

**THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
WEST AREA FORUM
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 24 OCTOBER, 2007**

Present: **Representing the District of Easington**
Councillor R Taylor (Chair)
Councillors T Unsworth, B Wilson
Mrs J Freak and K Mc Gonnell

Representing Parish Councils
D Carr – Monk Hesleden Parish Council
B Nutter – Castle Eden Parish Council

Residents
Mrs M Simpson
Mr G Wilson

Apologies: Councillors M Nicholls and B Bates

1 CHAIR'S COMMENTS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the District Council's West Area Forum and introduced himself and the Officers present.

2 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 11 July, 2007 were confirmed.

3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

(i) **Travellers - Thornley**
 (Minute No. 3(i) refers)

O Sherratt, Director of Community Services reported that work to place boulders at Hartlepool Street to deter travellers from parking at this location was complete.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) **Vandalism – Hesleden**
 (Minute Number 3 (iii) refers)

O Sherratt, Director of Community Services reported that it was proposed to demolish the three remaining garages at Hesleden. It was hoped that the work would be completed within this financial year however there was no guarantee that finance would be available.

Mrs Simpson, a resident, explained that she understood a special meeting was to be held with residents to discuss the proposals for the garages in Hesleden. It was pointed out to Mrs Simpson that a site meeting to discuss various issues related to Hesleden, which included car parking, garages and bus stops was held on 13 August 2007.

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Mrs Simpson advised that due to the lack of garages in Hesleden cars were parked all over the village. There was plenty of land that could be used for garages and Mrs Simpson had recently contacted Durham County Council in relation to the problem. Details of the response from the County Council were provided.

O Sherratt explained that this was a difficult situation and there was no easy solution which did not involve considerable expenditure, which the Council did not have.

Councillor D Carr, Monk Hesleden Parish Council suggested that the Council could lease an area of its land to a private company. The company would then manage the area as a business and lease the garages to residents.

O Sherratt explained that the Council would consider all reasonable suggestions and advised that any proposals should initially be addressed to the Asset and Property Management section.

Councillor B Nutter, Castle Eden Parish Council suggested that the Council sell off parcels of land with the proviso that it could only be used for a specific purpose i.e. a garage site. He also suggested that Mrs Simpson raise the problems associated with parking with the Parish Council.

O Sherratt, explained that he did not want to give any false promises, the decision had been taken to demolish the garages within this financial year. It was felt that any further consultation would not effect the decision to demolish the garages or result in new garages being built. However, consultation would continue with the remaining residents affected by the demolitions.

Following discussion it was **AGREED** that O Sherratt, Director of Community Services write to Mrs Simpson outlining the current position in relation to the garages at Hesleden.

(iii) **Horses – Haswell to Hart Cycleway
(Minute Number 3 (iv) refers)**

Councillor B Nutter, Castle Eden Parish Council requested an update on horses using the Haswell to Hart walkway. It was explained that the surface of the walkway was so deteriorated that it was a danger to members of the public using it. The walkway was regularly used by walkers and cyclist which was not a good mix with horses. The situation had been ongoing for some time and there was now an urgency about the issue.

O Sherratt, Director of Community Services explained that public safety was of utmost concern and he would instruct the District Councils engineers to inspect the surface of the walkway.

It was explained that this was a difficult situation and not everyone was going to be happy with the decision ultimately taken. There were very few bridleways within the district for horses to use, which resulted in them going into built up areas. This resulted in complaints which had led to the decision to allow horses to use the walkway on a trial basis.

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Local riding stables and the British Horse Society encouraged horses to use appropriate areas but there were insufficient bridleways in the area, so the challenge was to accommodate everyone.

At the last meeting M Smith, Principal Valuer, had advised that the District Council were in the process of undertaking extensive consultation in relation to horses using the walkway between Castle Eden and Hesleden. Following consultation, the Executive would consider a report and a decision would be made on the future of horses using the walkway.

Councillor B Nutter once again stressed that horses, people and cycles did not mix and the solution would be to provide more bridleways. Councillor Nutter suggested that the Council approach local farmers, landowners and Durham County Council to discuss the provision of more bridleways.

O Sherratt agreed that the issue of more bridleways was an issue which required further investigation.

Councillor B Nutter also suggested that poop scoop bags be provided at access and egress points on the walkway. O Sherratt advised that this was also being looked into.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(iv) **BUS SHELTERS**
(Minute Number 4 (ii) refers)

O Sherratt, Director of Community Services reported that the five bus shelters in Hesleden which were reported damaged at the last meeting had been repaired.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(v) **BUS SHELTERS – WHEATLEY HILL/THORNLEY**
(Minute Number 4 (VI) refers)

O Sherratt, Director of Community Services advised that the bus shelters on Henry Street and Asquith Street which were reported damaged at the last meeting had been repaired.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

4 **DISTRICT OF EASINGTON BENEFITS SERVICE**

C. Thompson, Benefits Manager was in attendance to provide information in relation to Housing and Council Tax Benefits. Members and residents were briefed on his role as Benefits Manager within the Council and the Benefits Take Up Campaign.

It was explained that there were a large number of residents in the district who were entitled to benefits but did not currently claim them. The Campaign aimed to encourage more people to seek advice on what benefits they were eligible to claim. As part of this, a number of roadshows had been held across the district and benefits officers had talked to local organisations and groups. The purpose of attending the forum was to find out if there were other groups the Council

could meet to promote benefit take up and seek ideas from residents on how to get the message across.

Leaflet drops had been carried out in areas where it was felt that the benefit take up was low. The Council were trying to make it easier to apply for benefits and had a visiting officer who could visit claimant's homes and take all the necessary details at the property. War pensions were now disregarded for benefit purposes but generally the public were not aware of this.

Councillor B Wilson queried if there had been an increase in private landlords. C Thompson confirmed that there had been an increase in privately rented accommodation across the country. Councillor B Nutter made reference to the growing trend of businessmen purchasing new affordable housing for rental purposes.

Councillor B Nutter asked if the Benefits section assessed attendance allowance. Castle Eden had an elderly population and residents often approached the Parish Council for assistance with benefits. C Thompson advised that there were dedicated telephone numbers which he would provide for Councillor Nutter to pass onto residents.

It was explained that an article would appear in the next issue of Infopoint and C Thompson would be happy to provide an article for any local publication.

The Chair thanked C. Thompson for his attendance at the meeting.

AGREED the information given, be noted.

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

(i) 31 – 35 Morris Crescent, Thornley

Mr G Wilson, a resident advised that a number of years ago he was promised, by the District of Easington, that car parking would be provided for properties in Morris Crescent but no work was undertaken.

O Sherratt, Director of Community Services advised that he was not aware of this and it was unlikely that the District Council would have the finance to provide car parking at this location.

AGREED that O Sherratt, Director of Community Services investigate and report back to the next meeting.

(ii) Greenwood Cottages, Thornley

Mr G Wilson, outlined the problems associated with Greenwood Cottages. Residents were being tormented on a regular basis by youths congregating around the properties and causing a nuisance. Residents needed to be rehoused as soon as possible.

E Coatman, Regeneration and Estates Officer explained that East Durham Homes were investigating the possibility of a developer acquiring the bungalows, however they were one bedroom and not very popular. At the present time there was nothing further that could be done until all the residents were rehoused.

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Mr G Wilson stated that over the years there had been very little investment by the District Council in Thornley. E Coatman refuted this and advised that there had been considerable investment in Thornley particularly by way of partnership working.

Councillor B Nutter made reference to money that was available to Parish/Town Councils through Section 106 Agreements. T Forster, Principle Regeneration Officer outlined what a Section 106 Agreement was and how Parish/Town Councils could benefit from the use of this money.

There were currently a number of schemes, which were being consulted upon for Greenwood Cottages which would aim to secure the maximum amount for development and recreational facilities.

There had been considerable investment in Thornley and regardless of where it came from it was still investment. Most investment was secured by partnership working, as organisations did not have sufficient finance to deliver schemes on their own. Reference was made to Thornley Community Centre and the possibility of it being refurbished or re-built, there was new residential development North and South of Hartlepool Street and the Crossways site would also be developed for housing.

The District Council were tackling the problems and securing investment where it could. The Durham County Council Renaissance Scheme was looking at a comprehensive plan for improvement over the next 20 to 30 years in the west of the district. Parish Councils had been consulted and following consultation the Plan would be considered by Members. Previously larger settlements such as Seaham and Murton had been the priority. The focus would now be the west of the district and large investment would take place in Thornley and Wheatley Hill.

G Wilson explained that the District Council had previously been requested to release £100,000 for a new resource centre in Thornley. T Forster advised that the District Council had to look at the bigger picture, they had to put together all the proposals into one comprehensive sustainable regeneration scheme to maximise the amount of finance that could be secured. Following full consultation a Master Plan would be adopted for the west of the district.

Councillor T Unsworth understood Mr Wilson's frustration with regard to the resource centre and stated that the Thornley Partnership was in discussion with the District of Easington to deliver a new resource centre. T Forster confirmed that this was included in the Master Plan and the approach outlined would secure success.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.