

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 5 November 2008 **Time:** 7.30 - 9.48 pm

Place: Council Chamber, Civic
Offices, High Street, Epping

**Members
Present:**

Representing Epping Forest District Council:

Councillor(s): J Knapman (Chairman), R Morgan, Mrs M Sartin and
Mrs P Smith

Other Councillors:

Councillor(s): Mrs D Collins, Mrs A Cooper, Mrs A Grigg, D Stallan, C
Whitbread and Mrs J Whitehouse

Representing Essex County Council:

County Councillor(s): G McEwen

Representing Local Councils:

Councillors: J Ballard (Parish Clerk – Roydon Parish Council), A Barr
(Lambourne Parish Council), Mrs D Borton (Nazeing Parish Council),
C Brown (Stapleford Abbots Parish Council), K Canning (Town Clerk -
Chigwell Parish Council), G Castle (Nazeing Parish Council), R
Church (Buckhurst Hill Parish Council), Ms S DeLuca (Parish Clerk -
North Weald Parish Council), Mrs V Evans (Parish Clerk – Epping
Upland Parish Council), J Farren (Stapleford Abbots Parish
Council), J Filby (Lambourne Parish Council), C Hawkins (North
Weald Bassett Parish Council), Mrs J Hedges (Epping Town
Council), Mrs S Jackman (Ongar Town Council), Ms P Jones
(Epping Upland Parish Council), R Jones (Waltham Abbey Town
Council), S Jones (Theydon Bois Parish Council), B Murphy (Epping
Town Council), Miss H Nicholas (Roydon Parish Council), J Philip
(Theydon Bois Parish Council), J Salter (Abbess. Beauchamp &
Berners Roding), B Surtees (Ongar Town Council), C Thompson
(Parish Clerk – Moreton, Bobbingworth & The Lavers), S N Wilkinson
(Roydon Parish Council), R Witham (Lambourne Parish Council)

Apologies: **Epping Forest District Council –**

Councillor(s): B Sandler

Essex County Council –

Councillor(s): C Finn and C Pond

Parish/Town Councils: -

Councillor (s): Ms J Bowerman (Matching Parish Council), Mrs C
Pond (Loughton Town Council), Mrs S Stavrou (Waltham Abbey
Parish Council)

Officers Present: D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development), S Bacon (Service Business Manager, Planning and Economic Development), I White (Forward Planning Manager) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

By Invitation: Chief Inspector J Baldwin, Inspector C Carrington (Essex County Police) and A Lainton (Epping Forest District Council Consultant)

11. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That, the minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2008 be agreed.

12. ISSUES RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILS

(a) Pre-Meeting Preparation for Local Councils

Members were concerned that there had not been adequate preparation before previous Local Councils' Liaison Committees. Councillor B Surtees of Ongar Town Council, apologised to the Committee for. He had conflicting commitments which had forestalled the collation of agenda items needed for this Committee. He was arranging another local council's meeting to collect agenda items for the next meeting of this committee. The Vice Chairman, Councillor J Salter of Abbess, Beauchamp and Berners Roding Parish Council, said that some members had missed preparatory meetings, he urged members to attend and raise questions on issues, for further discussion. There was a feeling that the number of Parish and Town Council meetings seemed to have been getting less and less. Committee members felt that there was a lack of interest amongst local councils. Councillor B Murphy of Epping Town Council suggested that members of local councils liaise with Town Clerks more.

The Chairman, Councillor J Knapman, said that the Committee belonged to the local councils, they should communicate more, particularly by email and use the facilities at the District Council. This issue was largely in the hands of Members.

(b) Community Initiative Fund Bids

Councillor B Surtees of Ongar Town Council said that he had attended a meeting of the Epping Association where County Council funding had been discussed. The funding was decided on an equitable basis. It seemed that the established protocol had been abandoned without information or consultation. There was a good proportion of funding available. The Deputy Chief Executive, Mr D Macnab, advised that the West Essex Co-Ordinator, should have been contacted if there were concerns.

Councillor G McEwen of Essex County Council thought everybody should know about the fund. Councillor B Surtees was concerned that the district was out of step with the rest of the County. There was no communication explaining how things were done.

13. IT DEVELOPMENTS IN PLANNING SERVICES

Mr S Bacon, Service Business Manager for Planning Services, gave a presentation regarding the Planning Portal.

The Planning Portal was the official Government sponsored Planning and Building Control Website, it would make the process of accessing information concerning planning applications much easier.

The system comprised the following:

- Allowing the submission of public comments on planning applications
- Public access to all Building Control information
- Public access to all planning application decision notices (930,000 available)
- Public access to all application forms (24,000 available)
- Public access to plans (29,000 available)
- Public access to register pages for 1948-1974 (41,000 available)
- Public access to appeal decisions (3,000 available), a total of more than 125,000 documents.

Mr S Bacon said that all new planning applications were scanned and published within two working days of being registered. From October 2008, all consultees (both internal and external) were being consulted electronically, this allowed wider consultation at the same cost. The costs of the scanning operation were offset by savings in printing and postal costs. The National eConsultation Service should cut down on phone calls and letters. It offered a single system for all consultees and would be available during the first quarter of 2009. Applying for planning permission and making payment for an application could now be made online. Currently 20% of applications were now coming via the Portal.

Planning data was put into a pinpoint mapping system which used Google maps. It contained all planning applications dating back to 1948 and was updated with new applications daily. Users searched planning applications by postcode, it allowed an overlay of data over satellite or aerial photographs and had made it much easier for relating planning applications to the local area. Additionally, the Adobe Measuring Tool allowed residents and consultees to scale from scanned plans.

To assist the public, a range of "How To" guides were available to view on the website. The guides were also available via the Weekly List. All neighbours consulted on planning applications were receiving a copy of the user guide "How to View Planning Application Material Online."

There was concern about the privacy of neighbours in the consultation part of the Planning Portal. Mr S Bacon said that they were currently examining this, the public could see a list of consultees but not who made which comments.

The Chairman thanked Mr S Bacon for his presentation and for answering questions from the Committee.

14. INTRODUCTION FOR CHIEF INSPECTOR JONATHAN BALDWIN

Chief Inspector Jonathan Baldwin was introduced to the Committee, he was the new District Commander for Epping Forest. He thanked the Committee for allowing him to speak, he had taken part in meetings with partnership bodies before but had not met the

local council representatives together. Accompanying Chief Inspector J Baldwin was his deputy, Inspector Craig Carrington.

Chief Inspector J Baldwin said that policing was a two way process, between the police and the general public. Local councils played an important part in the policing process as they were knowledgeable about their areas, a pro-active stance was therefore important. He advised that because he had not received questions from members beforehand, he could not answer all of their queries. He was willing to attend future Local Councils' Liaison Committees and report their particular concerns to the Neighbourhood Action Panels (NAPS).

Mr C Thompson, Town Clerk of Moreton Town Council, commented that although there was little crime in the Moreton area, it was rare for residents to see or know who their local police officers were. Despite advertising a local meeting, where 100 people had participated, no police representatives had attended. Chief Inspector J Baldwin advised that Inspector C Carrington was the officer for the Moreton area and he would supply the Parish Council with photographs of each neighbourhood officer and their contact details, both mobile numbers and email addresses.

Mr C Thompson added that he no longer received regular emails advising on the local crime situation, over the last few weeks there had been 2 or 3 burglaries in his area. Chief Inspector J Baldwin requested Parish Council contact details, he also suggested creating email groups which would facilitate better communication between the police and local councils. He advised that information on local neighbourhood watches can be emailed to residents. Councillor B Murphy of Epping Town Council agreed to provide liaison between the police and local councils. Councillor Mrs P Smith advised that the District Council website had the contact details for the Parish and Town Councils on it. She also advised that there was also a new anti crime initiative – "Not In My Neighbourhood."

AGREED:

That, the Parish and Town Councils email addresses be sent to Councillor B Murphy for dispatch to the police.

Chief Inspector J Baldwin said that local communities were becoming increasingly less tolerant of anti-social behaviour. There was a variety of local groups and partnerships taking action on crime and littering, for example the Epping Forest Rangers prevented fly tipping and there were groups who also dealt with anti-social parking around Underground Stations. Councillor B Surtees thought that the problem was that initiatives were introduced and then faded away.

Chief Inspector J Baldwin advised that furnishing districts with adequate numbers of police officers was often difficult. Officers did not want to stay in the same place for too long. Some stayed in an area for eighteen months to two years before moving away. Chief Inspector J Baldwin said that there needed to be a clear understanding between the police and local councils, regarding expectations of service. There were nine committed officers for NAPs. The process was still embryonic. The police needed to know what was expected from the public.

Ms S De Luca, Parish Clerk of North Weald Parish Council asked if common crime problems had emerged from the NAPs meetings. Chief Inspector J Baldwin replied that he had copies of the NAPs minutes, he wrote the strategic assessments which provided a picture of the crime situation in the area.

Councillor R Morgan, District Councillor, asked about the hundreds of extra officers who were now in the County force. Chief Inspector J Baldwin said that there were 600 extra officers across the force, Epping was receiving an extra 12 officers making its establishment 100 in total.

Chief Inspector J Baldwin was asked about controlling speeding traffic, he replied that officers by roadsides wearing fluorescent jackets had a positive effect on speed reduction.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector J Baldwin for coming to the meeting and advising the members on the current policing situation. Chief Inspector J Baldwin thanked the Committee in return. He also particularly thanked Lambourne Town Council for the exemplary way they had worked through a difficult time when a murder had taken place there.

15. GYPSY & TRAVELLER DPD - CONSULTATION

Mr A Lainton, Planning Services Consultant for the Gypsies and Travellers Consultation, gave a presentation regarding the Gypsies and Travellers Development Plan Consultation.

The consultation was both serious and controversial. He understood the underlying sentiments from the settled and Gypsy/Traveller communities. However Gypsies and Travellers were confronted by particular social problems, Mr A Lainton suggested that some comments made about them generally bordered on prejudice. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 paid "due regard" to the need for eliminating unlawful racial discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity and promoting good race relations. Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers were a legally recognised ethnic group.

Mr A Lainton said that the consultation process was completely open, the District Council's website was being updated with information on the consultation and advice for local councils and action groups with advice on how to get involved.

The plan, which would emerge from the consultation, needed to be sound, with supporting evidence. Objections must have been made on the grounds that the plan did not meet the tests laid down by the consultation. Alternative sites to those proposed, needed to have access to amenities. The new Google Pinpoint mapping system, available on the District Council's website, should assist residents in framing their arguments for alternative sites.

Mr A Lainton pointed out that Epping Forest had a good record on taking action against illegal Gypsy/Traveller sites. However it was much harder to evict Gypsies and Travellers if there was not adequate site provision. Essex currently had a large number of illegal sites. Although the Government's objective was in providing smaller Gypsy and Traveller sites, a smaller number of sites would mean more site proposals in the future.

There were essentially three options for the distribution of Gypsy and Traveller sites within the district, these were based around economic factors such as employment opportunities. The options for the distribution of sites was as follows:

Option One – Edge of the urban area

Option Two – Rural areas

Option Three – Wider distribution

The recent "Call for Sites" had not revealed any potential urban sites. There was a shortage of vacant and derelict sites in the district, those that were available were being used for social housing. Sites outside the Green Belt were unlikely to be viable for Gypsy and Traveller sites. Most of the sites identified within the consultation were privately owned, it may be the case that those owners may not wish to sell their land for a Gypsy and Traveller site. Mr A Lainton advised that the District Council was unlikely to compulsorily purchase a site.

Mr A Lainton advised that it was most important for matters of relevance only to be made when responding to the consultation. It was best for respondents to pool their responses through an action group.

Following the presentation a number of points were raised.

Councillor Mrs P Smith, Epping Forest District Councillor, asked about identifying potential sites that were not in the consultation. Mr A Lainton urged people to identify sites which they thought should be included in the consultation. The consultation would be extended to investigate new proposed sites for pitches.

Mrs J Ballard, Parish Clerk of Roydon Parish Council, commented that there had not been an exhibition of the Gypsy and Traveller Consultation in Roydon. Mr I White, Forward Planning Manager, advised that an exhibition was being put on in Roydon as soon as possible. There was concern that some residents had not received consultation document packs they had asked for. Mr A Lainton said that the District Council was writing to all residents who were within 300 yards of a proposed Gypsy and Traveller site. Staff were visiting individuals to explain the consultation process.

Councillor J Farren of Stapleford Abbots Parish Council asked the officers if it was possible for an individual within a household to respond on behalf of their family. Mr A Lainton replied that they could. Councillor J Farren asked if Stapleford Abbots Parish Council could distribute the consultation documents themselves within their area. Mr I White, Forward Planning Manager, replied that any member of the public could phone or write to Planning Services requesting a consultation pack. However, he advised that there would be a problem if Parish and Town Councils delivered packs to their local residents, the District Council would not know who these residents were. Planning Services were required to keep a record of where packs were sent, so they could update those respondents who had received a pack on any new developments. Councillor J Farren suggested that the local councils could collate the information themselves. Mr A Lainton warned that in some authorities, consultation documents had been returned only partially filled in by residents, this did not constitute a correct consultation. Subsequently the Government had instructed those authorities to carry out the consultation again. Mr I White advised that the public needed to read the whole consultation document before completing the questionnaire.

Councillor J Farren asked about Gypsy and Traveller sites on the border between Stapleford Abbots and Brentwood District Councils. Mr A Lainton advised that Brentwood District Council did not want to make provision for any Gypsies and Travellers. However this was not possible. Councillor G McEwen thought that the District already made good provision for Gypsies and Travellers, he did not believe that more sites were needed.

Councillor Ms Patricia Jones of Epping Upland Parish Council said that objectors' arguments needed pinpointing more closely, they should formulate their views with other groups. She asked if the Gypsies and Travellers on permanent sites would leave the sites in the future. Mr A Lainton replied that in order to justify a site, roots had to have

been shown. The Gypsies and Travellers living in Epping were amongst the most settled in the county.

Councillor B Surtees was concerned about the anxiety and upset that this process was causing to residents and Gypsies and Travellers. What was the District Council doing to address this issue? Mr J Preston, Director of Planning Services, replied that the District Council had employed consultants to facilitate the consultation process and produced a DVD as well. There were stresses and strains on councillors and officers alike, but the Government had directed the Council to undertake this task. Staff were dealing with the public sensitively, particularly assisting elderly residents with responding to the consultation. Members and public alike needed to recognise that the District Council was following a Government directive by initiating a consultation. Although this was unpopular, there had to be recognition of the issues. Mr A Lainton had represented the District Council well in negotiating the number of sites proposed. Brentwood District Council had not been accurate about their figures for the number of sites they thought they should have. An audit trail would facilitate an open and transparent process. The Chairman asked about the possibility of a judicial review of the consultation. Mr J Preston said this would bring the consultation to a halt. The Chairman next asked if the consultation was discriminatory. Mr J Preston replied that the District Council had adopted an equalities policy. The District Council's website did not provide details of action groups which were against the consultation.

16. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Moreton Parish Council requested a new internal phone directory.

17. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Committee was on 4 March 2008.

CHAIRMAN