

## **BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL**

### **PARISHES LIAISON MEETING**

## **Minutes of the Meeting held**

Wednesday, 20th June, 2012, 6.30 pm

Bath & North East Somerset Councillors: Rob Appleyard (Chair), Paul Crossley, Mathew Blankley, Sally Davis

Representatives of: Bathampton, Batheaston, Bathford, Camerton, Claverton, Clutton, Charlcombe, Chew Magna, Combe Hay, Compton Dando, Corston, Dunkerton, Englishcombe, Farmborough, Freshford, Keynsham, Marksbury, Monkton Combe, Newton St Loe, Peasedown St John, Publow with Pensford, Priston, Radstock, Saltford, South Stoke, Stanton Drew, Stowey Sutton, Timsbury, Wellow, Whitchurch,

Also in attendance: Glen Chipp (Strategic Director for Place), Vernon Hitchman (Council Monitoring Officer), Nigel King (Web Project Manager), Jonathan Mercer (Communications and Marketing Manager), Meghan Rossiter (Senior Planning Officer), Simon de Beer (Planning Policy and Environment Manager), David Trigwell (Divisional Director, Planning and Transport), Ann Swabey (Democratic Services Officer), Chris Head (West of England Network).

### **1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

The Chair, Councillor Rob Appleyard, welcomed everyone to the meeting. He expressed his thanks on behalf of the meeting to Councillor Peter Edwards, the former Chair of Council.

### **2 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Clerk drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

### **3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from John Everitt and Councillors Tim Ball, Cherry Beath, David Bellotti, Charles Gerrish, Francine Haeberling, Nathan Hartley, Eleanor Jackson, Roger Symonds and Tim Warren.

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

There was no urgent business.

### **5 MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 22ND FEBRUARY 2012**

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

## **6 THE EVOLVING STANDARDS REGIME**

Vernon Hitchman, the Council's Monitoring Officer, introduced this report. He explained that the current Standards Committee had recommended to full Council that the future membership should reflect a varied representation to include independent members, parish representatives and B&NES councillors. He informed the meeting that regulations concerning Disclosable Pecuniary Interests had been recently published and that guidance for clarification would be published shortly. He reminded the meeting that in future, failure to disclose could be viewed as a criminal offence. The Standards Committee would be considering which Code of Conduct to recommend at their meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> June. He urged the town and parish councils to consider adopting a similar code. He reminded the meeting that the old code had both general provisions and precise requirements which covered most eventualities, so it would be helpful if parish and town codes included similar provisions for the prevention of misunderstanding.

A representative from Englishcombe Parish Council expressed concern that, when he was the subject of a complaint, he was not informed until the process was well advanced and asked whether the new provisions would allow councillors to defend themselves. The Monitoring Officer re-assured him that the committee had also felt that the previous process was not equitable with the principles of natural justice and that in the future, those who were the subject of the complaint would be notified and invited to respond to the allegations at an early stage.

A representative from Combe Hay Parish Council asked whether the Standards Committee were considering the National Association of Local Councils code and was informed that the committee were considering various local codes at their meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> June. A representative from Combe Hay Parish Council further asked whether Town/Parish Councils may delegate the granting of appropriate dispensations to the Proper Officer of that Town/Parish Council and was told that they could.

A representative of Keynsham Town Council reminded Members of the importance of keeping the register of Members' interests up-to-date throughout the 4-year period for which they were elected. The Monitoring Officer said that from 1<sup>st</sup> July, it will be a requirement as the Disclosable Pecuniary Interest provisions have changed from the old code. A representative from Clutton asked whether B&NES will be sending out forms to the parishes for them to update the register interests, but was informed that the remit of the Monitoring Officer no longer covered towns and parishes, so they would be responsible for their own records. However, a commentary on the code and specimen forms would be provided. The Monitoring Officer added that the new Disclosable Pecuniary Interest seems to have omitted the fact that people can be motivated by issues other than money. However, councils can still put this in their codes.

The Chair thanked the officer for his contribution.

## **7 RURAL BROADBAND IN B&NES**

The meeting was asked to note the reports which had been circulated with the agenda. Cllr Crossley informed the meeting that Connecting Devon and Somerset have offered an update on the project using an e-newsletter system which he would be happy to circulate to parishes.

Chris Head of the West of England network thanked those members who took part in the local exchange box scheme and said that all the information would feed into the Devon and Somerset project as part of the tendering process.

Anyone with any further queries about the scheme was asked to contact Anna Garner whose details were contained in the report.

## **8 B&NES COUNCIL WEBSITE AND ITS NAVIGATION**

Jonathan Mercer (Communications and Marketing Manager) introduced this item and gave a Powerpoint presentation about the new Council website which was due to go live at the end of July 2012. Amongst the new facilities was the opportunity for small groups and societies to put local events on the website. Organisations would need to register to upload events on the site.

A representative of Combe Hay Parish Council asked whether the planning applications section would be available on the site as it is now and was assured that it would remain the same. A representative from Clutton Parish Council asked whether the search engine could give people different search facilities .e.g. to search by date order and was informed that the new site would offer a variety of search options – there was also the option to provide links to Parish and Town Council websites. A representative from Batheaston pointed out that the base map used for house mapping was nearly 30 years old and asked if there was an intention to update. Jonathan Mercer referred the question to David Trigwell, who said that the Council used the Ordnance Survey maps which were only updated occasionally and only when there was substantial change in an area.

Chris Head asked whether the size of the site would allow those with slower download speeds to access information and also whether there would be a facility to use the site on mobile phones. He was informed that the site would be accessible to those with a slower download speed and that there was the intention to provide the site on mobiles.

The Chair thanked the officer for his presentation.

## **9 B&NES CORE STRATEGY**

### Core Strategy

Simon de Beer (Planning Policy and Environment Manager) introduced this item and informed the meeting that the Examination in Public was still underway, The Inspector was currently consulting on whether the final version of the National Planning Policy framework would have implications for the Core Strategy. The Council would be advised on the way forward on the Examination by the end of June.

A representative from Combe Hay Parish Council asked whether there were certain areas that the Inspector was not happy about and was informed that the protection of employment land and affordable housing in villages caused some concern. A representative from Clutton Parish Council asked whether the classification of core villages was changing. The officer replied that the current way of classifying villages was not always successful and that a more flexible way was being sought which looked at appropriate facilities. The Inspector wished to remove the power of veto by villages to housing development. A representative from Batheaston Parish Council asked why the Inspector was seeking clarification on local compensation schemes and was told that he wanted to make sure that the Council had a viable scheme in place that could be funded.

### Placemaking

The officer informed the meeting that the next step in the Placemaking Plan was to look at the site-specific issues alongside the parishes. A launch document was being prepared which scopes the work according to village aspirations and which should be published at the end of 2012.

The Chair thanked the officer for his presentation.

## **10 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING**

Simon de Beer introduced this item. The updated Statement for Community Involvement for Planning would be presented to Cabinet in September for adoption. An online survey of Parish and Town Councils would be taking place over the summer to gauge potential interest in neighbourhood planning.

A representative of Monkton Combe Parish Council asked whether an independent group could take over the Parish Plan above the Parish Council and was informed that the Parish Council was the automatic forum to control this process. A representative from Stanton Drew asked if designations were changing and what was the driver and was told that it reflected changing circumstances. A representative from Freshford Parish Council said that they had a joint plan with Limpley Stoke and complimented the officer on the support that they had received from his department.

Chris Head asked about linking Placemaking with Neighbourhood Planning - would the Placemaking Plan be completed before Neighbourhood Planning? The officer replied that that it would not and comprised a separate Development Plan Document. A representative from South Stoke Parish Council asked about the timeframe for registering community assets. The Monitoring Officer informed him that

there was a statutory framework in place for community assets but that the detail was still being finalised. In the meantime, queries should be addressed to David Trethewey.

A representative from Priston Parish Council asked whether councils had to wait for the Planning Department to supply a Placemaking Plan and was informed that Placemaking does not prevent parishes going forward with their Neighbourhood Plan; also some parishes may not want to create Neighbourhood Plans.

A representative from Clutton Parish Council stated that their council was keen to have a Neighbourhood Plan. They had produced a Parish Plan in 2010 which foresaw modest growth for the village. However, planning applications are coming through before they have been able to produce a Neighbourhood Plan and the council was concerned that these applications would use up their housing allocation for many years to come. The officer pointed out that the provisions of the Local Plan were still in place.

The Chair thanked the officer for his presentation.

## **11 HYDRAULIC FRACTURING ('FRACKING')**

David Trigwell (Divisional Director, Planning and Transport) introduced this item and gave a brief explanation of the process. The government have issued many licences for the extraction of shale gas and a clear risk of underground earthquakes has been identified by the British Geological Survey. The Council was particularly concerned about 'fracking' because of the potential disruption to the Bath hot springs. There was also concern about quarrying for the same reason. It was possible to protect Bath, being a World Heritage Site, but it was not so easy to protect the wider area of Somerset and the Mendips from whence the springs rise. It may be that the springs within the city have enough legal protection already, but they may need more protection from the sources outside the city.

A representative from Peasedown St John asked whether there was any oil shale within the authority and was told that it was theoretically possible as a former coal-mining area. The government was looking for new energy sources, hence the issuing of extraction licences, but the Council's priority was to secure special protection for the unique hot springs. A representative from Stowey Sutton stated that their concern was the potential impact of the proposed storage cells at Stowey Quarry and was informed that the Environment Agency was the lead agency for that issue, so any concerns should be addressed to them. A representative from Claverton Parish Council informed Members that the British Geological Society website contained further useful information on this issue – [www.geolsoc.org.uk/shalegas](http://www.geolsoc.org.uk/shalegas).

The Chair thanked the officer for his presentation.

## **12 THE GYPSIES, TRAVELLERS AND TRAVELLING SHOW PEOPLE SITE ALLOCATIONS DPD**

Simon de Beer (Planning Policy and Environment Manager) introduced this item. Councillor Paul Crossley went on to inform the meeting that the site allocations process had been temporarily halted as a result of the meeting of full Council on 18<sup>th</sup> June at which it was decided to continue the consultation process until mid-July. The responses arising from the consultation would form the basis of the recommendations to the Cabinet meeting on September 12<sup>th</sup>. The Cabinet recommendations would create a pre-submissions document which would then go out for a 6 week consultation. In the meantime, Councillor Crossley asked parishes to keep feeding in suggestions for sites which would be investigated.

A representative from Compton Dando requested that parishes next to the parishes where sites are allocated are also informed of the exhibitions. A representative from Clutton Parish Council asked what would happen if their parish council recommended a site in a neighbouring parish. Councillor Crossley replied that the Council were looking for variety and there was no pre-determination about which sites would go forward at this stage. David Trigwell added that all the site information would be published before the Cabinet in September, but that it would still be possible to suggest sites until then. Glen Chipp said that parishes would be kept informed.

A representative from Combe Hay Parish Council sought assurance that rejected sites would not be reinstated at a later stage and was informed by Councillor Crossley that discarded sites would not return to the list. Concern was expressed by a representative from Timsbury Parish Council about managing the movements of showgrounds which can appear in parishes with very little notice. The Chair suggested that that issue be included in the consultation for comment. A representative from Dunkerton Parish Council asked whether the site at Camerton had been rejected – Councillor Crossley confirmed that it had been. A representative of Whitchurch Parish Council pointed out that the site in Stockwood which was being illegally occupied could make a good permanent site. The Chair said that the site was being considered. A representative from Compton Dando Parish Council asked at what point enforcement on existing sites would be started and was informed by David Trigwell that there was nothing to stop it from happening now – the Inspector was happy that the Council were making progress with this issue. Glen Chipp added that the chances of successful enforcement increased as the Council went through the allocations process as the Council could show that they were identifying sites.

The Chair thanked the officers for their contributions.

## **13 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Councillor Crossley informed the meeting about an issue concerning future election dates. If the current coalition government goes to full term in 2015, then it would be mean that 3 different types of elections could fall on the same day i.e. national, council and parish polls. This is in fact, illegal, so the Council is asking for an amendment to ignore that rule. When this suggestion was put to the meeting, the overwhelming majority were in favour of the Council's proposed action.

It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> October 2012 at a venue to be confirmed.

The Chair thanked the meeting for their welcome. He asked that parishes inform him of any community events and projects happening in the North East Somerset area as he was interested in visiting them during his year of office.

The meeting ended at 8.35 pm

Chair(person) .....

Date Confirmed and Signed .....

**Prepared by Democratic Services**