

WITHAM LOCAL COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Date: 6th November 2007

Meeting Started: 7.15pm

Meeting Ended: 10.12pm

Venue: Public Hall, Collingwood Road, Witham

Local Chairman: Cllr T J W Foster

Contact Point for further information: David Triggs, Locality Co-Ordinator

Membership Present:

Councillor J E Abbott	Yes	Councillor Mrs S A Howell	Yes
Councillor Miss L Barlow	Apologies	Councillor P J Hughes	Yes
Councillor D L Bebb	Yes	Councillor M C M Lager	Yes
Councillor K E Bigden	Yes	Councillor S J Lambourne	Apologies
Councillor J G J Elliott	Apologies	Councillor A M Meyer	Yes
Councillor Dr R L Evans	Yes	Councillor R G S Mitchell	Yes
Councillor T J W Foster	Yes	Councillor Mrs J M Money	Yes
Councillor Mrs M E Galione	Yes	Councillor R Ramage	Apologies
Councillor J E B Gyford	Yes	Councillor W Rose	Yes

Also Present:

Mick Galley, Street Scene Manager, BDC

Sgt Ken Midwinter, Essex Police,

Paul Munson, Head of Sustainable Development, BDC

Simon Taylor, Street Facilities Manager / Parking Services Manager, BDC

David Triggs, Locality Coordinator, BDC

Bob Wiltshire, Area Highways Manager, Essex County Council

Representatives of the Witham Local Community also in attendance:-

Representative	Address / Representing
Phil Barlow	Chalks Road, Witham
A Battley	Mill Bridge Road, Witham
Tim Bedward-Jones	Armond Road, Witham/Bethel Christian Fellowship
Sally Carpenter	Client Act Public Relations Ltd/Chamber of Trade
Ian Cass	Federation of Small Business
Anne Gould	Collingwood Road Witham/Bethel Christian Fellowship
Wendy Harlow	Grove Shopping Centre
P L Howell	Armiger Way, Witham
Ryan McCarthy	Braintree and Witham Times
John Perfect	Essex Chronicle

35. Declarations of Interest.

- Councillor John Gyford declared a personal and prejudicial interest in minute 39 concerning parking in the Witham Area as he is Treasurer of the Witham Labour Party who own a car park in Witham. Councillor Gyford left the meeting whilst this item was considered.
- Councillor Lager declared a personal interest in the items concerning car parking, the Local Development Framework, the Post Office Closures, the Community Warden Service and the urgent item regarding CCTV as he is a Witham Town Councillor and these matters have been discussed by the Town Council.
- Councillor Mitchell declared a personal interest in the matters relating to CCTV and anti-social behaviour as he is employed by Essex Police.

In accordance with the Code of Conduct, unless stated above, Councillors remained in the meeting during the discussion of the items referred to.

36. Minutes

The minutes of meeting of the Committee held on 11th September 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37. Matters Arising

The Chairman welcomed Sergeant Ken Midwinter, Essex Police who had been invited along to talk to the Committee about policing issues that had been raised at previous meetings of the Committee.

The Chairman specifically asked the Sergeant to respond to the issues of high visibility policing and the difficulty of getting a response from the police headquarters duty desk as both these issues were set out in the Committee's Action Plan.

Sergeant Midwinter explained that the Police had acted through the Neighbourhood Action Plan to place more police resources on duty during the times of concern. He explained that this meant using Special Constables, PCSOs and full Police Officers on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings. For security/operational reasons Sergeant Midwinter was unwilling to give the Committee precise details and the timing of police arrangements. He agreed to seek advice on this matter. Following the meeting he confirmed that his advice had been endorsed by senior police colleagues.

Sergeant Midwinter went on to explain the proposed improvements to police communications by way of an improved service desk at Braintree and retraining of staff to provide a more effective communications centre at Police Headquarters in Chelmsford. He expected these improvements to be put in place in the next five to six weeks but could not give a precise date.

Sergeant Midwinter then responded to questions from Councillors.

He was not sure that there was anything specific that the Council could do to reduce the paperwork burden experienced by the Police. It was a balance between getting Police Officers to spend as much time as possible in the

Community but when crime had been detected to ensure the paperwork is of a sufficiently high quality to be relied upon in court and to ensure convictions are achieved.

Sergeant Midwinter agreed that CCTV was an excellent tool in fighting crime, particularly when there is a high level of monitoring, but this could not replace high visibility policing.

Sergeant Midwinter explained the importance of the pub watch scheme in working more closely with licensees to prevent drinking related crime and anti-social behaviour.

He explained that the Neighbourhood Action Panels were not a police meeting and were chaired by an independent member of the Community. These were an opportunity for the Community to raise any issues and the experience of meetings so far was quite varied.

The Chairman invited the public to ask any questions of the Police. In response to a question from Mr Barlow, Sergeant Midwinter confirmed that the public were being encouraged to report all incidents of crime, as this information was invaluable to the Police in targeting its resources.

The Chairman thanked Sergeant Midwinter for attending the meeting and answering Member's questions. At this point Sergeant Midwinter left the meeting.

The Chairman invited any other matters arising.

Councillor Abbott referred to minute 22 of the last meeting and the comments made by Councillor Walters, Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability. Councillor Abbott questioned when the Council had been advised by DEFRA that it could no longer send waste to landfill as he had received different advice.

The Locality Coordinator informed the Committee that he had requested the diary logs as set out in minute 24. Officers from the Council had supplied public leaflets entitled "A Guide to Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour" and "Are you affected by Anti-Social Behaviour?" These gave information on how to report and record incidents. Members of the public and the Committee were advised to talk to the Council's officers if they wanted an incident diary so that officers could explain the process in more detail.

38. Public Question Time.

Members of the public were invited to address the Committee: -

- Town Councillor Phil Barlow referred to the benefits of CCTV and the proposal being put forward by the Town Council following its meeting in February 2007. He also referred to the Town Council's understanding that the funding of £108,000 for CCTV held by Braintree District Council would be divided equally between the three areas of the District with Witham being offered one-third for the development of CCTV.

- Mr Tim Bedward-Jones welcomed the opportunity to have open discussions at the Local Committees and the intention of the Committee to allow the public to become involved in discussions just prior to or during debates on different issues.
- Tim Bedward-Jones who represented the Bethel Christian Fellowship expressed his concerns about the progress of negotiations with officers on the proposed place of worship at Maltings Lane, Witham. The Committee had considered the matter at its meeting on 17th July 2007 and he was surprised that officers were trying to lease the land to Bethel when he felt the land would be given to Bethel for the provision of the place of worship.
- Anne Gould liaison officer for Churches Together in the District expressed similar concerns to those of Mr Bedward-Jones, she felt that by asking for leasehold the Council was moving the goalposts.

39 Parking in the Witham Area

Councillor Mitchell, Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment and Sustainability, outlined details of available parking in the Witham Area, both District Council car parks, private car parks and on-street parking. He briefly reported on the 2006 survey, recent changes to car parking charges aimed at freeing up town centre car parking for shoppers and the Council's need to balance car parking provision against income generation.

Bob Wiltshire, Area Highways Manager from Essex County Council referred to his Council's responsibility for implementing waiting restrictions. His office would only seek to implement such schemes if it was requested to do so and only if, following consultation involving Town/Parish Councils and local people, there was broad support for the scheme.

During the course of a wide and varied debate involving Members of the public the following issues were raised/debated:

- The need for an integrated approach involving all agencies/partners and all modes of transport;
- The importance of involving Parish Councils and including consideration of parking in villages, in particular commuter car parks such as those in Hatfield Peverel and Kelvedon;
- To include consideration of other modes of transport as part of the solution in tackling car parking issues e.g. public transport, cycling and walking – e.g. safe cycle storage, improved bus service and in Witham the provision of the footbridge
- The fact that buses were sometimes running empty might mean that they are wrongly priced, not advertised and/or not at the right times;
- The fact that changes to Morrison's car parking rules meant that the public were parking in residential streets and walking up to 25/30minutes to the station to avoid paying car park charges. This has the effect of causing additional traffic dangers in some areas in what become narrow roads with cars parked on both sides;
- A comment was made regarding funding of the footbridge and whether this should have been met from a highways budget rather than Section 106 funds. In response Mr Munson explained that the footbridge would be constructed in the next 12 to 18 months out of Section 106 monies;
- Why was there no opportunity to wait for passengers outside Witham

Station;

- The inclusion of planning policies which limit the provision of off-street parking in new residential developments and the impact this sometimes has on the parking on residential estates.

Decision: That Bob Wiltshire from Essex County Council establishes a working group with the remit to look at car parking issues across the Witham Area. That the group involve all key partners and take note of the issues raised above with a report being made back to this Committee.

40. Local Priorities.

The Committee received and noted the Action Plan.

Councillor Rose updated the Committee on the work of the anti-social behaviour working group. The work of the second working group on roads and traffic was partially being taken forward by way of tonight's debate on parking.

41 Local Development Framework

The Committee considered a report from Paul Munson, Head of Sustainable Development, in which he explained how it was proposed that the Local Committees would be involved in consultation on the preferred options document for the Core Strategy. Members were informed that the Local Development Framework would set out the proposals for development in the District for the period to 2025. It was noted that there might be some delay to the proposed programme depending on the outcome of next week's meeting of the Local Development Framework Panel.

Decision: That the report be noted and the proposal to hold a consultation event with the Witham Local Committee be endorsed.

42 Post Office Closures

The Chairman gave a verbal report on the outcome of discussions on 31st October 2007 with Gary Grange from the Post Office over the planned closures in the Braintree District including White Notley Post Office in the Witham Area. He referred to the debate at the Council meeting the previous evening and that given the criteria and the number of closures required if one post office remained open then others would probably need to close in order for the Post Office to meet its target of 2500 closures.

During the debate many Members expressed their frustrations and concerns. One or two Members stated that they were not surprised as customers chose or were being encouraged down other routes, the increasing use of non-cash methods of payment by using telephone and internet services meant it was to be expected that the number of customers using these facilities would fall.

Councillors and Members of the public were urged to write in to challenge the closure of White Notley Post Office by the deadline of 19th November by reference to the criteria for closure.

43 Review of the Community Warden Service

Mick Galley, Central Area Manager for Street Scene Services presented the findings of a review of the Community Warden Service introduced in November 2006. The report highlighted that the service was popular with local residents and town and parish councils and this was illustrated by the customer survey conducted in May 2007.

The Wardens have developed effective partnerships with the Police, youth groups, schools and community groups undertaking an enabling role rather than that of an enforcer.

The report concluded by setting out a series of recommendations of issues that needed to be considered in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. In discussing the report Members expressed their high regard for the service and supported the recommendations.

DECISION: That the following series of recommendations be endorsed.

- Review enforcement and delegation of powers along with the links with Planning Enforcement and Environmental Protection;
- Focus on promoting use of the website for news of local events, community projects, performance information, etc.
- Extend the programme of educational visits to schools;
- Investigate the use of better mobile technology to improve communications/ efficiency of the service;
- Consider introducing a Junior Warden Scheme;
- Explore opportunities for sponsorship and external funding.

44 Trial of Enforcing “No Parking on Grass Verges”

It was noted that this report had been withdrawn.

45 Place of Worship at Maltings Lane, Witham

The Chairman thanked Mr Bedward-Jones and Mrs Anne Gould for expressing their concerns during public question time. He informed the Committee that there had been no briefing paper as officers were in the process of discussing matters with the various parties involved.

DECISION: That the Head of Asset Management be requested to report to a future meeting of the Committee explaining the outcome of discussions with interested parties.

46 Future Items

The Committee was referred to section 5 of the Agenda regarding items for the next meeting.

DECISION: The items set out under section 5 of the Agenda were noted.

Councillor Gyford asked for a position statement to be given to the Committee regarding the feasibility study into the future of Bramston Sports Centre. This item had been deferred on various editions of the Forward Plan.

ACTION: That the Locality Co-ordinator asks the responsible officers to give a position statement to the Committee.

47 Urgent Item – CCTV in Witham

The Chairman agreed to take the above item as an urgent matter in public as this matter was under discussion and the Committee would not meet again until January 2008.

The Chairman invited Wendy Harlow from the Grove Centre and Sally Carpenter from the Chamber of Trade to speak on this matter before opening up the discussion for the Committee.

Wendy Harlow expressed her disappointment that Braintree Council's Cabinet meeting had deferred consideration of the report on CCTV. She referred to the fact that the Grove Centre had its own CCTV scheme as did Witham Industrial Watch. Both had proved successful and she believed the Witham Town Council scheme would be equally successful.

Sally Carpenter referred to the Cabinet report which had been withdrawn from the agenda of the meetings in October which she claimed was inaccurate. The fact that Witham would be monitoring its own cameras would not preclude support from Braintree Council.

Councillor Dr Evans referred to the report to Witham Town Council in February 2007 setting out the various aspects of the proposed scheme and the belief at the time that Braintree Council funding would be shared three ways with Witham receiving one-third. He said that statements made elsewhere that Witham was opting out were untrue.

Cllr Evans was pleased that the Leader had announced at the Council meeting that representatives from Braintree Council would meet with representatives from Witham Town Council on Wednesday 7th November 2007 to discuss CCTV funding.

Members discussed the merits of the new scheme and Wendy Harlow stated that the camera system proposed by the Town Council was state of the art and could provide high quality images at nighttime without external lighting.

DECISION: That the position be noted and a progress report be requested for the next meeting of this Committee.

T J W FOSTER

(CHAIRMAN)