

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING

OF THE WEST AREA FORUM

HELD ON WEDNESDAY 4 APRIL 2007

Present: **Representing the District of Easington**
Councillor M Nicholls (Chair)
Councillors Mrs J Freak, R Taylor and
G Wharrier

Residents

G Cox, K Simpson, Mrs. M Simpson

Representing Parish Councils

B Nutter – Castle Eden Parish Council

Mrs M Goyns – Wheatley Hill Parish Council

1 CHAIR'S COMMENTS

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

2 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 10 January 2007 were confirmed.

3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

(i) Travellers – Thornley (Minute No 3(i) refers)

Councillor G Wharrier advised that whilst there were a number of travellers in Thornley at the present time they were not causing any problems.

K Parkinson, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager advised that the District Council had received a number of complaints in relation to the travellers currently in Thornley and Durham County Council proposed to carry out a welfare check on the travellers. Members were advised that the Asset and Property Management Unit were aware of the problems and it was proposed to hold a meeting with all parties concerned to discuss the situation.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) Coopers Close, Thornley (Minute no 3(iii) refers)

Councillor G Wharrier requested an update with regard to the erection of a fence at Gore Burn. It was explained that the ditch at this location was open and until a fence was erected small children could gain access.

M Smith, Principal Valuer, advised that a new fence had been erected around the ditch and all works had been completed on site.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(iii) **Vandalism – Hesleden
(Minute no 4(i) refers)**

Mrs. Simpson, a resident, requested an update with regard to a site meeting to be held to discuss garages in Hesleden.

At the last meeting, Mrs Simpson advised that at one time there had been 66 garages in Hesleden, and now there were only 12 of which 3 were rented. All of the garages had been lost to vandalism and it was only a matter of time before the village had no garages at all.

It was explained that a site meeting was to be arranged by S Arkley, Head of Neighbourhood Initiatives to discuss vandalism and problems generally, including the garages, in Hesleden. P Cox, Specialist Support Manager, advised that consultation would be undertaken before any decision was taken in relation to the garages and agreed to refer the matter to the appropriate officer.

AGREED that P. Cox refer the matter of the garage sites in Hesleden to the appropriate officer to contact Mrs Simpson.

4 REVIEW OF DISTRICT COUNCILS CORPORATE ENFORCEMENT POLICY

K Parkinson, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the Council's Corporate Enforcement Policy set out a publicly available policy as to how the Council would encourage people to keep within the law. It showed how the Council would deal with any cases within its control where the law was broken or breached. Standards of service the community should expect from the Council's regulatory functions were set out and details were provided of how these would be achieved in the delivery of different and individual services. Details of how the policies and standards would be monitored and reviewed were also provided. The policy applied to: -

- Town and Country Planning
- Building Control
- Private Sector Housing
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Commercial Enforcement

The aim of the Policy was to ensure that clear standards were set out for enforcement. There should be openness and information should be provided clearly. The District Council wanted to be helpful in providing advice and be consistent in how the law was used and must always be used in a proportionate way.

To obtain a copy of the Policy members of the public could contact: -

- Envirocall on 0191 527 5040
- by e-mail – environment@easington.gov.uk
- Customer Services representative
- write to Envirocall at the Council Offices

- the District Council's website – www.easington.gov.uk

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

5 DOG CONTROL ORDER FOR THE DISTRICT OF EASINGTON

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act came into force in 2005 and gave local authorities new powers. The Dog Control Order would replace existing controls that the Council had under the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996. It was an offence to foul in designated areas and there was a £50 fixed penalty notice and up to £1000 on prosecution in court.

At present approximately 100 spot fines were issued each year and 400 – 500 stray dogs were seized. Approximately 900 complaints from residents were received and investigated.

Preventative measures included dog waste bins, warning signs, publicity and education, warning letters, area clean ups and free dog chipping. If an area needed cleaning residents could call Envirocall and request that this be done. Last year, a free dog chipping scheme was introduced and 1000 dogs were chipped the previous year.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that new estates could not be added to designated areas and the level of spot fine could not be increased above £50 and could only be limited to controlling fouling.

The benefits of a Dog Control Order included: -

- additional controls
- extended the designated area where dog owners were required to clean up their dog faeces
- designated areas where owners must keep their dogs on a lead
- designated areas where dogs were prohibited
- designated areas where a person could only take a specified maximum number of dogs

Restrictions needed to be realistic and enforceable and easy for the public to understand. Restrictions must also take account of dog owners needs and required good signage and publicity.

In designating a Dog Control Area, the Council proposed to apply no fouling to all built up areas. A decision needed to be made on which areas would be “dogs on lead only”, which areas the dog prohibition would apply and if the Council wanted to apply a maximum limit on the number a dogs a person could walk.

There were a number of options available: -

Option 1 - a simple approach which would designate no fouling controls only: -

- target fouling as a priority concern

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- easier to enforce
- easier for residents to understand
- easier to publicise
- cheaper

Option 2 - applying no fouling controls as Option 1 and have a limited amount of “dog on lead” controls and dog prohibitions where problems justify: -

- more complex to enforce
- more complex to understand
- more signage required
- may be more costly

Option 3 - the complete mix of these controls applied across the district with specific controls to suit Town/ Parish Council land: -

- required joint enforcement approach
- harder to understand and required extensive signage
- more costly and would take longer to implement

Mr Simpson, a resident queried if the walkways were covered by this legislation. K Parkinson advised that the full length of the walkways were not covered by the legislation, however, the Council received very few complaints regarding fouling on the walkways.

Mr Simpson advised that where picnic benches were located on the walkway dog owners regularly walked their dogs to these spots then allowed them to foul. K Parkinson advised that if it was made an offence to foul on the walkway then Wardens would need to patrol the area which would result in less concentration in the towns/villages. He advised that the scheme would be reviewed periodically and all comments made in relation to the walkway would be considered.

K Parkinson asked Mr Simpson what he felt was a reasonable number of dogs for any one person to walk. Mr Simpson advised that he was aware of three people who regularly walked up to fifteen dogs at any one time along the walkway at Hesleden. Mr. Simpson felt that the area around Monk Hesleden was particularly bad in relation to dog fouling. K Parkinson advised that he would instruct the Countryside Rangers to contact Mr Simpson to discuss the situation at this location in greater detail.

Councillor B Nutter, representing Castle Eden Parish Council, advised that the District's map, which outlined the designated areas, showed the whole of Castle Eden as a restrictive area. However, Durham County Council had recently repainted the street lamps and all signage related to dog fouling had been removed, there was also only one dog fouling bin in the village and that was on the walkway. Councillor Nutter advised that Castle Eden was a 40 mph zone and the designated dog fouling areas could not be applied in areas over 40 mph.

K Parkinson advised that the dog fouling signs would need to be re-erected in Castle Eden and confirmed that the District Council were unable to apply the designated dog

fouling areas to villages with speed limits of 40 mph and over. Mrs Simpson, a resident queried what the speed limit in the village had to do with dog fouling. K Parkinson advised that it was clearly stated within the Act that the designated no fouling areas could not be implemented on roads with speed limits over 40 mph.

Councillor Mrs M Goyns, representing Wheatley Hill Parish Council, suggested that the District Council limit the number of dogs one person could walk as she had recently witnessed a resident walking six dogs and felt if one of the dogs had fouled, the walker would have been unable to clean it up.

Following discussion K Parkinson asked the meeting what their preferred option would be. Councillor B Nutter, Castle Eden Parish Council preferred Option 1 and Councillor Mrs M Goyns, Wheatley Hill Parish Council preferred Option 2.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

6 YOUR QUESTION TIME, YOUR SAY IN SERVICE DELIVERY, YOUR CALL

(i) Horses - Haswell to Hart Cycleway

Councillor B Nutter, Castle Eden Parish Council advised that a number of years ago the District Council granted permission for horses to use the walkway between Castle Eden and Hesleden.

Councillor Nutter felt very strongly that cyclists, pedestrians and horses were not a good mix on the walkway and had tried for a number of years to persuade the District Council to prohibit horses using the walkway. Councillor Nutter pointed out that horses heavily fouled the walkway.

The District Council had recently granted planning permission for an equestrian centre in Castle Eden, near to the entrance to the walkway which had resulted in more horses using the walkway. Councillor Nutter was aware that the district had no bridleways however he felt that children cycling on the walkway did not mix well with horses and there was the potential for an accident. He suggested that barriers be erected to prevent horses gaining access. Councillor Nutter explained that the walkway was not accessible to disabled people and was not DDA compliant.

Mr. Simpson explained that the walkway had recently been re-surfaced but was being ruined by horses, he advised that when the barriers were initially removed from the walkway, he was told it was in order to allow disabled access.

M Smith, Principal Valuer, explained that the District Council had allowed horses to use the walkway for a trial period only. He agreed to investigate the current situation and report to the next meeting.

AGREED that M Smith, Principal Valuer, investigate and report to the next meeting.

(ii) GALT STREET/GARDEN TERRACE/ASQUITH ROAD

Councillor G Wharrier advised that youths were causing a disturbance by climbing over cars and tipping rubbish in this location.

AGREED that the matter be referred to M Vest, Environmental Co-ordinator, for referral to the Street Wardens.

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(iii) **REFUSE COLLECTION**

Councillor Mrs M Goyns, Wheatley Hill Parish Council queried if the District Council were moving to a two week refuse collection service. K Parkinson advised that the District Council would continue to collect on a weekly basis.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(iv) **AMENITY BINS**

Councillor Mrs M Goyns, Wheatley Hill Parish Council reported that the area around the amenity bins, behind the doctors surgery, in Wheatley Hill was a mess. The bin lids were constantly broken and there was glass all over the car park.

K Parkinson advised that the bins were subject to abuse but had not been removed from this location as they were still well used. However, all the amenity bins were currently being reviewed and any that were damaged would be repaired. K Parkinson advised that he would ask C Regan, Environmental Co-ordinator (Waste Management) to contact Councillor Mrs Goyns to discuss the issue in greater detail.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

JW/MA/com waf/070401
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