

8 SEPTEMBER 2003

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the New Forest District Council held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Monday, 8 September 2003.

p J A G Hutchins - Chairman
p Lt Col M J Shand - Vice-Chairman

Councillors:

G Abbott
p K F Ault
p K E Austin
p C Baker
p G C Beck
p Mrs J L Cleary
p J E Coles
p D E Cracknell
p G F Dart
p W H Dow
p Miss P A Drake
p M H G Fidler
p Ms L C Ford
p P C Greenfield
p R C H Hale
p C J Harrison
p D Harrison
p F R Harrison
p J D Heron
p D A Hibbert
p P E Hickman
p Mrs M D Holding
J M Hoy
p Mrs M Humber
p M J Kendal
p Mrs B M Maynard
p Mrs M McLean
p M J Molyneux
p R J Neath

Councillors:

p G J Parkes
p B M F Pemberton
e J Penwarden
p L R Puttock
p A W Rice TD
p B Rickman
p Mrs M J Robinson
p B Rule
D J Russell
p T M Russell
p D N Scott
p N E Scott
p S A Shepherd
p Mrs B Smith
e Mrs L P Snashall
p Mrs S I Snowden
p M H Thierry
p A R Tinsley
p D B Tipp
e Mrs B Vincent
p M S Wade
e S S Wade
p G M Walmsley
p J G Ward
p A Weeks
e Dr M N Whitehead
p C A Wise
e P R Woods
e Mrs P A Wyeth

Officers Attending:

D Yates, N Gibbs, Ms J Bateman, Mrs P Higgins and Miss G O'Rourke.

24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

Cllrs Dart, Harrison, Heron and Weeks declared interests in Minute 27

25. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2003, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

26. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

(a) Capability – Festival for the Disabled

The Chairman announced that on Saturday 13 September the Council would be hosting 'Capability', the New Forest festival for the disabled. People with disabilities and their carers were invited to this special day at Appletree Court in Lyndhurst between 10am - 4pm. Entry was free. The event, which would be opened by the BBC's Peter White, would provide information and advice as well as recreational and sporting activities.

27. CABINET.

Cllrs Dart, Harrison, and Weeks declared personal interests (item no. 3 – 3 September 2003 - Hanger Farm, Totton : Outcome of Tenders) as members of Totton and Eling Town Council. They did not consider their interests to be prejudicial. They remained at the meeting.

Cllr Heron declared a personal interest (item no.5 – 3 September 2003 – Development Proposals in Ringwood Town Centre) as the President of the Ringwood Chamber of Trade. He also declared a personal and prejudicial interest in that his girlfriend was a member of the Ringwood Redevelopment Action Group. There was no discussion on this item.

The Chairman presented the reports of the Cabinet held on 6 August and 3 September 2003. On the motion that the reports be received and the recommendations adopted:

(a) Site Thresholds for Provision of Affordable Housing

It was moved and seconded that the words "or 0.17 hectares" be inserted after the word dwellings on the 5th line of the Cabinet recommendation. In moving the amendment the member said that there was a need for a rule for an area threshold as well as a number threshold. Without an area threshold there was concern that developers might find a loophole in the Council's policy. The best defence would be to ensure that the policy was not likely to change in the future. Cross party support to the amendment would give developers confirmation that the policy was not likely to change further.

Members spoke for and against the amendment.

Members said that to set an area threshold would achieve the best outcome for those in most need. There needed to be a realistic package for developers. The New Forest area would always be an attractive location for developers and an area threshold would be a valuable tool in policy making.

The Housing Portfolio Holder, whilst agreeing that there was a definite need for more affordable housing, felt that the need for an area threshold was superfluous. The number threshold of 5 provided clarity and was therefore sustainable for developers.

The Planning and Environment Portfolio Holder said that the reduction from 15 to 5 as a number threshold was to be welcomed and could mean that significant additional developers' would be attracted. There were a number of single property sites in the New Forest that were in excess of half an acre which could, under the current system, be redeveloped and replaced by 2 or 3 houses. If the Council agreed to an area criteria then this would force developers to opt for higher density on such sites in order for the development to be economically viable. He was of the view that a number threshold of 5, whilst still remaining economically viable to developers, would also attract a higher level of developers' contributions.

Another member said that the application of an area threshold would result in less affordable housing being available. Developers would be forced into building higher densities on sites that would fundamentally change the character of the Forest's villages and towns.

Other members supported the need for additional affordable housing and said that an even lower number threshold should be considered.

Other members said that the Council had separate policies that would protect rural villages and the proposed policy would not override any current policy. Towns and villages such as Brockenhurst, Lyndhurst and Burley would not be affected. Higher density developments could be of high quality. There were already too many executive style homes being built in the area and there needed to be smaller, lower cost homes that local people could afford.

The Leader of the Council said that, after detailed calculations, officers had recommended an area threshold of 0.17 acres that retained the same ratio of area to dwellings as previously. There were already problems in the rural areas of the district with builders coming forward with high density developments. He agreed that there was certainly a need for more affordable housing but the issues were finely balanced and developers needed to continue to be encouraged to invest in the area.

Upon a vote, the amendment was lost.

RESOLVED:

That the reports be received and the recommendations adopted.

28. STANDARDS COMMITTEE.

The Chairman of the Committee presented the report of the Standards Committee held on 8 August 2003. On the motion that the reports be received and the recommendations adopted:

(a) The Local Authorities (Code of Conduct) (Local Determination) Regulations 2003

A member said that he thought that to amend the quorum of the Standards Committee to 3 when exercising its functions under the above regulations was too restrictive. The Chairman replied that the matter had been fully discussed at the Standards Committee and he was of the view that, in these particular circumstances, a quorum of 3 would be appropriate.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and the recommendations adopted.

29. PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' QUESTION TIME.

Question No. 1 from : Cllr Ward to Cllr Rickman, Leisure Portfolio Holder

"Will the Portfolio Holder give a report on the progress of the "Healthy Horizons" referral scheme that was introduced by this administration".

Answer:

In responding to the question the Portfolio Holder thanked members for attending the recent tour of facilities in the district, organised by the Leisure Services department, which he felt had gone very well.

The Portfolio Holder said that the GP Referral Scheme has been in existence for many years and whilst the current administration would not wish to claim credit for having introduced it, they had supported the development of this important area of work, which was jointly funded with the Primary Care Trust.

This month a new scheme at Lymington Recreation Centre opened based in the new 20 station gym. The PCT has so far committed £27,000 a year to Healthy Horizons over three years rising to £35,000 for 2003/2004. It was a true partnership project.

There had been 949 referrals in 2002/2003, a rise of 11% over the previous year. A total of 740 passes had been sold to assist the transition from the subsidised scheme to full payment for the service and new exercise classes had been organised to follow on from the gym sessions. The partnership with the PCT had been extended with a new initiative to combat obesity that was a national problem of increasing concern. The PCT had earmarked £30,000 over the next 3 years. The Portfolio Holder said that this, coupled with the Council's exercise staff working with dieticians to promote healthy lifestyles, put the Council at the leading edge of this work.

115 referrals from G.P. surgeries had been received and Applemore Recreation Centre was now classified as a Phase II Cardiac Rehabilitation Centre.

The Portfolio Holder said that he attached considerable value to the work the Council did in supporting the community, encouraging healthy lifestyles and improving the quality of people's lives, as well as maximising the use of our Recreation Centres.

Question No. 2 from : Cllr Ms Ford to Cllr Thierry, Environment Portfolio Holder

"Would the portfolio holder for the Environment please give an update on the success of the Blue Sack kerb side recycling recently introduced in Ringwood and Fordingbridge?"

Answer:

The Portfolio Holder replied that the Recycling Plus Scheme started in Ringwood on 7 July 2003. Re-usable blue bags were used to collect paper and cardboard for recycling. The recyclables were collected every 2 weeks with the collection day sometimes different from the normal refuse collection day.

The scheme had made a good start with approximately 12 tonnes of paper and card collected every week. The quality of the material collected was very good. The scheme was very popular with local residents, with many requesting extra recycling bags. Whilst there was some early difficulty in returning blue bags and with vehicular access to some properties, these had been addressed and the scheme was now running well.

The Portfolio Holder was pleased to report that the Council were among the top ten recycling authorities in the country, with 23% of the waste being recycled.

In response to a supplementary question, the Portfolio Holder said that there were plans to extend the Recycling Plus Scheme to some supplementary rural areas as soon as possible.

Question No. 3 from : Cllr Mrs McLean to Cllr Heron, Crime and Disorder Portfolio Holder

"Could the Portfolio Holder for Crime and Disorder please explain the rationale behind the loss of 18 police officers across the Forest when pressures to reduce crime, and particularly youth nuisance, are increasing?"

Answer:

The Portfolio Holder said that there was now a new Resource Allocation Formula. The new formula did not calculate the number of officers for a given division but the percentage of resources that should be provided. This meant that the New Forest division had more than its calculated share of officers by 20.

Hampshire Constabulary were aware that a reduction of 20 officers would not be well received and made a decision to reduce the operational strength from 161 to 151. The Portfolio Holder quoted Superintendent Barry Talbot, of the New Forest Division who said "This reduction will be over an extended time and through natural wastage". He went on to say "We are still committed to the community beat approach, but we are looking at the style of policing to improve our service".

As the Portfolio Holder for Crime and Disorder, Cllr Heron said that his concern was not for the whole of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight but for the New Forest District. In recent years, the trend within the Police force was that 'desk' work was undertaken by civilian staff, which meant that the 10 officers lost would be from the front line. According to Dr Richard Day, that would mean that New Forest still had too many Police Constables. The Portfolio Holder said that should this proposed reduction in the number of officers be implemented, he believed that Hampshire Police would be letting down the residents of the New Forest. He expressed concern that such a reduction might mean that there could be insufficient back up for the police themselves when dealing with incidents. This would not only be to the detriment of the residents of the New Forest, but could also raise health and safety implications for police officers themselves.

In response to a supplementary question the Portfolio Holder said that he was keen to see CCTV installed in Hythe but this could not happen without central government funding.

Question No. 4 from : Cllr Pemberton to Cllr Heron, Crime and Disorder
Portfolio Holder

"Does the portfolio holder for crime and disorder feel that we are making any progress in tackling youth nuisance within the district?"

Answer:

The Portfolio Holder replied saying that whilst he could spend a considerable amount of time updating the members on the successful partnership working and the numerous distraction activities that the Council were supporting across the district, he preferred to concentrate on the Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs).

The Council had reviewed its procedures and on 31 July 2003 the first ASBO for the district was granted. The order was made against a juvenile from the Netley Marsh area. The new protocol for obtaining an order had been seen by others as such good practice that one Housing Association had asked if they could use it as best practice in order to apply for an ASBO themselves.

In response to a supplementary question, the Portfolio holder said that ASBO's were a cost effective method of control. The Council were prepared to use them and take action, including the use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABS's) prior to ASBO's when necessary. The use of these methods showed that the Council was prepared to be tough when required and would not tolerate anti-social behaviour.

Question No. 5 from : Cllr D Harrison to Cllr Heron, Crime and Disorder Portfolio Holder

The Skate Park at Bartley Park, Totton, was an extremely valued facility, utilised by hundreds of young people. Public perception of this might be changed by distribution of a survey form that included clumsy questions directly linking anti-social behaviour with the presence of the facility. Local members & Totton & Eling Town Council did not appear to have been involved, consulted or informed before the survey was produced and delivered; why not?

Answer :

The Portfolio Holder said that the survey was intended to be distributed to all members in whose wards the survey area lay. An outside agency had been used to distribute over 750 questionnaires but obviously not everyone had received their copy and he apologised for this.

However, he did confirm that Totton and Eling Town Council were forwarded a copy of the survey and there was considerable discussion with the Assistant Town Clerk on the issues.

The survey was carried out under the auspices of the Community Safety Partnership at the request of the Police who had wanted a clear view from the residents in the area. The survey formed the first stage in finding a solution to the problems being experienced in the area. In due course, the results from the survey and the actual recorded crime data would be fed back to the community and partner agencies.

30. MEETING DATES FOR THE 2004/2005 MUNICIPAL YEAR.

RESOLVED:

That, for the 2004/2005 Municipal Year, Council meetings be held on the following Mondays at 6:30 p.m. :-

2004

17 May
19 July
13 September
25 October
13 December

2005

21 February (subject to the County Council budget meeting having taken place)
25 April
16 May

31. IRAQ CONFLICT.

RESOLVED:

That the Chairman write to Desmond Swayne, M.P. and to other residents of the District currently serving in Iraq, to send them the Council's best wishes and hope for a safe and speedy return home.

CHAIRMAN

(DEMOCRAT/CL080903/MINUTES.DOC)