

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

NORTHAMPTON DISABLED PEOPLE'S FORUM

Tuesday, 24 April 2012

Members: Councillor Larratt (Co- Chair), Councillors Hadland and Mennell.

Officers: Lindsey Ambrose, Keith Mitchell, Ian Swift.

Apologies: None.

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair and Co Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting of the Forum held on 21 February 2012 were agreed.

Forum Agendas and Minutes

Lindsey Ambrose reported that some adjustments had been made to Forum agendas and minutes to make them easier for members of the Forums to read.

Disabled Car Parking Access to Becketts Park

Comment was made that access to the disabled car parking spaces in Becketts Park near the marina was sometimes blocked off by bollards. Councillor Hadland commented that he would investigate the situation and report back.

4. NORTHAMPTON ALIVE:PUBLIC DEBATE

Councillor Hadland made a presentation on Northampton Alive, which was intended to explain to people the developments that were taking place in and around the town centre. Northampton Alive was a partnership of the Borough and County Councils, WNDC, SEMLEP, Northamptonshire Enterprise Partnership and the University of Northampton. The Northampton Alive exhibition would be in the Great Hall at the Guildhall until 28 April 2012.

The main points of the presentation were:

- The Enterprise Zone extended over an area of some 300 acres from Nunn Mills to Sixfields and was the largest of the 22 throughout England;
- It was hoped that 400 businesses would come to the Enterprise Zone creating 7,000 high precision, high value jobs;
- Major projects such as the redevelopment of Grosvenor/Greyfriars would create 2,000 jobs and provided the style and size of shop units modern retailers wanted;
- The new bus interchange was a necessary step towards the redevelopment of Grosvenor/Greyfriars. (The existing bus station cost £400,000 a year to run).

Consultation about the location of the bus interchange had taken place during 2011 and it had been agreed that the Fishmarket site was the best location. The Arts Collective, with the help of the County Council, had been relocated to 9 Guildhall Road so it was in the "Cultural Quarter";

- A planning application for the bus interchange had now been submitted and there was currently an exhibition of the proposals in the One Stop Shop. The application would be considered by the Planning Committee during the summer and if approved, it was anticipated to be built and open by Christmas 2013;
- The Central Museum had recently reopened following a major refurbishment;
- Planning approval had been given to student accommodation for the University on the current St John's surface car park. It was anticipated that St John's Multi Storey car park had sufficient capacity to cope with the displaced parking from the surface car park;
- The Marina had been completed and work to improve the river frontage had also taken place;
- The heritage of the Town Centre would be protected. English Heritage had required that the bus interchange project retained the historic shop frontages to Sheep Street; and
- Other projects included the redevelopment of the railway station and the business innovation centre on the south side of Westbridge

In answer to questions Councillor Hadland commented that:

- Retailers demanded larger, regular shaped shop units that were not currently available in the Town Centre. The extended Grosvenor Centre would meet this demand and make the Town Centre more vital and vibrant. The population of Northampton was set to grow to 260,000 over the next few years and the right shops were needed or else shoppers would spend their money elsewhere and shops (and the jobs they brought with them) would not come to the Town;
- The former Balkan Iron Works on Fetter Street was too small a site for a bus interchange and was a listed building in any case;
- The bus interchange needed to be in the Town Centre as opposed to being part of a redeveloped railway station; bus routes would still run to the station;
- There would be disabled toilet provision in the new bus interchange which would also have level access and give better accessibility to most of the Town Centre;
- There was no student parking, apart from five disabled spaces, included in the student accommodation at St John's bearing in mind that St John's Multi Storey Car Parking was currently under used;
- Throughout the Town Centre there was a 30% over capacity of car parking provision: improvements would be made to traffic flows around the Town Centre: the Central Area Action Plan included improvements to the ring road and there would be improved Town Centre signage;
- That in terms of the student accommodation on St John's surface car park, the Central Area Action Plan had identified the site for development and also identified potential uses: the Plan which Council had agreed be submitted to the Secretary of State for examination on 23 April 2012 had been subject to a public consultation during 2011 and the planning application itself from the University had been advertised. The consultation on the planning application had led to revisions to the shape, size and materials of the development;
- It was understood that the University might be interested in moving to the Nunn Mills site but that was a decision for them (if they were to move some of

- their existing buildings could be reused- but some were listed);
- Pedestrian safety in and around the bus interchange was of paramount concern; and
- Issues of accessibility to the new Grosvenor Centre would form part of the consultations on any proposal that was put forward by Legal and General.

Comment was made about a bus stop opposite the school on Fishponds Road where there was no footpath either side of it. It was noted that this would be referred to the County Council.

5. OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINT ABOUT DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT ADMINISTRATION UPDATE

Ian Swift, Housing Solutions Manager, reported that the Ombudsman Report concerning a finding of maladministration of a Disabled Facilities Grant, had been reported to Cabinet in March. On the recommendation of the Ombudsman an external consultant had been appointed however their advice had not been that helpful in that it recommended the action (ie that the individual be rehoused) that the Ombudsman had criticised. The primary error had been when the customer had applied for a Disabled Facilities Grant the suggestion had been made to rehouse without making a decision on the application itself. The Ombudsman had commented that the application should have been closed down first. This case had drawn national interest.

In answer to questions Ian commented that;

- The new Universal Credit included provision for live in support for 24 hour care;
- The sheltered housing review had been reported to Cabinet in March with a further report to be made in September;
- There had been fewer complaints made to the Ombudsman since the processing of Disabled Facilities Grants had moved from the OT service;
- If a landlord wrote to the Council indicating that a property could not be adapted to meet a tenant's needs then the situation could be considered;
- Under occupancy of a property could lead to the loss of 14% in benefit but if extra bedrooms were needed for medical equipment additional grant could be awarded on a time limited basis.

6. GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Governance Review Project Manager, Keith Mitchell, commented that the Council was currently carrying out a Community Governance Review to see if the public wanted to alter existing parish council boundaries or create new parish council areas. The process, which was statutory, would take 12 months from start to finish.

At present Stage 1 of the process was taking place which was to seek public interest, through petitions, in altering existing parish council areas or in creating new parish council areas. To date petitions for new parish council areas had been submitted for Parklands, Rectory Farm, Sunnyside & Obelisk, West Hunsbury, Westone, Moulton Leys, St James, Kingsthorpe and Hunsbury Meadow (Banbury Lane). Of these Parklands, West Hunsbury and St James had received sufficient support (10% or more of the local electorate) to trigger local referenda of the proposals. The final date for petitions and for people to support them had been extended to 18 May 2012.

Stage two of the process would be for the Council to agree the results of the petitions and to agree that local referenda take place in those areas where the trigger for support had been passed. These referenda were likely to be held on 15 November 2012. A simple majority was needed to establish a new parish council. Council would then confirm the results and the new parish councils would run from 2013/14.

In answer to questions it was noted that:

- Parish councils were held to account through elected councillors the same as the Borough and County Councils;
- Issues such as street lights could be taken up with a parish council (some had agreed to pay for some of the lights to be switched back on);
- The main vehicle to see if there was local public interest had been through the political parties locally and through residents associations but anyone could start a petition (to express an interest people did not have to be a member of a political party or residents association);
- The signatures on the petitions were validated to ensure that supporters were local electors (between 5 and 10% had been rejected so far);
- No specific consultation had taken place on the review information and guide and in terms of accessibility the review had been advertised via the Council's website, sessions in the Grosvenor Centre, evening and lunchtime briefings, and bringing the issue to the Forums.
- The existing Upton Parish Council wanted to extend its current area and a proposal had been made that Wootton and East Hunsbury Parish Council should split into two areas.
- In Kingsley there had been a mixed reaction to the suggestion that a parish council be created in the area; and
- Any new parish council would be able charge Council Tax. The level of that extra charge would be decided by that parish council.

7. ITEMS FOR NEXT AND FUTURE MEETINGS

- Housing Allocations Consultation (next meeting)
- Sheltered Housing Review
- Community Safety Partnership
- "Keep Safe"

8. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next Forum meeting would take place on 17 July 2012 at 17.30 in the One Stop Shop.

The Meeting Concluded At 19.16 hours.

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The next meeting of the Disabled Peoples Forum will be held on Tuesday, 17 July 2012.