

# **Bath and North East Somerset Council**

## **PARISHES LIAISON MEETING**

### **Minutes of the Meeting held**

Wednesday, 16th February, 2011, 6.30 pm

Councillors: Sarah Bevan (Chair), Charles Gerrish (Cabinet Member for Service Delivery) (Cabinet Member), Malcolm Hanney (Cabinet Member for Resources) (Cabinet Member), Sally Davis (Bath & North East Somerset Council), Vic Pritchard (Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services and Housing) (Cabinet Member), Brian Simmons (Bath & North East Somerset Council) and Francine Haerberling (Leader of the Council), Neil Butters, Martin Veal

Representatives of: Bathford, Bathampton, Batheaston, Camerton, Chew Magna, Chew Stoke, Claverton, Clutton, Combe Hay, Compton Dando, Dunkerton, Englishcombe, Farmborough, Freshford, Keynsham, Marksbury, Monkton Combe, Saltford, Stanton Drew, Timsbury, Wellow, Whitchurch, Ubley

Eric Potter – Chairman of the B&NES Local Councils Association

Peter Duppa-Miller – Secretary of the B&NES Local Councils Association

Also in attendance: John Everitt ( Chief Executive), Glen Chipp (Strategic Director for Service Delivery), David Trigwell ( Divisional Director for Planning and Transport), Andy Thomas, Graham Sabourn, Sara Grimes, Kelvin Packer

#### **31 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair of Council, Councillor Sarah Bevan, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **32 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **33 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from representatives of Batheaston, Publow with Pensford and Saltford Parish Councils.

Apologies had also been received from Councillors Rob Appleyard, John Bull, Victor Clarke, Paul Crossley, Nathan Hartley, Eleanor Jackson and Christopher Watt.

#### **34 URGENT BUSINESS AS AGREED BY THE CHAIR**

There was no urgent business.

**35 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 20TH OCTOBER 2010**

The Minutes of the last meeting were agreed and signed as a correct record.

**36 B&NES COUNCIL EMPTY PROPERTIES POLICY**

The Associate Director for Housing and Health (Graham Sabourn) introduced this report. He informed the meeting that there were 500 properties within the authority which had been empty for more than six months. The small number of 'anti-social' properties (which owners had no intention of bringing back into use) could cause nuisance issues. However, they could be the subject of an enforcement order. The department were due to conduct a kerbside survey of empty properties over the next few months.

A representative from Saltford asked what level of resources was being allocated to this work and was informed that a part-time officer had been allocated to co-ordinate the work on empty properties. There were two potential government funding streams which could be accessed – one relating to properties brought back into use by councils and the other which was directed at housing associations. The Council was actively encouraging the local housing associations to bid for that money.

A representative from Englishcombe enquired about a property in their village which had been damaged by fire and was lying empty as the owner was now in a home. The officer offered to meet with the parish council and discuss the options that could be pursued, which might include enforcement.

A representative from Keynsham asked whether the number of empty properties within the authority was above or below the national average and was informed that it was lower than average. The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services and Housing (Vic Pritchard) commented that the policy was a useful tool in bringing empty properties into use, although it is not having a significant effect on the authority's housing deficit.

**37 B&NES COUNCIL'S ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PROJECTS**

The Corporate Sustainability Officer (Sara Grimes) introduced this report and updated the meeting about the Council's proposed partnership with Bath Community Energy (BCE), a registered not-for-profit community enterprise which aims to install renewable energy sources e.g. solar, wind and hydroelectric power. One example was the proposed hydro project at Bathampton Weir. She informed the meeting that, based on the planned initial tranche of 1.5MW of renewable energy technologies, including wind, solar PV and hydro, Bath Community Energy plan to generate an average of around £400,000 per year over 20 years (i.e. more in later years than

early years) for re-investing back into local communities. This would be through a combination of interest payments to local investors and distribution of surplus profits via a community fund. The actual level of funds will depend on the success of local share offers and the scale, technology and performance of projects implemented.

The officer also informed the meeting that the Council was seeking to encourage more parishes to join the Local Energy Champions Scheme. She updated the members about the Sustainable Energy Plan which was being developed for Keynsham in association with The Converging World and also the Home Electricity Monitor Loan Scheme.

A representative from Dunkerton asked whether landowners had been approached by BCE as well as private companies about developing three potential sites for solar farms. The Corporate Sustainability Officer offered to meet with the councillor to discuss this. A representative from Combe Hay asked whether the officer was in a position to confirm the Secretary of State for Energy's recent statement that the feed-in tariff would not be available for projects greater than 50Kw? The officer replied that the decision may be made to prevent solar farms being eligible for the feed-in tariff by the end of July 2011. A representative from Saltford asked whether their community hall, (which had a south-facing roof) would be eligible for a feed-in tariff if solar panels were installed and was informed that it would.

## **38 THE OUTCOME OF THE HIGHWAYS WINTER MAINTENANCE REVIEW**

The Service Manager for Highways and Parking (Kelvin Packer) introduced this item and thanked those stakeholders who had responded to the review. He stated that three main issues were raised by parishes: more grit bins, additional salting routes and advice about the legal position with regard to self-help and snow clearance. He reported that some new grit bins had been approved and that an additional 7 miles of salting routes had been introduced. The Council now routinely salts 38% of the network. A leaflet had been produced giving guidance on self-help to support parishes and residents when dealing with severe weather. The policy for winter maintenance would be presented to the Safer and Stronger Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel on March 24<sup>th</sup>.

The Cabinet Member for Service Delivery (Charles Gerrish) thanked the officer for his work and that of his team and congratulated them for producing a balanced report which had been based on clear criteria.

A representative from Combe Hay thanked the officer for the report and leaflets and asked whether, if there was a further cold snap this spring, the arrangements for bagged salt would be brought forward from next winter. The officer replied that they were planning to develop the bagged salt service over the summer months, but that if there was a further cold spell, a judgement would be taken depending on the severity of the weather.

A representative from Stanton Drew said that their parish had requested a grit bin as it was almost impossible to get out of the village during the cold spell. The officer replied that the situation would be looked at again, but any adjustment to the criteria

would require the Council to provide bins at many other sites. The officer stressed the difficulties involved in refilling bins during snowfall conditions. The crews who drive the gritters are normally employed on road works/highways maintenance during the daytime and are also subject to drivers' working hour restrictions. In the period of snowfall before Christmas, the operatives were asked to refill more than 500 bins.

A representative from Dunkerton praised the work of the highways team during the winter in keeping the main routes open. He welcomed the bagged salt distribution during the summer, which would mean that parishes would be well prepared for the onset of winter. He asked which routes would be affected if the supplies ran out and was informed that the Highways Department would publish the priority routes on the website. The representative welcomed the use of local farmers and asked how their parish could implement that idea. Their parish was also looking at buying a mini-gritter which would fit on the back of a Land Rover and was seeking help with funding from the Council. The officer informed the meeting that the Council had developed a network of farmers who used their tractors in bad weather to reach the places impassable to a gritter. The officer asked that if any parish/town council knew of farmers who wanted to participate in the service, could they please contact the Highways Department. With regard to the parish's plan to buy their own gritter, he said that the service could not commit the funds at present but would be willing to listen to any suggestions that could improve the service.

A representative from Batheaston asked whether the Council would consider supplying a pile of salt for the village handyman to keep the pavements clear. The officer replied that this practice could cause problems as the salt might solidify in a heap and become a hazard to cyclists or people with a visual impairment and also could block drains. The Cabinet Member for Resources (Malcolm Hanney) added that the Council was unfortunately already under pressure to cover more services.

A representative from Bathampton asked where the bagged salt would be delivered and what would be done to prevent it being stolen. The officer replied that they needed to organise the distribution carefully at times when there was lower pressure on the service. They also needed to identify proper storage places to ensure the salt was available for highway purposes.

A representative of Keynsham Town Council asked why the pavements around the sheltered housing developments in the town were not cleared of snow and ice and was informed that many of the pavements were owned by the housing associations which were therefore responsible for clearing them. The officer added that salt from bins can be used to treat footways. The Council salts and clears snow from a number of strategically important footways across the district.

## **39 THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE B&NES TRANSPORT COMMISSION**

The Strategic Director for Service Delivery (Glen Chipp) introduced this item and explained that the purpose of the Transport Commission is to help the authority to develop an overall transport strategy to support sustainable growth, increase capacity and improve air quality. It was hoped that an integrated system would help to protect the city's heritage. With regard to the membership of the commission; experts were being recruited along with local representatives of the right calibre who

would act as a critical friend. The commission would examine the major transport schemes, including HGV movements, parking, public transport and cycling. More details of the commission would be published shortly.

#### **40 THE FUTURE ORGANISATION OF B&NES COUNCIL**

The Cabinet Member for Resources ( Malcolm Hanney) introduced this item and informed the meeting that the Council were planning for a 30% reduction in government funding over the next four years. However, the Council had managed to achieve a balanced budget in recent years and had £23m in reserve. Savings of £15.5m were required in 2011/12 of which £7.3m would come from efficiency savings, bringing the total of efficiency savings over the period 2007/12 to £25m. Actual cuts were £2.6m or about 1% of gross expenditure with very limited impact on frontline services, particularly for the vulnerable. Council tax rates had been frozen. With regard to the impact on employees, 150 posts would be lost during 2011/12 out of a total planned reduction of 300 posts over the next 3 years. Of these, only 73 were redundancies (67) or early retirements (6); there were only 24 compulsory redundancies. The Council were much better placed than most councils as a result of forward planning and past prudence.

The Council are planning £200m capital investment over the next 5 years including including Keynsham Town centre regeneration (£33m) as well as more investment in the public realm, infrastructure, leisure facilities in Bath, affordable housing and schools.

The Council was in close partnership with the PCT and were working with the emerging GP commissioning consortium. The social care costs are currently within budget and not overspent. In addition, the West of England was a major generator of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and it was hoped that this would serve to attract government and private sector investment in the region.

Overall, for 2011/12, Bath and North East Somerset was in a better position than most other councils, but by 2013/14, the financial situation would be more concerning. Academies would be in place, there would be benefits changes and the joint health and social care provider would be independent. Councils would move increasingly to become 'core' or commissioning organisations which will impact on the overall structure, particularly affecting support services. In conclusion, Councillor Hanney informed the meeting that the budget had been passed by full Council on 15<sup>th</sup> February with no material cuts to frontline services.

A representative from Saltford asked whether the capital being raised was achieved by selling properties or by increased borrowing. Councillor Hanney replied that the Council will be increasing borrowing but will also be developing a partnership for the Commercial Estate working with an organisation(s) which share the Council's vision for the future. It was planned to invest in the public realm, which will enhance the City centre and the Council's retail property interests. The retail sector in Bath is currently relatively healthy with a constant demand for shop premises. In addition, the local knowledge and creative industries are now larger than tourism and retail

combined, so there are many opportunities for growth. The corporate estate itself generated £14m income and was worth well over £250m.

A representative from Bathford asked whether the funding for the Bath Transport Package would come from resources or asset sales. Councillor Charles Gerrish replied that the final submission for the Transport Package would be in the autumn. The government had made it clear what share they expected from the Council towards the project and so £9m has been allocated out of capital as B&NEs' contribution. Councillor Hanney added that this would have no impact on reserves.

A representative from Batheaston commented that the Council had decided arbitrarily to withhold money from the Batheaston youth club contrary to the guidelines in the Parish Charter. Councillor Hanney replied that the Council had to prioritise certain areas. Money had been allocated to Radstock and Keynsham youth projects and that there was other funding which could be bid for, including possibly through Community Empowerment. The representative from Batheaston repeated that the parish council had not been consulted and that the club would close at the end of March. The Chief Executive (John Everitt) added that there was a shift in how the Council delivered youth services and that there were reasonable sums available to parishes for this purpose. He assured Batheaston Parish Council that an officer would be in contact about this issue.

#### **41 REVIEW OF THE PARISH CHARTER**

The Strategic Director for Service Delivery (Glen Chipp) introduced this item and informed the meeting that the review had originally been planned to go out for consultation in November, but the publication of the Localism Bill with its impacts on planning, enforcement and accountability had changed the background to the Parish Charter. The latest version of the charter will reflect the developments in the Localism Bill and will be sent out for consultation with the expectation that it will return to the June Parishes Liaison meeting. The Secretary to the B&NES Local Councils Association (Peter Duppa-Miller) informed the meeting of the documents that would be sent out to parishes as part of the consultation.

A representative from Compton Dando enquired whether information about the new enforcement process would be included within the consultation papers and was informed that the parish council would need to raise any enforcement issue on behalf of the complainant in order to be kept informed of any progress.

#### **42 THE LOCALISM BILL**

The Group Manager for Partnership Delivery (Andy Thomas) introduced this item and detailed the main proposals outlined in the Bill. The changes would affect the Parish Charter and he encouraged parishes to respond to the current consultation on the proposed changes. The impact on planning would be a key issue for parishes, especially regarding the neighbourhood development orders. The Chief Executive added that the Bill allows for elected Mayors and a return to the committee system in

local government. The new Council will be considering these governance options after the May local elections.

A representative from Combe Hay commented that there seemed to be a lack of clarity over the definition of not only 'community' and 'neighbourhood' but also 'local' and 'council'. He asked whether it was the intention that the Local Planning Authority will, in rural areas, consider the 'neighbourhoods' to be the Parishes. The Divisional Director, Planning and Transport Development (David Trigwell) replied that that was how he had interpreted the phrase, although very large parishes could possibly split up into neighbourhoods.

A representative from Keynsham asked whether the Council was concerned about the costs of the Community Right to Challenge. The Chief Executive replied that they were cautious of this and would monitor it carefully.

It was agreed that an update on the progress of the Localism Bill could come to the June Parishes Liaison meeting.

#### **43 DRAFT CORE STRATEGY - PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CONSULTATION RESPONSE**

The Divisional Director for Planning and Transport Development (David Trigwell) introduced this item and informed the meeting that, as the consultation had closed on 3<sup>rd</sup> February, it was early days in the analysis process. 1500 representations had been received, with a large proportion of those concerned with rural issues. The evidence so far supports the Council's planning strategy instead of the now-defunct Regional Spatial Strategy. A strong local strategy would enable the Council to head off predatory planning applications. It was hoped to submit the Core Strategy to the Planning Inspectorate before the election and hold the Examination in Public in September.

With regard to the concerns about sites for Gypsies and Travellers, the officer informed the meeting that the member of staff who had been dealing with this area had left and they were yet to be replaced. A representative from Clutton asks whether there was a target date for the appointment of someone to deal with the issue. The officer replied that there was no date at present as they had to find a person with the right specialist skills. However, once an officer was in post, the parishes would be informed.

A representative from Englishcombe expressed concern about predatory planning applications. He asked for update on progress with Western Riverside and the proposed MOD land sale. The officer informed the meeting that the Council were in talks with the MOD with regard to appropriate developments on brownfield sites. He was pleased to report that the Western Riverside development had started.

A representative from Bathford asked about the green belt policy and the World Heritage Site buffer zone and how they were dealt with in the Core Strategy. The officer replied that there would be a full analysis of these issues which would be publicised at the end of March.

A representative from Claverton asked about the process regarding legal compliance for the Core Strategy. The officer replied that if the document goes forward with no significant changes, it will pass to the stage of Examination in Public. However, if major issues are raised which were outside the scope of delegation then it could not be progressed at this time and it would have to go back to the Members. Any representations about the Strategy would go to the Inspector who examines all responses.

#### **44 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Chair announced that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday June 15<sup>th</sup> 2011.

She informed members about the Chair's Charity Ball which would take place on 1<sup>st</sup> April in aid of the Neonatal Unit at the RUH and Quartet Community Funding.

The Chair also brought the members' attention to the display of Parish Plans which was in the Guildhall reception lobby outside the Chair's office.

Peter Duppa-Miller informed the meeting that there were 28 images on display, with a further 4 ready to be hung.

He also notified that meeting that the Community Resilience Manual had been issued by the Business Continuity Planning Manager (Richard Look) to all parishes.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions.

The meeting finished at 8.10pm.

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**