

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

BATH CITY LIAISON FORUM

MONDAY 5TH OCTOBER 2009

PRESENT :- The Chairman of Council, Councillor Bryan Chalker, in the Chair

Forum Members:

Martin Broadbent (Greenway Residents Association), Michael Brett (Abbey Residents Association), Henry Brown (Federation of Bath Residents Associations), Jan Brown (Norfolk Crescent Green Residents Association), Mark Cartwright (Shakespeare Avenue Residents Association), Gerald Chown (Macaulay Prospect Residents Association), David Dunlop (London Road Area Residents Association), Robin Kerr (Federation of Bath Residents Associations), Stephen Little (Royal Crescent Society), Ian Perkins (Abbey Residents Association), David Rising (London Road Snow Hill Partnership), Richard Wales (Widcombe Association) and Nigel Websper (Pulteney Estate Residents Association)

Also in attendance:

Councillors: Francine Haeberling (Leader of the Council), Charles Gerrish (Cabinet Member for Customer Services), Terry Gazzard (Cabinet Member for Development and Major Projects) and Chris Watt (Cabinet Member for Children's Services)

Ward Councillors Ian Gilchrist and Richard Maybury

Apologies for absence were received from Robin Davies, Lisa Dora and Patrick Rotheram; and from Councillors Chris Cray, David Hawkins and Vic Pritchard

8 CHAIRMAN

The meeting was chaired by Councillor Bryan Chalker, Chairman of the Council, who welcomed those attending.

9 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Committee Administrator drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure as set out on the Agenda.

10 MINUTES – 16th JUNE 2009

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 16th June 2009 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Henry Brown gave the meeting an update on Item 6 of the previous meeting (the Traffic and Pollution Task and Finish Group). The object of the Group was to work jointly with the Council on transport options and issues. Six people had volunteered and Patrick Rotherham had offered to lead on behalf of the residents. They had held a preliminary meeting with David Trigwell. The Group would be examining best practice in other cities and planned to complete their work within 6 months.

Councillor Charles Gerrish added that the Group would shortly be consulted on air quality issues.

11 BUDGET SETTING PROCESS FOR 2010/11

The Strategic Director for Resources and Support Services (Andrew Pate) gave a presentation on the background to the proposed budget for 2010. He identified the areas of funding reduction and outlined the actions which were being proposed to cope with the situation.

A resident enquired about the savings target for the change programme and was informed that it was needed to make a substantial contribution to the Council's 5% per annum savings requirement. The different aspects of the programme have separate targets and these are still at a draft stage. A saving of 10% or more is being targeted within support services. Further savings are being targeted from lean reviews and rationalisation of off ice accommodation. Andrew Pate went on to say that the Authority was, in comparative terms, in a reasonable position and the reserves were in good order; however, the pressures facing local government and the public sector were immense.

A resident enquired about the percentage of the budget taken up by employment costs and was informed that it would amount to 30% of gross spend. It was suggested that the Council could look at reducing the layers of hierarchy as a way of reducing costs. The Chief Executive responded that the number of layers varied between services but that in most services there were only 3 or 4 layers from senior management to frontline staff.

A resident raised concerns about the likely rise in the cost of pensions and how the Council would cope with this problem. The Chief Executive informed the meeting that the Council were lobbying national bodies about this issue as any change would require legislation. Andrew Pate added that the Council's financial plans anticipated the pensions costs and agreed that all employers faced difficult pressures arising from deficits in pension funds.

A resident requested an update on the finances of the Spa project and also whether the proposal for a casino had progressed any further. The Chief Executive replied that the Spa was extremely successful and that there was solid evidence that it had boosted the City's economy. He acknowledged that the City should look at providing other attractions and referred to the investment in the Roman Baths, but pointed out the conflict caused by the necessity for reducing the budget as set against the need to invest to generate more income.

With regard to the casino, Councillor Charles Gerrish informed the meeting that a technical specification for the licensing process was being prepared which would be presented to the full Licensing Committee.

Henry Brown commented that the proposed efficiencies would not save enough to balance the external pressures on the Council budget. Residents were concerned about cuts in services and would like to be consulted about the priorities. Councillor Francine Haeberling acknowledged that it would be a difficult year but that it was intended to preserve the highest priority services and to consult on proposed cuts.

The Chairman thanked the Director for his presentation.

12 PROGRESS IN RECOMMENDATIONS OF CLEANLINESS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Councillor Charles Gerrish introduced this item and informed the meeting about the various specialist cleaning machines and vehicles which had been purchased in order to improve street cleanliness. It was proposed to move staff from Sawclose to Avon Street so they were closer to their work and the possibility of further moves to Manvers Street or the Sports Centre were being considered. Out of Bath, staff had been allocated to 5 dedicated teams which would cover specific areas. Councillor Gerrish acknowledged the support of local groups, the Task and Finish Group and the Bath Chronicle with the cleanliness campaign. With regard to the seagull problem, he informed the meeting that there was to be a local conference in November where authorities could pool ideas ready for the 2010 breeding season.

Gerald Chown (Chairman of the Task and Finish Group) said he was encouraged by the report and stated that the productivity savings arising from the use of the new equipment would be significant. Councillor Gilchrist expressed concern that the improvement in the inner City centre litter collection was to be paid for by reducing the service to outer areas. The Divisional Director for Environmental Services (Matthew Smith) assured him that this was not the case and that the increase in efficiency had been achieved by investing in better equipment.

Henry Brown welcomed the Council's response and expressed a hope that the investment will bring long-term improvements but asked what was proposed for the next financial year. Councillor Gerrish replied that he would be giving a 6 month progress report on the new machinery which it was hoped would deliver good value in efficiencies in return for the investment. A resident commented that the cleanliness of the Snow Hill area had improved substantially in the past two weeks. He suggested that greater enforcement action, in particular against restaurants, could raise income.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Gerrish and Matthew Smith for their contribution.

13 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK (LDF) – CORE STRATEGY OPTIONS

The Divisional Director for Planning and Transport (David Trigwell) gave a presentation on the impact of the Core Strategy on the City of Bath. He informed the meeting that the implementation of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) had been delayed by the Government until 2010 but that local consultation on the Core Strategy could still go ahead based on the Draft RSS. He went on to explain the LDF programme which would culminate in a final version in 2011 and outlined the challenges concerning housing and employment which were specific to Bath. The consultation period would run from 16th October to 11th November.

The Fobra representative asked whether the Authority was totally committed to the Strategy and whether it had any influence over the University's plans for expansion. Councillor Charles Gerrish replied that the Council was totally committed to following the Core Strategy process as it currently stands but that a review may be necessary

if the Government changes the Strategy. David Trigwell added that, if the City wished to control the size of the University population, then that would need to be expressed in the responses to the consultation. Nigel Websper (Fobra) asked whether the student accommodation was included in the total housing needs and was informed that, at present, they are not counted but that the Council would be raising the question with the Government as to whether they could be designated as part of the affordable housing pool.

Jan Brown asked whether there were possible conflicts between the proposals for the Public Realm and the Core Strategy. In response, David Trigwell stated that the Public Realm was a very important part of the process, especially where improvements to the Public Realm linked to better transport provision.

Henry Brown asked whether the consultation period could be extended into December but was told that the date had been set. He confirmed that Fobra would be encouraging residents' groups to take part in the consultation and would be happy to collate the responses.

Councillor Richard Maybury asked why the Core Strategy was so important. David Trigwell informed him that the Local Plan was coming to the end of its life and that the Core Strategy would lay down a planning framework to replace it. He was aware that developers were drawing up plans which they would want to progress once the economic situation improved and it was important that the Council were prepared with a clear planning strategy in order to respond robustly to proposals.

The Chairman thanked the Director for his presentation.

14 PROGRESS ON BATH TRANSPORTATION PACKAGE

The Group Manager for Planning Policy and Transport (Peter Dawson) introduced this item and thanked all those who had engaged in the project. He updated the meeting on the planning process – it was hoped that, if the final permissions were granted, then the scheme would go out to tender with a project price being set in 2010. Potential delays could be caused by the compulsory purchase orders or if a Public Inquiry was called.

The Chairman thanked the Group Manager for his presentation.

15 IMPROVEMENTS IN BATH CITY CENTRE

The Group Manager for Planning Policy and Transport (Peter Dawson) introduced this item. He informed the meeting of the proposed changes which included making the City centre more pedestrian and cycle friendly and changing the vehicular access to some streets. The public consultation carried out earlier in the year had generated a favourable response overall.

Henry Brown expressed concern that the various schemes would be started in a piecemeal fashion and asked that the changes be progressed in a logical order. David Trigwell replied that progress depended on the funding streams – these proposals were part of the Bath Package and it was hoped to co-ordinate the work as much as possible. A resident observed that it was important to consult with the

bus and taxi drivers about the scheme for the High Street as it was already too congested and this was before the proposed narrowing of the road.

Councillor Charles Gerrish added that the Civitas funding had been allocated to building a freight distribution centre outside the City centre from which electric vehicles would take goods into the City. This scheme would be in place before the street improvements. A resident asked who would meet the running and delivery costs of the freight scheme and was informed that it was funded by a European Union grant and was based on a model which was working well in Bristol. The costs were shared between businesses and the freight centre itself.

The Chairman thanked the Group Manager for his presentation.

16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the Committee Administrator would arrange the date for the next meeting within 6 months in consultation with appropriate parties.

The meeting ended at 8:35pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services