

THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WEST AREA FORUM

HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 23 APRIL, 2008

Present: Representing the District of Easington

Councillor M Nicholls (Chair)
Councillors B Bates, K McGonnell, Mrs J
Freak and T Unsworth

Representing the Parish Councils

J Higgins – Wingate Parish Council
Mrs M Goyns – Wheatley Hill Parish Council
E Goyns – Wheatley Hill Parish Council

Apologies: Councillors R Taylor, B Wilson and D Carr

1 CHAIR'S COMMENTS

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

2 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 30 January, 2008, were confirmed.

3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

(i) Vandalism – Hesleden (Minute Number 3(i) refers)

Councillor B Bates requested an update in relation to the demolition of garages at Hesleden. Tenants had been served notice to quit but no further progress appeared to have been made.

G Harrison, Area Manager advised that she would ask E Coatman, Regeneration and Estates Officer to contact Councillor Bates direct with an update on the situation.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(ii) Horses – Haswell to Hart Walkway (Minute Number 3(ii) refers)

The Chair welcomed Mr D Gomes, Countryside Ranger who was in attendance at the meeting to give an update on horses using the Haswell to Hart Walkway.

It was explained that over the years there had been a growth in equestrian activities which had resulted in a rise in horse related complaints. In an attempt to formulate a consistent approach the Council had convened a meeting with a number of stakeholders to discuss the issues arising.

The following problems were identified;

West Area Forum – 23 April, 2008

- Loose horses
- Horse manure on the highway
- Horses tethered to council land
- Horses on the walkway

With regard to horses using the walkway it was explained that a number of years ago the Council had allowed horses access onto the walkway for a trial period. However, since that time no further action was taken and currently the Head of Asset and Property Management was reviewing the situation.

There had been complaints that horses using the walkway were damaging the surface. It was explained that the majority of the walkway was wide enough to accommodate horses but there were sections that were too narrow and therefore unsuitable for horses.

It was explained that initially barriers were erected to prevent horses accessing the walkway but unfortunately these also prevented wheelchair access and had to be removed.

Durham County Council was investigating the network of bridleways throughout the county and it was hoped that many of the existing pathways could be upgraded which would make them suitable for walkers, cyclists and horses. The County Council were also looking at the introduction of a voluntary code of conduct for use on the walkways.

D Gomes invited suggestions for further improvements and pointed out that even if horses were banned, this would be very difficult in practice to enforce, hence the current focus on seeking voluntary agreement.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(iii) **Kerb It Collections, Wingate (Minute Number 4(v) refers)**

Councillor J Higgins reported that since the last meeting there had been an improvement in the collection of the black kerb it box. However, the introduction of the green bag had raised further problems. Many residents received the green bag late and had not received an explanatory leaflet which outlined what it was and what could be recycled.

O Sherratt apologised for the late distribution of bags to some areas and explained that there had been a problem with supplies. This coupled with missed collections and pull outs had led to a temporary drop in service standards that were lower than expected.

The Council had been very ambitious with the introduction of the recycling of plastic and cardboard, the new contract with Greencycle and the extension of the green waste collections. The introduction of these services had stretched resources and the delay in the delivery of the green bags meant some residents received them very late, sometimes distributed in a sloppy fashion.

New Greencycle crews had to be recruited and trained, however, more resources than was originally anticipated were needed and levels of crewing had initially been too low. This had now been corrected.

West Area Forum – 23 April, 2008

Since delivery of the green bags there had been an immediate increase in recycling from 40–50% to 80–90% participation in many areas. This was very welcome but had initially overwhelmed the crews.

Improvements to the service should be evidenced over the coming weeks.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(iv) **Feedback from Street Wardens (Minute Number 4(vi) refers)**

Following the last meeting Councillor Higgins had spoken to a Street Warden regarding a number of issues but had received no further feedback.

O Sherratt apologised for the lack of feedback and gave an assurance that someone would contact him

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(v) **Invitation to attend Wingate Parish Council Meeting (Minute Number 4 (vi) refers)**

At the last meeting Councillor J Higgins reported that an invitation had been extended to the District of Easington for a Director to attend a Parish Council meeting to discuss problems associated with anti social behaviour in Wingate.

O Sherratt advised that to date no letter of invitation had been received from Wingate Parish Council. However, he was happy to attend a Parish meeting to discuss Members concerns.

AGREED that O Sherratt attend a future meeting of Wingate Parish Council.

(vi) **Bus Shelter, Gray Avenue, Hesleden (Minute Number 4 (vii) refers)**

O Sherratt advised that the damaged bus shelter at Gray Avenue, Hesleden had been repaired on 7 March 2008.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(vii) **Parking on Footpaths (Minute Number 4 (viii) refers)**

O Sherratt advised that J Yorke, Enforcement Co-ordinator had contacted the Police in relation to this matter.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(viii) **Clean Up – Hesleden (Minute Number 4 (ix) refers)**

O Sherratt advised that following a scheduled clean up by the Council in Hesleden a number of black bags which had been overlooked had been removed.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

(ix) **Church Street, Hesleden (Minute Number 4(xi) refers)**

O Sherratt advised that a weed spraying programme was scheduled for Church Street.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

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

(i) **Victoria House, Wingate**

Councillor J Higgins referred to Coronation/Kings Road in Wingate and particularly Victoria House, which had been closed for a number of years and left to deteriorate. Councillor Higgins had repeatedly contacted the Street Wardens and no action was taken, he had also received numerous complaints from residents that they reported incidents to the Street Wardens and no action was taken.

O Sherratt whilst acknowledging Councillor Higgins' opinion stated that he was aware of the good work undertaken by the Street Wardens and the positive feedback that was received in relation to their work.

With regard to hot spot areas the Street Wardens did target these areas but there was no quick fix. The Street Wardens also undertook a lot of work with youths and where necessary did confiscate alcohol.

Councillor T Unsworth advised that he had reported problems at Victoria House on a number of occasions and stressed that the building needed to be demolished as soon as possible.

The Street Wardens present at the meeting advised that they were aware of the problems around Victoria House. However, no reports regarding youths at this location had been received from residents.

With regard to confiscation of alcohol from youths the Street Wardens did this where possible and letters were also sent to the parents. Once again the Street Wardens reported that no reports from residents in relation to these problems had been received.

The Police stated that they were aware of the problems at Victoria House and had the names of those who were causing the problems. They had approached the Council with regard to installing a CCTV camera. However, on the evidence collected so far the problems were of a minor nature and whilst the parents had been approached there was very little else that could be done.

O Sherratt advised that he would investigate the current situation regarding Victoria House as this was the magnet.

AGREED that the information given, be noted.

West Area Forum – 23 April, 2008

(ii) **Wheatley House, Wheatley Hill**

Councillor Mrs M Goyns referred to the floral display at the entrance to Wheatley House and felt it was spoilt by the amount of litter in the hedges and bushes

AGREED that O Sherratt arrange to have the area cleaned.

JT/MC/COM/WESTAF/080401
24 April 2008