

## **THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE SEAHAM NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM**

**HELD ON WEDNESDAY 21 MAY 2008**

Present: **Representing the District of Easington**  
Councillor C. Walker (Chair)  
Councillors Mrs. G. Bleasdale, D. Myers,  
M. Baird, F. Shaw

**Representing Town/Parish/County Councils**  
J. Walker – Seaham Town Council  
S. Cudlip – Seaham Town Council  
B. Allen – Seaham Town Council  
B. Arthur – Durham County Council  
W. Kennedy – Dalton Le Dale Parish Council

**Also Present**

M. Hepplewhite - Dalton Le Dale Community Association  
R. Blair - Seaham Health Forum  
D.B. Glover – Resident  
J. Gibson – Resident  
A. Place – Resident  
B. Mitchell – Resident  
P. Taylor – Resident

Apologies: Councillor Mrs S Forster

### **1. CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION**

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

The Chair advised that a number of people present had attended a pilot meeting held in March at Parkside Community Centre. This Forum had been established to provide the communities of Seaham with an opportunity to comment on and shape services provided by public authorities including the Police and the District Council.

There was a number of Officers present who would discuss a wide range of initiatives which would be tackled as issues identified as being high priority by those present at the pilot meeting.

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

Representatives from the Council's Customer Services Section were also present to advise on individual queries at the end of the meeting.

J. Brindle, Assistant Chief Executive, explained the background to the establishment of the Seaham Neighbourhood Forum and gave details of the pilot meeting which was facilitated by East Durham Trust. The pilot had identified issues which people saw as priorities and made up the "Agenda for Action".

**2. SEAHAM AGENDA FOR ACTION**

**(i) Swimming Pool Feasibility**

P Irwin, Senior Cultural Development Officer advised that the Council were working in partnership with a number of organisations, particularly Durham Sport, to look at the feasibility of a swimming pool in the north of the District. Durham Sport had undertaken consultation with various stakeholders i.e. schools and local business' and a report looking at a range of issues including finance for the proposal, a business plan and sustainability of a pool would be forthcoming.

Mr Glover advised that there were two former pit sites in Seaham which were suitable locations for a pool. The catchment area of Seaham, Murton and the surrounding villages was large enough to sustain a pool.

Councillor F Shaw pointed out that the prospect of attracting a pool to the north of the district was slim unless it was in partnership with an education authority. The catchment area may not be big enough to sustain a pool and whilst it was possible to raise the capital to build the facility it would be the ongoing revenue costs that would be difficult to sustain.

Mr S Cudlip, Seaham Town Council stated that the only possible location for a pool in the north of the district was Seaham and Building Schools for the Future was an opportunity to provide a pool in the town. A feasibility study was being undertaken on a number of sites in the district not just Seaham. However, Seaham Town Council would like the Seaham Neighbourhood Forum to endorse Seaham as the preferred location.

Councillor B Arthur endorsed the idea of a pool being built as part of a new educational building in Seaham and stated that other areas within the County with a similar population were able to sustain a pool.

P Irwin advised that all of the comments made would be taken on board.

**AGREED** that the Seaham Neighbourhood Forum endorse Seaham as the preferred location for a pool in the north of the district.

**(ii) Visible Police Presence and Action of Youths Drinking/Drugs**

Inspector V Addison, Durham Constabulary advised that in the north of County Durham the Police priorities included drugs and anti social behaviour and within the Seaham area criminal damage, anti social behaviour and street drinking were local priorities.

These priorities were very similar to those of the Community Safety Partnership which was well established in the area. Last years strategic assessment had identified Easington Colliery and Deneside as two areas for action, where crime and anti social behaviour had previously been high. Since their introduction there had been a reduction in the number of incidents.

Residents had now identified Westlea and Blagdon Road as priority areas which required Police attention.

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Mr Glover explained the Blagdon Road was the road leading to what was known locally as the “bull fields” which was used as a regular meeting spot for youths to race cars.

V Addison asked if the Forum wished to identify these areas as priorities. This would mean diverting resources from other areas within Seaham as the Police only had limited resources and this was not an area which would normally be seen as high priority by the Police. V Addison went on to provide details of a recent operation which had resulted in the seizure of £100,000 worth of drugs and a number of arrests.

Mrs W Kennedy confirmed that the owner of the “bull fields” was experiencing problems with youths and racing vehicles. Meetings had been held to tackle it and measures taken to prevent access into the field. V Addison confirmed that this area would be investigated.

Mr B Blair stated that the Forum was looking for positive Police action in Seaham. Particularly in relation to young people, street drinking and anti social behaviour. He felt stronger action was needed and the sale of alcohol to youths needed to be tackled. There were areas where there were signs banning the drinking of alcohol in the street but the Police never enforced it.

V Addison confirmed that the Police did enforce the law and took strong enforcement action where appropriate. However, the Police had limited resources and the wider community as well as the parents of the youths also had a part to play.

The Chair pointed out that the Police did work closely with local shopkeepers to control the sale of alcohol to youths.

Councillor F Shaw agreed that parents had to take some responsibility for what their children got up to.

V Addison explained that the Police were aware of the problems related to retailers selling alcohol to youths and provided details of operation “Leon” a sustained campaign related to youths purchasing alcohol.

It was pointed out that each can of alcohol could be identified and traced to where it was purchased.

Mrs M Hepplewhite felt that the on going effort to stop retailers selling alcohol to youths was needed but there was also the problem of parents buying it for their children.

**AGREED** the Blagdon Road be classed as a priority area for Police action.

### (iii) **Dog Fouling**

K Parkinson, Environmental Health Manager advised that the Council’s strategy for tackling dog fouling and other dog related problems involved;-

- Catching stray dogs and removing them from the streets,
- Issuing spot fines of £80 to anyone caught not cleaning up after their dog,
- Responding to complaints from residents and carrying out targeted patrols and investigations,

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- Installing signs and litter/poop scoop bins,
- Cleaning heavily fouled areas that were reported
- A wide range of educational activities

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 owner, 118 were rehomed with new owners, 94 were given to rescue centres, 83 were transferred to stray aid 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 strays collected by area along with the number of dogs chipped were given.

It was reported that during this period the following 222 fixed penalties were issued:

95	Dog Fouling
109	Litter (19 from vehicles)
16	Fly Tipping
2	Graffiti

Details of the number of 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 1508 in 2007/08.

It was suggested that a target of 50 spot fines and 70 stray dogs collected be set as a target for Seaham.

Previously the sea front and beach area were classed as priority areas, K Parkinson asked if there were any other areas that should be considered a priority.

Councillor F Shaw pointed out that in order to make an impact resources needed to be channelled to one particular area. In Dawdon people walked up to 5 dogs and it was impossible for them to clean up after them when they had that many. K Parkinson agreed that these areas could be patrolled.

Mrs W Kennedy asked about horses fouling the pavements. K Parkinson advised there was no legislation to tackle this problem.

Councillor B Allan asked if there was anything the Parish/Town Councils could do to tackle this. K Parkinson advised that Parish/Town Councils did have the powers to appoint their own wardens if they wished.

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Mr D Glover asked what action was taken against people discarding chewing gum onto the pavement. K Parkinson advised that this had never been seen as a priority area as very few complaints were received.

**AGREED** that the issuing of 50 spot fines and collection of 70 stray dogs be set as a target for Seaham.

### (iv) **Dangerous Parking**

V Addison advised that whilst the Police were aware of the parking problems in Seaham, from their point of view, it was not a priority. PCSO's could be trained in this area but it would mean diverting resources from other areas to tackle parking issues. Unless a vehicle was dangerous or causing an obstruction then the Police liked to adopt a common sense approach to the problem. There was also the possibility of a backlash against the Police if they were perceived as spending all their time and resources issuing parking tickets. There were plans to provide a 100 space car park in Seaham.

Councillor F Shaw reported that PCSO's were issuing parking tickets to cars parked around the Library displaying disabled badges. V Addison agreed to investigate.

Mrs J Gibson outlined problems related to parking at Mill Dale. V Addison advised that this was an area the Police were investigating. Mrs P Taylor advised this was also the case on Westlea where the roads were not wide enough to accommodate the cars on the estate so they had to park on the pavement.

Mr Glover explained that various parts of westlea were on a bus route and the parked cars caused an obstruction for the buses.

**AGREED** that the information given, be noted.

### (v) **Job Opportunities**

S. James, Principal Economic Development Manager, advised that East Durham Business Service (EDBS) provided an economic development service for the District of Easington Council. The unit worked closely with local and regional partners to develop, manage and implement a variety of initiatives to create a diverse and strong local economy in East Durham. The activity was wide ranging and included managing capital projects, providing modern and appropriate business accommodation, marketing East Durham as a business location, encouraging people into work, creating an entrepreneurial culture and providing advice to companies wanting to expand or relocate to the area.

Details of the Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (LEGI) were outlined. The aim was to release the economic and productivity potential of deprived areas through enterprise and investment. The "Be Enterprising" LEGI Programme submitted by Derwentside, Easington, Sedgefield and Wear Valley District Council's was approved in February 2006 details of which were outlined.

LEGI had funded 7 "Be Enterprising" Coaches across the District, 2 of which were based in Seaham. The coaches assisted with a range of issues and within the last financial year there were 139 NRF business start ups and 498 individual clients were advised on start ups.

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The Lifelong Learning Co-ordinator offered financial assistance to help people acquire new skills and qualifications to help them move into self employment. In addition, information, advice and guidance were provided on training/service providers and potential funding streams for education and learning. There were a number of grants related to skills and learning that were available, details of which were outlined.

The Business Service was involved with Byron Place and the "Working Together Forum" details of which were provided.

The Retail Business Support Adviser offered advice to retailers on improving access to business support and helping address issues such as security, development and premises improvement. A number of premises grants were available such as the Retail Improvement Grant. This grant was funded by NRF and provided a maximum of £7,000 to retail business to improve both the interior and exterior appearance. Twelve businesses had benefited from the grant in Seaham.

The Commercial Improvement Grant covered the Conservation area in Seaham and was jointly funded by the District of Easington and Durham County Council. A maximum of £7,000 could be awarded to businesses to improve the exterior. Six businesses had benefited from the grant in Seaham.

Apprenticeships East Durham was run by EDBS, Connexions East Durham and Easington Action for Jobs and was funded by the County Durham Learning and Skills Council. The scheme allowed young people to earn money at the same time as gaining nationally recognised qualifications in a diverse range of sectors. Since the introduction of the scheme in May 2004, 290 young people across the District had been placed into apprenticeships.

Mr Glover stated that the grants available for the exterior of premises in Church Street should also be used to tidy up the back of the properties.

Mrs W Kennedy compared Church Street to the Headland area of Hartlepool and the improvements that had been made to the conservation area. The Chair explained that various offers had been put to the owners who were encouraged to take up the grant but it could not be forced upon them.

**AGREED** that the information given, be noted.

### (vi) **Strengthen Local Trade**

T Forster, Regeneration Projects Manager advised that the Council had implemented a package of regeneration measures which focussed on Seaham Town Centre.

As people moved away from the Town it was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain a large town centre.

The measures comprised of a number of environmental enhancements which aimed at improving the sea front and town centre to make it a more attractive place to visit. The new residential development at East Shore Village had helped to create a greater population base for Seaham and thereby greater spending within the Town. There had also been economic development through job creation on the Spectrum Business Park and Byron Place shopping centre.

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The effect of these measures was to maintain Seaham's role as a major town centre in the County.

Such a vast range of improvements inevitably led to a certain amount of disruption. With regard to Church Street this had had an impact on traders, who had experienced a drop in trade through the opening of Byron Place. However, it was hoped this was short term and would be redressed through the re-building of St Johns Sq and a new marina at North Dock, both of which had secured funding.

It was acknowledged that further work was needed with traders to help sustain local business until such time as these additional developments were in place. A traders' forum had been established and the Council were working with them to address their concerns and issues. There was now good dialogue with the traders and a number of initiatives had been introduced to help strengthen local trade.

Concerns had previously been expressed in relation to the level of car parking in the town centre and an additional 700 places had been provided and an extra 100 were proposed.

Further details were provided of the commercial building and retail premises improvement grants, which were available to help towards new facades and internal fixtures and fittings. A significant number of properties had now been improved and benefited from the grants. Work was also underway to look at ways in which the first floors of the retail properties could be brought back into productive use and an enhancement scheme was being looked at to complement this.

In addition signage and way marking was being considered as well as improving linkages between the existing retail centre and other new developments.

The intention of these complementary measures was to ensure the viability of Seaham, as a major centre, was safeguarded in the future and the entire business community continued to prosper.

Mr Glover queried if the taxi rank in Church Street would be affected by the proposals. T Forster advised that the taxi rank would not be affected by the development and explained that there would also be a free phone taxi located within the new PCT development. Mr Glover advised that there was a walkway outside ASDA that could be used as a taxi rank. He was fearful that once the development was completed there would be nowhere for taxi's to stop. In addition now that the central bus station was gone there was only so many stops that people could get on and off at. The Chair advised that he had seen the plans and the taxi rank was not affected by the new development.

Mrs B Mitchell asked why the old bus station was demolished before the new one was built. Councillor D Myers explained that there were adequate temporary bus stops in place until the new bus station was built and pointed out that the Council could not erect a bus stop on land that did not belong to them.

Mrs M Hepplewhite asked if the shop keepers in Church Street were tenants or owners and were they experiencing problems accessing the grants available. T Forster was not aware of any problems with the owners accessing grants. D Glover asked if the grants could be used to improve the back of the shops. T Forster confirmed that the grant could only be used to improve the fronts of the premises.

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Councillor D Myers pointed out that a strong Chamber of Trade should be looking at the opening hours of Church Street, particularly the half day closing on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

**AGREED** that the information given, be noted.

### (vii) **Affordable Housing/Private Landlord**

L. Ogilvie, Care Services Manager, was in attendance at the meeting representing I Morris, Head of Housing who had submitted his apologies.

L. Ogilvie circulated a paper which had been prepared by the Head of Housing and explained that the strategy outlined covered the whole of the District and if requested a specific strategy and action plan for Seaham could be prepared for the next meeting.

With regard to the external doors and windows replacement programme Mrs B Mitchell asked why Westlea was not included in the scheme, similarly Mrs J Gibson queried the situation at Mill dale. L Ogilvie apologised and advised that specific questions would be answered at the next meeting by the Head of Housing.

Following further questions J Brindle advised that it was clear there were a number of issues related to housing in Seaham which were high priority and it was clear that an action plan specific to Seaham was needed. It was proposed that this item be placed on the Agenda for the next meeting and given a high priority on the agenda.

Mrs P Taylor asked why the Council continued to sell off houses when there was a high demand for them and pointed out that some houses stood empty for years. B Garside apologised for the absence of the Head of Housing and stated that these issues would be fully discussed at the next meeting.

Mrs J Gibson asked why there was no representative from EDH to answer questions in relation to replacement windows. J James, Acting Director of Property Investment proceeded to explain which schemes had been completed in Westlea and what achieving two star status would mean to the Council and residents.

**AGREED** that further consideration be given to this item at the next meeting.

### 3. **SEAHAM AGENDA FOR ACTION DOCUMENT**

B. Garside explained that the Seaham Neighbourhood Forum was a new initiative and asked those present if they were happy with the format of the meeting and the agenda.

It was acknowledged that Housing was a high priority and would need to be discussed in greater detail at the next meeting, however, it was important that the priorities originally identified were right and if there were any other priorities that had been identified.

B. Blair explained that he would like to see issues related to the PCT in Seaham and youth provision adding to the Agenda.

With regard to the venue for meetings B. Garside explained that transport could be provided for anyone with transport problems.

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J. Brindle pointed out that Officers had provided a lot of information at this meeting and the job was now to focus on the detail. She acknowledged that other partners such as Durham County Council and the PCT needed to be involved.

Mr. Glover asked for further information in relation to the refuse collection service and particularly the no side waste policy.

**AGREED** that;

- (i) issues related to the PCT in Seaham and youth provision be added to the priorities for action;
- (ii) O. Sherratt be invited to attend the next meeting to discuss refuse collection and the no side waste policy.

JT/CB/SNF/080500  
29.5.08