

## **PARISHES LIAISON MEETING**

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

Wednesday, 22nd February, 2012, 6.30 pm

Bath & North East Somerset Councillors: Peter Edwards (Chair), Tim Ball, Cherry Beath, David Bellotti, Mathew Blankley, Neil Butters, Sally Davis, Gerry Curran, David Dixon, Vic Pritchard, Brian Simmons, Jeremy Sparks, David Veale, Tim Warren.

Representatives of: Batheaston, Bathford, Bathampton, Cameley, Claverton, Clutton, Combe Hay, Compton Dando, Compton Martin, Corston, Dunkerton, Englishcombe, Farmborough, Freshford, Keynsham, Marksbury, Monkton Combe, Newton St Loe, Paulton, Peasedown St John, Priston, Publow with Pensford, Radstock, Saltford, South Stoke, Stowey Sutton, Timsbury, Ubley, Whitchurch,

Also in attendance: Tony Crouch (President of the Avon Local Councils Association), Richard Daone (Planning Policy Team Leader), John Everitt (Chief Executive), Tim Richens (Divisional Director for Finance), Andy Thomas (Group manager, Partnership Delivery), David Trigwell (Divisional Director for Planning and Transport), John Wilkinson (Economic Development Manager).

#### **28 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chairman, Councillor Peter Edwards, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### **29 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Clerk drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

#### **30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from representatives of Camerton, Charlcombe and High Littleton Parish Councils and Midsomer Norton Town Council.

Apologies had also been received from Councillors Rob Appleyard, Sarah Bevan, Paul Crossley, Francine Haerberling, Nathan Hartley, Paul Myers and Martin Veal.

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

Peter Duppa-Miller drew the meeting's attention to the fact that it was the Chief Executive's last Parishes Liaison meeting before his retirement. On behalf of the

Parish and Town Councils, he thanked John Everitt for his support and guidance over the past years.

### **32 MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 19TH OCTOBER 2011**

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### **33 CLINICAL COMMISSIONING**

Dr Ian Orpen, Chair of the B&NES Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), gave a presentation on the progress towards clinical commissioning in Bath and North East Somerset and the purpose and aims of the clinical commissioning group.

A representative of Combe Hay Parish Council asked whether the CCG would be providing the 111 'out-of-hours' service? Dr Orpen replied that the CCG would not be running the service, but would procure it from an appropriate provider.

A representative from Radstock Town Council asked how the CCG would meet the public sector equality duty in their commissioning. Dr Orpen replied that the CCG were mindful of the importance of taking those issues into consideration and would have to satisfy the Department of Health that they would fulfil that requirement.

A representative of Cameley Parish Council asked what difference the patients would notice under the new regime. Dr Orpen replied that they would be able to access the same services, but closer to home. Hospitals would tend to get smaller, but otherwise there would not be great changes. The Chief Executive, John Everitt, added that patients should notice the benefits of integration between social services and the health service into a joined-up service from one provider. Sirona Healthcare is due to deliver £9m of annual savings which will be ploughed back into local services.

The Chair thanked Dr Orpen for his presentation, a copy of which is attached to these minutes.

#### **GP Clinical commissioning - an introduction**

### **34 RURAL BROADBAND IN BATH & NORTH EAST SOMERSET**

John Wilkinson, Business Enterprise Manager, distributed a handout which informed the meeting of progress with B&NES participation in the Connecting Devon and Somerset broadband programme. The programme aims to deliver improved broadband service to every community and business by 2015 to 2MB per second with at least 85% of the area getting 24MB per second by 2015 and 100% by 2020. He explained that the Connecting Devon and Somerset Broadband Programme was one of three national pilots supported by the government.

He urged parish members to complete the online survey about demand which was on the Connecting Devon and Somerset website. This would inform the private sector (who would be bidding to provide the broadband service) about the level of demand in rural areas. The general survey would be followed up with a series of questionnaires and phone surveys to gather more detailed information.

Mr Wilkinson then introduced Chris Head from the West of England Rural Network who had been working with parish councils in Devon and Somerset on the broadband project. Mr Head informed the meeting that the first step was to identify the location and type of the small local exchanges (green or grey boxes). The parishes could help with this work by mapping the boxes within their areas. A letter requesting that this work be carried out would arrive with the parishes shortly.

A representative from Freshford Parish Council said that their exchange was in the neighbouring county of Wiltshire and asked whether that would cause a problem. John Wilkinson replied that Wiltshire was also part of the national pilot, so they would be commissioning a provider on the same timescales who would deliver the same service across the county border.

A representative of Combe Hay Parish Council asked what the timescale was for the completion of the broadband project and was informed that, as B&NES had been able to link in with the already well-established Somerset and Devon scheme, it was hoped that there would be an early delivery date with roll-out starting in 2013.

The Chief Executive added that B&NES will benefit from the economies of scale achieved by the larger counties – the Council does not need to contribute very much funding as it only represented a small percentage of the whole project.

Councillor Neil Butters (Bathavon South Ward) expressed concern that the claimed broadband speeds would not be achieved. John Wilkinson replied that, until the procurement was complete, it would be difficult to predict the final figures accurately, but that they did intend to achieve what had been promised. A representative from Clutton added that to achieve 24MBpersecond would be a huge improvement.

Councillor David Veale (Bathavon West Ward) asked what the open market broadband speeds would be by 2020 and was informed that it was very difficult to predict. However, as B&NES are part of the pilot, the area would be ahead of many other parts of the country in terms of broadband speed.

Councillor David Bellotti (Cabinet Member for Finance and Property) informed the meeting that the choice for the Cabinet had been to partner with Bristol and South Gloucestershire at 85% capacity or join this cheaper scheme which had 100% coverage and was quicker.

The Chairman thanked the officer and Mr Head for their contribution. A copy of the handout is attached to these minutes.

## **Rural broadband programme**

## **35 IMPLICATIONS OF THE B&NES COUNCIL'S 2012/13 BUDGET**

Tim Richens (Divisional Director for Finance) introduced this item and drew the members' attention to the executive summary contained in the briefing note. He informed the meeting that Council Tax has been frozen at last year's level; this was the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a likely 4-year freeze which is set under the government's comprehensive spending review. The Council's government grant had been reduced by 8.3%; it was expected that these reductions would continue for another 2 years.

However, there was some good news in that B&NES was better placed financially than many other local authorities; only 10% of the savings will affect frontline services. Borrowing would also be reduced over the next few years, though not at the expense of the capital programme. There would still be significant investment in capital packages and infrastructure.

There were no questions from members but a representative from Combe Hay Parish Council welcomed the Council's support for investment in the rural broadband project despite the difficult financial climate. The Chair thanked the officer for his presentation.

## **36 THE LOCALISM ACT'S COMMUNITY RIGHT TO CHALLENGE AND COMMUNITY RIGHT TO BUY**

Andy Thomas (Group Manager, Partnership Delivery) introduced this item and explained that he had extracted the key impacts of the Localism Act as they affected parishes regarding their community rights.

The Act gives parishes the right to 'challenge' and 'bid'. The right to challenge enables a parish council to express an interest in running a local authority service. The right to bid gives communities a right to identify a building or land that they believe to be of importance to their community's social well-being.

A representative from Saltford Parish Council asked how the parish would be reimbursed if they decided to bid to repair the roads. The officer replied that, under the Community Right to Challenge, any organisation could approach the Council and propose that they could deliver a better service. If the Council accepts the proposal, they would have to initiate a procurement process and decide if the relevant body is suitable and capable of providing the service. The Chief Executive added that, if a parish felt it could deliver a service, the Council could issue a tender and anyone who bid for it would be considered.

A representative from Combe Hay Parish Council asked whether this scheme would prejudice the current agency arrangements in parishes e.g. for parish sweepers. The officer replied that each case would need to be looked at on an individual basis. If there was an existing agreement, there was a presumption that it would continue.

A representative from Claverton Parish Council asked whether councils had to have a neighbourhood plan in order to make a community bid and was informed that this was not required.

The Chair thanked the officer for his contribution.

## **37 THE B&NES CORE STRATEGY AND PLACEMAKING PLAN.**

### Core Strategy

David Trigwell( Divisional Director, Planning and Transport) introduced this item and updated Members on the progress of the Examination in Public. He reported that the Inspector was impressed with the number of Parish Councils who had taken part.

A representative from Combe Hay Parish Council, with reference to Paragraph 1.4 of the briefing note, welcomed the inclusion (in the proposed changes to the Core Strategy) of the urgent need for reliable and adequate access to high-speed broadband for every home and business in rural areas.

A representative from Claverton Parish Council asked what was happening to the plans for the A36/A46 link road as to implement it would seem to contradict other key policies in the Core Strategy. As there was no work currently being undertaken on that project, he could not understand why it was still included in the Core Strategy. David Trigwell replied that the issue was still due be addressed in the next planning period up to 2026, so it would be disingenuous not to include it. However, the Council currently did not have the resources to address the issue. The representative from Claverton Parish Council commented that the resource argument was not valid. He pointed out that the scheme had been unambiguously rejected at an earlier public enquiry. The Chief Executive added that, as technically it was still possible that the link road would go ahead, it had to be included in the Core Strategy.

A representative from Whitchurch added that their village would like to see the A36/A46 link road improved so that the trunk route traffic heading for Southampton would not go through their village. A representative from Saltford Parish Council agreed that they had a similar experience with traffic using A4.

### Placemaking Plans

David Trigwell introduced this item and explained that part of its intention was to provide clarity and greater certainty for the development industry; in Bath, this particularly applied to the future of the MOD sites in the city. The MOD wished to dispose of the sites quickly, so they were currently being prioritised. It was also the aim to protect the wider district from inappropriate development.

## **38 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING ( INCLUDING THE COMMUNITY RIGHT TO BUILD)**

David Trigwell introduced this item and informed the meeting that the legislation relating to Neighbourhood Planning takes effect in April 2012. The Cabinet will consider a draft Neighbourhood Planning Policy at that time followed by a period of public consultation until June 2012 when it will be finalised and adopted. A lot of work was being done about how the Council follows guidance from the Localism Act as to how it can improve engagement with communities.

A representative from Combe Hay Parish Council asked whether it was the Council's understanding that the scope of a Neighbourhood Plan is restricted to 'land use' matters only or may issues such as transportations be addressed. The officer confirmed that transportation issues would be included in the plan. The plan could also potentially include healthcare, but the impact would need to be assessed.

A representative from Freshford Parish Council asked whether the Neighbourhood Plan would be judged against the provisions of the Core Strategy to ensure conformity. David Trigwell acknowledged that conformity posed a difficult problem in this process – nothing can be done which is not in accordance with the core strategy and joint planning framework.

## **39 DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT**

David Trigwell introduced this item and summarised the background to the Development Management system and Scheme of Delegations which was introduced after 2008. The scheme provided for the situation where an objection or a comment or support from a parish council is contrary to the recommendation of the planning officer. It gives the opportunity for the planning officer to consult with the Chair of the Development Control Committee to consider whether the application goes before the Committee. The delegation rate was now at 95% and so the remaining 5% of cases receive a high degree of attention from the Committee. The planning department tried to resolve conflicts over land and property – sometimes the issues were settled to people's satisfaction, sometimes not.

Councillor Gerry Curran (Chair of the Development Control Committee) informed the meeting that he had been a councillor for 17 years and for most of that time, he had been a member of the Development Control Committee. Officers brought applications to him on a weekly basis for a decision on whether they would be referred to Committee. A form is completed and signed to record his decision and is then published. The Chair stated that he did consider all the issues and that some were very difficult. He did agree that correspondence with parishes could be improved.

Peter Duppa-Miller ( Secretary to the B&NES Local Councils Group) made the following statement:

*“The purpose of asking Councillor Curran to speak at this meeting is to help Local Councils how to better articulate (in planning policy terms) their recommendations concerning planning applications, so that in those few instances where the Local Council’s recommendation is opposite to that of the planning case officer, the Chair of the Development Control Committee will decide to refer the application to the Committee for determination.”*

David Trigwell replied that he was happy to help parish councils with this.

Councillor Neil Butters (Bathavon South Ward) informed the meeting that South Stoke Parish Council had drafted a Conservation Area Character Appraisal in conjunction with officers, but it seems to have stalled; he asked when it would be published. The officer replied that the department had been concentrating on the Core Strategy and so other work had been delayed as a result. He would need to consult with Cabinet Members to decide future priorities.

A representative of South Stoke Parish Council commented that parishes do consider planning applications carefully and they are careful to keep within policy guidelines. They wanted to help the planning department to deliver consistent results especially where there were substantial objections. They wanted to be re-assured that the high level of local concern was reflected on by the Chair of the Committee. A representative from Dunkerton asked if parishes could be notified if an application was to be considered by the Chair. The officer agreed that could be implemented.

A representative from Ubley stated that he was glad to hear that communications were to be improved but that there were still concerns about the delegation process. He referred to a local planning case which had over 30 objections, but which was not referred to Committee; this kind of incident destroyed confidence in the process. The Chair requested that Councillor Gerry Curran to respond to Ubley Parish Council directly on this matter.

Councillor Eric Potter (Chair of the B&NES Local Councils Group) commented that he hoped that the parishes and the Development Control Committee could sort out their differences. Planning Officers needed to work hard to justify their recommendations and improve the lines of communication. The Chief Executive added that planning was not a democratic process as the officers and Committee Members did not have much discretion as they had to follow planning policy. The number of cases where there was an issue was very small, but he agreed that informing parishes of the route of an application would be a good idea.

A representative of Batheaston Parish Council added that the parishes wished to be allies with the Development Control Committee, but that communications were a problem. He asked whether there were situations where planning decisions had been made in advance of the consultation process. David Trigwell replied that the system should not allow that to happen, but that he would investigate.

The Chair thanked Councillor Curran and the officer for their contribution.

**40 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Chair announced that the next meeting would be on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> June at 6.30pm in the Town Hall Chamber, Keynsham.

He informed the meeting that the next Chair of the Parishes Liaison meeting would be Councillor Rob Appleyard, with Councillor Neil Butters as Vice-Chair.

As it was the Chief Executive’s last Parishes Liaison meeting, the Chair thanked him for his wise counsel and wished him well for his retirement.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**