durham Homes would continue with the external doors and windows replacement programme in Seaham during 2008/09, with 263 properties benefiting on the EastLea, Central, East and South estates, NorthLea and Station Road. Approximately 54 properties in Marlborough would also benefit from electrical cable and fittings replacement works. 58 properties in Deneside would receive re-roofing and other structural repairs during the year.

With regard to greener homes, the Council and its partners ran a number of schemes to help residents make their homes more “green” and energy efficient, details of which were outlined.

The Council's rolling programme of housing insulation was currently in Seaham with the Council's partners Dyson Insulation Limited, carrying out door to door surveys to provide residents with access to cavity and loft insulation measures if required. The Council would always precede these surveys with an introductory letter from the Council to explain how the scheme worked and residents should contact the Warm Homes Team if they had any questions or concerns regarding cold calling at their homes.

The Council had secured funding to run a Pilot “renewable energy source” installation programme that would use methods such as solar panels, photovoltaic panels and ground/air source heat pumps to assess the impact of such measures on reducing carbon emissions and fuel bills for existing homes. The Council were also working with two Housing Associations towards enhancing the “greenness” of homes they were building by using techniques such as timber frames and renewable energy sources to move the homes they built up from the Governments “Code of Sustainable Homes” level 3 to level 4. The Council had also produced a Climate Change Strategy which set out further details of work in this area.

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Mr. Fisher queried how members of the public could contact a private landlord who had a property in bad repair. I. Morris advised that any resident could obtain this information through the Land Registry but the easiest option would be to contact the District Council who would carry out an investigation into the matter.

I. Morris went on to explain that the Council had various powers which could be used against private landlords. This could range from taking action regarding dangerous properties i.e. a property/wall which was unstable to general untidiness.

Mrs. J. Jones advised that many residents suffered because of private landlords who were uninterested in the state of their properties or the tenants renting them. Mrs. Jones provided details manhole cover which was missing and the drain subsequently overflowed onto the street. The problem was reported to the Council who immediately dealt with the situation. The tenant of the property had since been evicted however, the property was still in a state of disrepair. I. Morris once again asked if residents would provide this type of information to the Council in order that it could be investigated.

B. Blair pointed out that residents were being asked to report information to the Council but there was still a problem with the Council's call handling system and residents were often left waiting on the phone for long periods of time. I. Morris advised that he would forward Mr Blair's comments to Mr D Payne, Customer Services Manager.

Councillor Mrs. M. Baird referred to the 80 affordable houses that were to be built in Seaham and queried if disabled access would be taken into account in the design of the properties. I. Morris confirmed it would be and provided details of the lifetime homes standard.

Mrs. J. Bell queried what was classed as affordable housing in Easington. I. Morris advised that it was difficult to put a figure on what was an affordable house. Ultimately house builders were in business to make a profit and affordability was different for everyone.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(iii) **Dog Fouling/Litter/Re-cycling/Refuse**

K. Parkinson, Environmental Health Manager, outlined the Council's strategy for tackling dog fouling and other dog related problems.

The Council were on course to hit their targets for Seaham. Regular patrols of the Promenade continued as well as patrols in unmarked cars.

It was explained that stray dogs found roaming free were caught and taken to kennels where owners could reclaim them at a cost of £25 plus kennelling charges. From 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008, 475 stray dogs were picked up and taken to kennels. Of these, 154 were reclaimed by their owners, 118 were rehomed with new owners, 94 were given to rescue centres, 83 were transferred to StrayAid and 26 were destroyed.

To reduce the number of stray dogs being destroyed, from 1 April 2008 all unclaimed stray dogs were transferred to StrayAid. Details of the number of

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strays collected by area along with the number of dogs chipped were given. During this same period, 222 fixed penalties were issued, details of which were outlined.

Details of the number of fixed penalties issued by village were given and 46 had been issued in Seaham. Anyone issued with a fine that refused to pay were taken to court.

A wide range of educational campaigns were held during the year which included free dog chipping and poop scoop give aways. The Pride in Easington campaign had also given presentations to local schools to raise awareness regarding dog fouling.

Residents were able to request areas to be cleaned up and report problems relating to stray dogs by contacting Envirocall. In 2007/08, 391 requests for dog fouling to be cleaned up were dealt with within 24 hours. A total of 1508 complaints related to fouling and straying were made to Envirocall. The number of complaints received by the Council was increasing annually and had gone from 845 in 2000/01 to 1,508 in 2007/8.

K. Parkinson proceeded to give details of the Council's re-cycling policy and advised that refuse was one of the greatest contributors to environmental harm, wasting natural resources and increasing climate change. In 2007/08 District of Easington residents produced nearly 42,000 tonnes of household waste which was approximately 1 tonne of waste per household per year. It was explained that it cost £63.50 to landfill 1 tonne of waste in 2008/09. In 2009/10 this would cost £72.50 and the year after around £82.50, however, it only cost £54 per tonne to recycle waste using the kerbside collection service.

The Government required County Durham to reduce the quantity of waste being land filled by 32,000 tonnes by next year and by greater amounts each year, details of which were given. The Council would have to pay a penalty of £150 per tonne which would place an additional charge on the Council tax payer for not re-cycling. By 2010, it would cost approximately twice as much to landfill waste as it did to re-cycle it. It was cheaper to provide re-cycling services if everyone re-cycled, however, residents who did not re-cycle increased Council Tax levels for those who did. The Household Waste Recycling Act now required at least two types of material to be collected at the kerbside for re-cycling. The Government's target for re-cycling was set to increase to 40%. Last year County Durham re-cycled 22% of its refuse. Glass could not be re-cycled properly using a wheelie bin and the best form of re-cycling used a range of boxes and bags.

Mrs. W. Kennedy asked if there were penalties for those who did not re-cycle. K. Parkinson advised that there had been a lot of publicity about Councils that took enforcement action against residents who did not re-cycle. The District of Easington was trying to tackle the problem through education rather than enforcement.

Mrs. J. Jones pointed out that street cleansing was often carried out between the re-cycling bins being emptied and the normal household bin being emptied. Mrs Jones felt that the street cleansing should be done following both collections. K. Parkinson agreed that this would be a better way of

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working and advised that the Council were looking to align services so they were all done in sequence.

Mr. Fisher advised that he lived near the Asda store in Seaham and had recently had to move a large carton from Asda that had blown into the street and weighed 4-5 stone. Mr Fisher had tried to contact Asda on a number of occasions with little success. Eventually, Asda responded and asked Mr. Fisher to return the carton to their store. Mr. Fisher felt he was continually picking up litter and queried why this was not controlled in the same way as dog fouling. K. Parkinson advised that the District Council did issue spot fines for litter and he was grateful to Mr. Fisher for outlining areas where further attention was required by the District Council. K. Parkinson advised that he would pass Mr. Fisher's comments onto the Senior Street Warden for attention.

Mrs C. McAvinnie queried what the Council classed as fly tipping as she had witnessed residents putting rubbish outside their properties and expecting it to be collected. However the bin motors did not collect the rubbish and it was not reported to the Council. K. Parkinson advised that residents who put out their bins would have their rubbish collected in the normal way, however, residents who continued to dump rubbish on the street, would need to be spoken to. K. Parkinson explained the problems associated with proving who dumped the rubbish on the street in order to allow the District Council to take any action. K. Parkinson suggested that the Senior Street Warden be asked to contact Mrs. McAvinnie to discuss the problems being experienced.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(iv) **PCT Seaham**

The Chair advised that a representative from the PCT was not in attendance at the meeting.

(v) **Youth Provision**

S. Clark, Youth Strategy Co-ordinator advised that until 6 years ago the District Council had neither a Youth Team nor a budget to provide any services for young people. Since that time, the Council had introduced a Youth Strategy and Alcohol Strategy.

S. Clark advised that in the main it was only a small minority of young people who caused problems. He did, however, acknowledge that alcohol was a problem, particularly binge drinking and anti-social behaviour. Whilst the Police could trace where the alcohol had been purchased, it was also parents who bought and supplied alcohol for their children.

S. Clark outlined activities which had been undertaken with young people throughout the District particularly in Seaham, which included the following:-

- Young people from Dawdon Community Centre had completed a weeks residential in active citizenship and were planning a visit to France.
- funding had been secured for 4 outreach workers to be employed across the District. Deneside, Seaham was seen as a priority area

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- Positive Futures were working with Seaham School/Seaham Youth Club to engage youths who were at risk of offending or taking drugs by involving them with sport. The scheme targeted 11 to 19 year olds
- Personal Social Development – Endeavour Training
- Districtwide Youth Forum – with members from Seaham. The forum had purchased litter picking equipment, which could be lent out. Litter picks had been carried out all over the district
- A Street Champions Campaign was being launched
- Possible Youth Shelter in Seaham

S. Clark provided details of the “Get Out There” project which targeted young people who were in care or in receipt of free school meals. They could claim £30 per month to spend on leisure facilities. The take up to date had been limited however, there was still 6 months remaining on the project.

S. Clark outlined details of the mobile skate park and mobile cinema the District Council had purchased. Both of these were free to community groups to use. Training was to be carried out in the erection of the equipment which would divert skaters away from the town centre and promenade.

Mr R Blair expressed his concern that once the District Council ceased to exist on 1 April 2009 all the good work that had been undertaken in Seaham would be lost. S. Clark gave an assurance that the unit were working with youth and the new authority to ensure that the good work was not lost.

B. Garside advised that as part of the transition some District Members were twin-hatted and were already serving on the new unitary authority. They were working hard to ensure that areas of good practice were not lost and put forward to influence what the new council put in place. The transition period was the District Council's chance to influence what happened in the future.

S. Gwilym advised that through the area and participation locality arrangements the new unitary authority would be consulting over the coming months. Events were scheduled to be held throughout the District in order to allow residents to voice their views and concerns.

AGREED that the information given be noted.

JT/CB/SNF/080700
15.7.08