

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

**HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 30 JULY, 2008**

**Present: Representing the District of Easington**

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

**Representing the Parish Councils**

B Nutter – Castle Eden Parish Council  
Mrs M Brunskill – Thornley Parish Council  
Mrs J Middleton – Thornley Parish Council  
J Lamb – Wheatley Hill Parish Council  
A Attey – New Thornley Partnership  
N Attey – New Thornley Partnership

**Also Present:** R Scott – Travellers Liaison – Durham County Council  
Sgt S Hawkes – Durham Constabulary

**Apologies:** Councillors R Taylor, L O'Donnell 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 23 April, 2008, were confirmed.

### **3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

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

Councillor B Nutter raised the issue of horses using the walkway and pointed out that it was unsuitable to accommodate horses, pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchairs. In addition the surface was being damaged by the horses.

Councillor Nutter explained that the barriers on the walkway were removed at the request of the horse owners and not because they prevented wheelchair access. If the barriers had been designed correctly in the first place they would have allowed wheelchair access and prevented motor cycle access which was an increasing problem.

The problem had been ongoing for years and the increased number of equestrian centres was exacerbating the situation.

O Sherratt explained that at the last meeting D Gomes gave a lengthy presentation on all the issues. There were a lot of horses using the walkway and on many stretches it was wide enough to accommodate them. If the Council were to restrict access to horses then practically this would be

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difficult to enforce. Horses could be banned from the walkway but this would force them into urban areas which could result in complaints from residents.

It was proposed that where possible the walkway could be widened to accommodate everyone, however this would take time. Repairs to the surface of the walkway were undertaken as and when necessary and regular safety checks were carried out. The Council were receptive to any suggestions or ideas and a site visit could be arranged with Councillor Nutter and the Countryside Rangers if necessary.

Councillor Nutter felt there was a very simple solution to the problem. He pointed out that there were many fields adjoining the walkway and through negotiation with local farmers horses could be allowed to use these fields.

Recent housing development in Castle Eden had resulted in more people using the walkway, particularly children. On sections of the walkway there were very steep drops either side and if someone fell down the embankment there would be no way of knowing and reporting the accident.

The Chair suggested that other areas with similar problems could be investigated.

O Sherratt advised that it would be very difficult to completely ban horses from the walkway and if this did happen the horses would still need to go elsewhere which would result in them entering urban areas. O Sherratt offered to discuss this further with Councillor Nutter following the meeting.

Councillor Nutter reiterated that the walkway was not suitable for Horses, pedestrians, cyclists and wheelchairs.

Councillor B Wislon asked if residents had met with the horse owners to discuss their concerns. O Sherratt advised that the Council had met with the horse owners and they had argued that there was a lack of bridleways in the district for them to exercise their horses.

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. This would hopefully be investigated further by the new unitary Council.

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

(ii) **Kerb It Collections, Wingate (Minute Number 3(iii) refers)**

O Sherratt advised that since the last meeting “teething problems” with the Kerb it collections had been rectified.

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

(iii) **Invitation to attend Wingate Parish Council Meeting (Minute Number 3 (v) refers)**

O Sherratt advised that he had attended a meeting of Wingate Parish Council.

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

(iv) **Victoria House, Wingate (Minute Number 4(i) refers)**

O Sherratt advised that the Asset and Property Management Unit were actively marketing this site. Since the last meeting a number of repairs had been undertaken and the building had been secured. It was possible that demolition would be the answer however at this time the future of the building was uncertain.

The Police advised that Victoria House had previously featured on the Street Safe Boards. The building had been the subject of surveillance but activity was at a very low level. It was difficult to get residents to provide statements regarding who was causing the damage. In cases where it was proven that they were EDH tenants then action was taken against them. The area would continue to be monitored by the Police and Street Wardens.

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

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

(i) **Blue Bins – Castle Eden**

Councillor B Nutter advised that many areas of Castle Eden still did not have blue bins.

O Sherratt advised that he would investigate.

**AGREED** that O Sherratt investigate.

(ii) **Mobile Skate Park**

Councillor B Nutter queried the situation with the Councils mobile skate park and the fact that at the present time the Council did not have staff qualified to erect the equipment. Councillor Nutter had been advised that training would commence on 28 August which was almost at the end of the school holidays. In addition community groups and organisations were unsure who to contact in relation to hiring the equipment.

O Sherratt advised that an accident had occurred in the past involving a Street Warden and it was important that staff were fully trained in erecting the equipment before it was used.

**AGREED** that O Sherratt request S Clarke, Youth Strategy Officer to contact Councillor Nutter in relation to this matter.

(iii) **Travellers – Thornley**

Mrs A Attey reported that the annual village fete in Thornley had been marred by travellers in the village. A lot of preparation had gone into the event in relation to health and safety and risk assessments. On the day of the fete the travellers were congregated on the Pit Wheel site with horses. Residents wanted some assurances that this would not happen again.

The Chair advised that R Scott, Travellers Liaison Officer, Durham County Council was in attendance at the meeting. Her role was to make contact with the travellers and act as a liaison. It was explained that several meetings had been held with the travellers to try and resolve the problems and through negotiation it was agreed that the travellers would leave the village by an agreed date.

O Sherratt advised that the Council had to initially make contact with the travellers regarding welfare issues. There were rules related to noise/disturbance and the Council had come to an understanding with them. It was however unfortunate that they had tethered horses on the Pit Wheel site on the day of the fete. A team was however sent out immediately to clean the site. It was pointed out that there was no cast iron guarantees that this would not happen again, but it was hoped that through building up trust with the travellers it could be avoided.

R Scott advised that a lot of work went on behind the scenes and she sympathised with residents and how they felt. The aim for the future was to identify areas within Easington District that were suitable for the travellers to use. The Council were aware of the event that was planned in Thornley and had worked with the travellers with this in mind. That was also why the travellers were given “direction to leave”.

A Attey felt that what happened was a reaction to the situation and it should have been anticipated and prevented.

R Scott advised that daily visits were made to the site throughout the travellers stay. Following “direction to leave” they did respond and moved on. However for the future there needed to be a temporary area found for them to stay and measures needed to be taken to make sure that the area was suitable. They potentially travelled through the area on an annual basis. Local residents could help by identifying areas that were suitable within the district.

A Attey pointed out that all residents wanted was for the travellers to respect the area and residents

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