

Item 2

SEDGEFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

AREA 4 FORUM

Hackworth Suite,
Shildon Sunnydale
Leisure Centre,
Shildon.

Tuesday,
23rd September 2003

Time : 6.00 p.m.

Present: Councillor D.M. Hancock (Sedgefield Borough Council) (Chairman) and

Inspector P. Curtis	- Durham Constabulary
P.C.A. Lawton	- Durham Constabulary
M. Straugheir	- Durham Constabulary
Councillor K. Henderson	- Durham County Council
Councillor J. Quigley	- Durham County Council
J. Stephenson	- Durham County Council
Councillor H. Robinson	- Eldon Parish Council
J. Johnson	- New Shildon Residents Association
Councillor J.M. Howe	- Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor J.G. Huntington	- Sedgefield Borough Council
Councillor Mrs.I. Jackson Smith	- Sedgefield Borough Council
K. Vasey	- Sedgefield PCT
Councillor J. Bird	- Shildon Town Council
Councillor L. Goldie	- Shildon Town Council
Councillor J. Thompson	- Shildon Town Council
M. Quigley	- SPICE
N. Clarkson	- Local Resident
B.C. Hind	- Local Resident
L. Merryweather	- Local Resident
V. Merryweather	- Local Resident
J. Smith	- Local Resident
J.R. Ward	- Local Resident

In Attendance: I. Brown, A. Charlton, Mrs. G. Garrigan and D. Scarr
(Sedgefield Borough Council)

Apologies: Councillors J.M. Smith and Mrs. L. Smith
(Sedgefield Borough Council)

AF(4).11/03 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22nd July 2003 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman. (For copy see file of Minutes).

AF(4).12/03 POLICE REPORT

P.C. A. Lawton was present at the meeting to give details of the crime statistics.

Members noted that the crime statistics for August were as follows:

Type of Crime	August 2003
Youths causing annoyance	28
Thefts	15
Burglaries (Other) Non dwellinghouse	1
Burglaries (Commercial)	2
Attempted Burglaries (Shed)	1
Dwellinghouse burglary	10
Assaults	4
Criminal Damage	23
Thefts from Motor Vehicles	17
Motor Vehicle Thefts	4
Arson	3

Members noted that P.C. Lawton had checked the police records relating to dwellinghouse burglaries and had ascertained that the majority of the burglaries were the result of a window being left open and the thief reaching inside the property. The Forum was warned not to leave any valuables in the vicinity of open windows.

With regard to Domestic Violence, it was noted that there had been 20 incidents of Domestic Violence in Shildon in August, compared with 23 for Ferryhill. Members noted that a new Domestic Violence Co-ordinator had just been appointed and arrangements would be made for her to attend a future meeting of the Forum.

With regard to the form that P.C. Lawton and Mrs. B. Gardner had compiled to provide information to private landlords regarding prospective tenants, it was noted that officers at police headquarters were happy with the format of the form. It was, however, pointed out that under the Data Protection Act, the police were unable to provide private landlords directly with information. They would need to work in partnership with the Council in order to supply the information. The suggestion was made that the Council should appoint a dedicated officer within its Tenancy Enforcement Unit who would have responsibility for liaising with private landlords and the police.

AF(4).13/03 B6282 AUCKLAND TERRACE/BUSTY BANK, SHILDON

Concern was expressed that a number of motorists still persisted in driving at inappropriate and sometimes unlawful speeds on the above road.

It was reported that Durham County Council had in recent years implemented a range of traffic calming measures on the above road. The measures included a 40 m.p.h. buffer zone on the bank itself, 'ripple print' rumble strips together with a number of improvements and enhancements to signs and carriageway markings. The portable 'speed visor' sign had also been used with some effect on the location and the site remained on the rota for future use.

Durham Constabulary also policed the site and had held a number of speeding campaigns on the bank. It was noted that arrangements would be made to place a traffic data unit on the bank in the near future to check vehicle speeds.

It was noted that the topography of the site i.e. on a relatively steep hill and the fact that it was a 'B' road used by buses, made it unsuitable for conventional traffic calming. Speed humps, cushions and chicanes could all be dangerous on the bank in winter conditions.

It was also pointed out that the accident statistics for the road had been checked and during the past five years, there had only been four accidents, none of which related to excess speed.

Members requested that the police should prosecute those drivers caught speeding rather than issuing warnings.

AF(4).14/03 SEDGEFIELD PRIMARY CARE TRUST

Copies of the latest newsletter "Your Health Matters" issued by Sedgefield Primary Care Trust were circulated at the meeting for the Forum's information.

The newsletter included articles a on national project being run by the PCT to reduce falls in older people, the action being taken to improve the Trust's star rating and the launch of the new Sure Start Scheme for Shildon and Newton Aycliffe West.

AF(4).15/03 OLDER PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING – WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PRIVATE LANDLORDS

D. Scarr and I. Brown from the Council's Housing Department attended the meeting to give presentation regarding the above.

It was reported that the private rented sector of the Housing market had grown significantly over the past ten years. Within the Borough, 6% of the housing stock (1,600 properties) were owned by approximately 450 private landlords. In Shildon, 100 private landlords owned 160 properties. A large number of the privately rented properties were terraced properties, built before 1919.

It was noted that the Borough Council had a statutory duty to ensure that properties were secure and over the past six months 58 notices had been served on private landlords in respect of properties that were open for unauthorised access across the Borough and 6 in Shildon.

With regard to the condition of the properties in the private rented sector, it was noted that there was legislation to deal with the issue of fitness or unfitness, however there was no legislation relating to decency standards.

It was reported that private landlords were not legally responsible for the actions of tenants. It was up to the victim of any nuisance to take action against the perpetrator – Smith –v- Scott 1973. That case law also established that a landlord did not owe a duty of care to neighbours when selecting tenants.

Residents encountering problems relating to noise nuisance from neighbours were advised to contact the Council's Environmental Health Department as officers may be able to take action under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. With regard to problems of harassment and anti-social behaviour, the police and the Council's Community Safety Department should be contacted.

Specific reference was made to the Government's proposed Housing bill that would address the following issues:

- Licensing of houses in multiple occupation.
- Selective licensing of landlords in low demand areas
- Housing Health and Safety rating system

With regard to selective licensing, it was explained that local authorities would need to apply to the Secretary of State for permission to implement a registration scheme for a low demand area. The scheme was currently being piloted in five areas within the country, Hartlepool being one of the areas.

It was also reported that the Government was proposing to introduce legislation to simplify the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.

It was noted that the Borough Council had established a Private Landlords Forum, however, there was no statutory requirement for a private landlord to be a member of the Forum. Only 22 private landlords within the Borough were currently members of the Forum.

With regard to the proposal put forward by P.C. Lawton, it was noted that a meeting would be arranged between the Council's Community Safety Officer and the Police to discuss how the Community Safety Section could take the issue forward.

The Forum was informed of the measures that the Council was taking to address the fall in demand for the pre 1919 terraced housing. They included: Group Repair Schemes, Clearance Schemes involving

Compulsory Purchase and the establishment of a Home Improvement Agency.

Specific reference was also made to the work being done to address the issues of housing market failure in the former coalfields area within the Districts of Durham, Easington and Wear Valley. It was explained that within each settlement, there was usually an area typically comprising pre 1919 terrace or social housing displaying severe symptoms of market failure. Application was being made to English Partnership for grant aid to address the problems.

Concern was expressed regarding the problem with rats in Sunnydale Shildon. It was agreed that the matter would be referred to the Council's Environmental Health Department.

Concern was also expressed regarding tenants being allowed to transfer to other Council properties within the Borough when the condition of their property/garden was not considered satisfactory. It was pointed out that the Council's Housing Officers did inspect properties before tenants were allowed to transfer, however, the Council had very few grounds on which to refuse transfer.

It was pointed out that it was a very onerous procedure to evict a secure tenant. The Council needed to have very detailed and accurate evidence to convince a judge that the tenant had been given a number of opportunities to either pay the outstanding rent and/or rectify the condition of the property.

It was proposed that the Borough Housing Officer should be invited to a future meeting of the Forum to explain the Council's housing allocation and management procedures.

AF(4).16/03 COMMUNITY STRATEGY

A. Charlton – Sedgefield Borough LSP Co-ordinator was present at the meeting to give a presentation on the draft Community Strategy that had been launched for consultation.

The vision of the Strategy was to make the Borough a better place to live and to improve the economic social and environmental wellbeing of the area. The Strategy was important to ensure the delivery of more effective and co-ordinated services and to identify the needs of service users. It would also identify and prioritise those activities that would be needed to implement the Strategy.

The Strategy had been developed through the Borough's Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and agreed by the LSP Board in April 2003. The Strategy was a 10 year vision, with clear priorities aimed at addressing the real issues facing the Borough and would provide a framework for prioritising actions, deploying resources and monitoring activities.

Specific reference was made to the four key priorities of the Strategy which were the promotion of:

- A healthy Borough
- A prosperous Borough
- An attractive Borough and
- A Borough with strong communities

The Strategy would be considered at the LSP Annual Conference on 21st November 2003. An Action Plan Framework and a series of Annual Plans would be developed and the final Strategy would be submitted to the LSP Board in January 2004 for approval.

The Forum was asked to submit any comments they had on the Strategy to the Council's Regeneration Section.

It was noted that Shildon Community Forum would meet on Thursday 6th November 2003 between 10.00 and 12 noon at Jubilee Fields Community Centre to consider the Strategy. All residents of Shildon were invited to attend the Forum meeting and have their say.

AF(4).17/03 STREET CLEANSING

Concern was expressed regarding the number and size of weeds growing along the two main thoroughfares of Shildon. The Chairman reported that the matter had already been referred to the Council's Environmental Services Department.

Concern was also expressed regarding the height of some trees in Shildon. It was reported that the Shildon Housing Office had arranged for a number of trees to be pruned at the end of October 2003.

AF(4).18/03 REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES

Specific reference was made to the proposed establishment of directly elected Regional Assemblies, and the request was made that the general public be given information on the costs of the various options for the establishment of unitary authorities for County Durham, prior to a referendum being held.

It was explained that the Boundary Committee for England was currently undertaking an independent review of local government structures and would recommend the most effective unitary structure for the region. Until its recommendations were known, costs could not be estimated.

AF(4).19/03 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Tuesday 18th November 2003 at 6.30 p.m. at Shildon Sunnydale Leisure Centre.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Any person wishing to exercise the right of inspection, etc., in relation to these Minutes and associated papers should contact Gillian Garrigan, Spennymoor 816166, Ext. 4237