

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
WEST AREA FORUM**

**HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 4 OCTOBER, 2006**

**Present:**           **Representing District of Easington**  
Councillor M Nicholls (Chair)  
Councillors B Bates, D Chaytor,  
R Taylor and G Wharrier

**Residents**  
M Wigham

**Peterlee Police**  
I Dickinson and S Rowe

L O'Donnell – Durham County Council

**Representing Parish Councils**  
B Nutter – Castle Eden Parish Council  
G Wilson – Thornley Parish Council  
M Brunskill – Thornley Parish Council

**Apologies:**       Councillors Mrs M Goyns, Mrs J Freak, G Martin  
and B Wilson

**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 14 June, 2006, were confirmed.

**3       MATTERS ARISING**

**(i)       Travellers – Hartlepool Street, Thornley (Minute Number 3(i) refers)**

Councillor G Wharrier thanked the District of Easington for the fencing that had been erected in Thornley to prevent travellers gaining access to open land in Thornley. However, this would not provide a permanent solution to the problem.

L Wright, Senior Valuer advised that it would be impossible for the District Council to enclose all open space but problem areas could be looked at individually as and when necessary.

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

(ii) **Youll House, Thornley (Minute Number 3(ii) refers)**

Councillor G Wharrier requested an update in relation to youths drinking and taking drugs in the area around Youll House and the increasing amount of anti-social behaviour around the bungalows at Greenwood Cottages.

J Link-Emery, Housing Officer, advised that historically there had always been problems with youths congregating at this location and the District of Easington were investigating the long term options for the empty bungalows but as yet no firm decision had been taken.

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

(iii) **Coopers Close, Thornley (Minute Number 4(iv) refers)**

At the last meeting Councillor G Wharrier advised that in 2002 Northumbrian Water constructed a new Combined Sewer Overflow and a storage tank at Coopers Close to limit the amount and frequency of discharge from the sewer into the Gore Burn.

During these works, Northumbrian Water took possession of 35 metres of land immediately south of the allotments. As part of the reinstatement of the land, the contractor replaced approximately 35 metres of Council owned fence along the ditch. Northumbrian Water remained responsible for any defects on the fence for twelve months following completion of the work. The fence was vandalised during the twelve months and the necessary repairs were undertaken and financed by Northumbrian Water.

On completion of the maintenance period in September 2003 the fence line along the boundary of the site was in good condition.

Councillor G Wharrier requested information in relation to the handover of the land once the work was completed by Northumbrian Water and handed back to the Council. Councillor Wharrier was concerned that the records did not show if the fence had been replaced or who was responsible for providing the fence. The ditch was open and until a fence was erected access could be gained by small children, which could result in an accident.

**AGREED** that L Wright, Senior Valuer investigate and reply direct to Councillor Wharrier.

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

(i) **Thornley Library**

Councillor G Wilson, Thornley Parish Council reported that the flagstones outside the Library at Thornley were raised.

**AGREED** that the Chair report the matter to Durham County Council.

(ii) **A19 - Signage**

Councillor G Wilson, Thornley Parish Council advised that the signage for Thornley when leaving the A19 was incorrect.

**AGREED** that the Chair report the matter to Durham County Council.

**5 PRESENTATION BY EMPTY PROPERTIES OFFICER**

Mr C Taylor, Empty Properties Officer, explained that he had been in post since 30 January, 2006 and his remit was to identify empty properties across the district and bring them back into use. C Taylor had established a database of vacant and/or abandoned properties across the district. The Authority would be contacting the owners or managing agents of these properties and encouraging them to bring their properties back into use, this could include advice on sale, re-let or disposal. He added that he would be concentrating on the Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder areas in Easington Colliery and Horden.

It was explained that a district wide Empty Property Strategy was being developed which would tackle the problem of empty properties and the associated problems of anti-social behaviour. The latest information from Council Tax identified that there were 2000 empty dwellings which was 5% of the total housing stock. The priority was to focus on properties that had been empty for a considerable period of time. The powers available were: -

- (i) Enforced sale – the Council could apply to purchase the property and sell it at auction without the agreement of the owner.
- (ii) The Housing Act 2004 introduced Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMO). If an EDMO was granted the Council could take over management of the property without the agreement of the owner and charge the owner for the cost of renovations. Interim Orders were for 12 months and full Orders lasted up to 7 years.
- (iii) The Council could levy 100% Council Tax on the empty property.
- (iv) Licensing schemes could be introduced where the empty property could be leased to a registered social landlord who would manage the property on the Council's behalf.

C Taylor advised that feedback from members of the public would be welcomed and provided questionnaires which could be completed and returned to the Authority.

Following a number of questions to which C Taylor replied it was **AGREED** that the information given, be noted.