

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
WEST AREA FORUM
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 30 NOVEMBER, 2005**

Present: **Representing the District of Easington**
Councillor M Nicholls (Chair)
Councillor D Chaytor, Mrs J Freak, R Taylor,
G Wharrier, B Wilson

Representing Parish Councils
Mrs M Nicholls – Wheatley Hill Parish Council

Residents
M Wigham, C Thompson, G Thompson

Apologies: Councillor B Bates and Mr B Chatterley

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 7 September, 2005, were confirmed.

3 FOLLOW UP FROM THE LAST MEETING

(i) Travellers – Hartlepool Street, Thornley

K Parkinson, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager advised that the travellers located at Hartlepool Street, Thornley had moved on. It was explained that enforcement work undertaken by the District Council had been effective and acted as a deterrent in this instance.

It was explained that Hartlepool Street was currently being developed and barriers had been erected elsewhere in the village to deter access. The position would be reviewed in the new year as this was a problem which could potentially affect other areas within the District.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) Litter – Wheatley Hill

K Parkinson, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager, advised that the Council proposed to undertake a programme of pre-christmas clean ups across the district and Wheatley Hill was one of the areas to be targeted. With regard to litter enforcement in Wheatley Hill there was particular problems with empty pizza boxes and the Council was in discussion with the pizza shop owners to ensure that they kept the area directly outside their premises clean and tidy.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(iii) **Amenity Bins**

K Parkinson, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager, advised that the contractor employed to empty the bottle banks at Wheatley Hill Workmen's Club had been advised of the lack of collections.

Members were advised that there had been problems throughout the district with bottle bank lids not being locked. The contractors had been advised of this and it had been agreed that Street Wardens would carry a locking key in each vehicle so they were able to lock bottle bank bin lids as and when they came across them. The ideal situation would be for the contractor to ensure that all bin lids were locked and secure after each collection. It was also pointed out that in the short term Parish/Town Councils could be provided with a key to lock the amenity bins if requested.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(iv) **Castle Eden – Walkway**

K Mullender, Valuation and Estates Officer, advised that the Castle Eden walkway had been fully discussed with Members and a report would be submitted to Full Council in the near future.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

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

(i) **Thornley**

Councillor B Wilson queried the current level of Police activity in Thornley compared to the beginning of the year. Sergeant Dickinson advised that compared to the beginning of the year incidents in Thornley had reduced. Councillor Wilson expressed concern at the recent problems around the Gorehill Estate area. Sergeant Dickinson advised that he would speak direct to Councillor Wilson following the meeting.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) **Under-age Drinking**

Councillor D Taylor queried the situation in the west of the district in relation to under-age drinking and quoted the Evenwood Initiative. Sergeant Dickinson explained that in order for an initiative similar to that at Evenwood to progress successfully it was important at the initial stages to have retailers on board. As an example it was explained that retailers could mark bottles/cans of alcohol with infrared pens which would identify when and where the alcohol had been purchased.

K Parkinson advised that the District Council intended to review the current Byelaws, which prevented the consumption of alcohol in designated places throughout the district. The District Council

proposed to introduce Byelaws in four target "hotspot" areas throughout the district. In order to progress this the Authority were looking to local communities to provide evidence for where these four "hotspot" areas should be. Councillor G Wharrier advised that he had recently applied for a Byelaw to prevent the consumption of alcohol in designated places in Thornley and asked if this could be considered as one of the four "hotspot" areas.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

5 CLEAN NEIGHBOURHOODS AND ENVIRONMENT ACT 2005

K Parkinson, Environmental Health and Licensing Manager, gave a presentation on the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 which would be phased in over the next year and gave potential new powers to Local Authorities.

Councillor B Wilson queried who was responsible for the removal of rubbish from land where ownership was unknown. K Parkinson advised that in instances where ownership was unknown the authority could remove the rubbish but there was limited budgets which had to be allocated throughout the district. It was explained that the District Council had its own mobile CCTV which could be temporarily erected in "hotspot" fly tipping areas.

Councillor B Wilson expressed concern at the number of ex-council houses that, once bought, were left in a state of disrepair and it was often difficult to track down the owners in order to serve Orders to have the property repaired. K Parkinson advised that under current legislation there was a range of measures available under both Environmental Health and Planning legislation that the authority could use to have the property repaired.

K Parkinson advised that under Environmental Health legislation the authority had to prove that the house was in disrepair and causing a health hazard to neighbouring properties.

I Morris, Head of Housing Strategy, reported that the authority were in the process of recruiting an Empty Homes Officer. This post would be responsible for empty properties throughout the district and those which were causing problems. He advised that under current legislation there was a range of measures that could be taken which could lead to a Compulsory Purchase Order being served on the owners of the property. I Morris advised that the situation was difficult as there were so many properties throughout the district that were in a state of disrepair and the authority had limited budgets. However, at any stage the Council had the powers to board up an empty property and carry out the repairs by default without knowing who the owners were.

Councillor G Wharrier acknowledged the number of empty properties in disrepair and expressed concern at the growing number of properties owned by private landlords that were in a state of disrepair. I Morris, Head of Housing Strategy, advised that tenants could make a complaint about the poor condition of a property at any time. The authority would inspect the property and if necessary serve the landlord with a Notice to carry out the repairs. However, it was pointed out that tenants very rarely complained and it was usually neighbours living in the surrounding area. Members were concerned that where properties were in disrepair rather than make a complaint, people

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moved away from the area which exacerbated the situation and left the area in a worse state.

The Chair expressed concern at the amount of litter being dumped on Public Rights of Way where responsibility for removing it was unclear. K Mullender, Valuation and Estates Officer, advised that the District Council were in the process of digitalising all land ownership details and Durham County Council had theirs on the web site. In addition the Land Registry was in the process of ensuring all land ownership was registered by 2010, which would make it easier to identify land ownership.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

JW/MC/COM/WESTAF/051201
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