

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL PEOPLE'S FORUM

Wednesday, 14 March 2007

PRESENT:

Tom (Chair)	Individual
Paul Colhoun	Northants Police
AJGray	NBC
Kevin Wright	NBC
Lindsey Ambrose	NBC

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Andrew and Annie.

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING (PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED)

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2007 were agreed.

3. MATTERS ARISING NOT ALREADY ON THE AGENDA

It was noted re Money 4 Youth scheme that the NLGBA's Attic Youth Group had been funded to go paintballing, providing an opportunity for young LGB people from across Northampton and county to get together and enjoy themselves in a "safe" environment.

It was noted that no other projects for paintballing had been funded and the only other trips which had been funded were for a group of young carers and a group of young disabled people, also considered to be priority groups under the scheme's criteria.

It was noted that the proposed civil partnerships and weddings event for 24 February 2007 had not gone ahead. It was also observed that where in November the Forum had been calling on the business sector to adapt their marketing to include civil partnerships and to recognise the market and needs of LGB people, this had not only happened immediately following the event, but seems to be continuing to happen – both Highgate House and the Hilton had recently been marketing to couples preparing for civil partnerships. The Hilton was in fact holding a "Gay Weddings Fair" in March and in the circumstances the Forum Co-Chairs had taken the view that it would be better not to hold the February event, but to go for 3 November 2007 as originally planned.

4. TOWN CENTRE DEVELOPMENTS AND THE NEW COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT OFFICER AT NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

L Ambrose and A J Gray advised that an e-mail had been sent out to Forums as part of the ongoing work of consulting people about the future development of the town centre, and particularly to help with scoping the Issues and Options Paper

which will go our for formal consultation later in the year, probably around June or July time. In keeping with the COMPACT best practice guidance, the e-mail also advised people that the Issues and Options Paper consultation was expected to happen then (ie 3 or 4 months time). A J Gray introduced herself as the new Community Involvement Officer for Northampton Borough Council. She described that she has, among other things, picked up the work on the development of the town centre, which Martyn Swann had formerly done. She advised that she hoped to keep the Forum updated and informed of developments and welcomed their ideas and thoughts about engaging effectively with the LGB community in Northampton.

Tom gave A J Gray some background information about the work done by Martyn and the forums. He referred to the safety walk he had done with Martyn and with members of the Race Equality Forum and how valuable he felt it had been.

Tom also expressed his concern that the plan is look at solving issues in 15 years time, whereas in his view, the consultation had already shown up issues which people and the town are facing today and which need swifter resolution. He particularly cited fear of crime and the need to feel safer in the town as crucial now and particularly important to members of the LGB community who may often have higher disposable incomes and may be attracted to live in the town centre and make use of its recreational facilities. DS Colhoun noted that there were no particular "hotspots" within the town centre for hate crimes against LGB community members.

Tom noted that as with many towns that have developed from medieval town plans, Northampton retains certain historic features, such as having main streets and back streets, which tend to make some streets less safe by night e.g. less well lit – and he cited Horseshoe Street as an example. Another issue which Tom felt arose from this historic legacy of street planning is that in some streets there's less width, and it can be particularly difficult for pedestrians to walk in a good amount of space, especially if cars are parked on pavements.

The underpasses around the courts, the bus station and near the Mayorhold car park were also felt to be a concern due to lack of lighting and poor steps.

A J Gray responded that as a result of other feedback too, lighting is already being looked at creatively to avoid dark spaces and to highlight the grandeur of the historic buildings. She said that this is a focus of the safety issues.

Tom suggested that one way of improving safety in some streets would be for more use of locking gates to be encouraged. He gave St Katherine's Street and Gold Street as examples where he felt that the backs of premises should have gates shut and locked at night.

Tom also said that he felt St Katherine's churchyard needs addressing, noting that it was a memorial garden, and could be a nice safe place to walk across. Tom also noted that in his view St Katherine's would provide a very good public open space in the centre for people to take the air if it was cleaned up and more secure as he felt it presently has an undesirable image.

It was noted that Northants County Council are currently consulting on a transport strategy and that it may be appropriate for Tom and members of the Forum to feed in some of the concerns about safety to that consultation. A J Gray said that the consultation details could be found on Northants County Council's website.

Tom said that he was concerned that BDP consultants lacked local knowledge about the town. He felt that this is reflected in some of their ideas in their report. It was noted that the BDP report is only one part of the information being looked at and taken into account in moving forward thinking about the development of the town centre and that its contents are not set in stone.

Tom said he felt it was very important that the needs of the LGB community are taken into account and that opportunities keep being provided for LGB community members to have a voice in the consultation processes as so many LGB people live in or near the town centre.

Kevin agreed to provide a copy of the presentation slides to go with the Minutes of the meeting. It was also agreed to include his and A J's contact details in case anyone would like to get in touch with them with their thoughts, questions etc about the town centre and its development.

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Other issues that were noted as concerns were the number of pedestrian crossings with lights not working (little green men and little red men lights) and it was noted that in some cases crossings seemed to lack the lights altogether. It was queried whether this was a policy on costs grounds and about the difficulties for some people with disabilities in using crossings safely as a result.

ACTION: L Ambrose agreed to liaise with Northants County Council Highways Department.

It was also noted that some changes for the better are starting to happen now. The Royal & Derngate is now open, there's been more street cafes encouraging a range of people to come and spend time enjoying the town, the Fish Market, there are more evening buses and housing near the theatre is nearing completion and going to help to bring people into the town at all times. The planned investment e.g. in creating nice open spaces in Spring Boroughs area was also noted.

ACTION: It was agreed that L Ambrose would drop 2 copies of the BDP report plus some survey forms to NLGBA on Monday 19 March in case anyone there would like to comment in the survey before 30 March.

5. COMMUNITY SAFETY - INITIAL DISCUSSION

This item had been included to see if this was something that needed further

discussion at a future meeting. Tom said that he felt he had the opportunity to discuss his concerns in the item on the town centre.

Suggested Items for a Future Meeting

- CCTV – someone to come and speak to the Forum about the considerable amount of cameras in Northampton and also to include information about what CCTV coverage and any other safety measures are in place for people waiting for taxis. It was noted that the Taxi Marshalls are thought to still be in place.
- Safety on the Buses – the Police and bus companies to be invited to give an update on work they are doing e.g. CCTV, sitting on buses, to help make travel safer.

6. INFORMATION EXCHANGE

- International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – even on 24 March at the Weston Favell Centre – information was shared and posters handed out.
- International Day Against Homophobia – L Ambrose advised that Andrew from NLGBA was leading the organisation of 1 minute's noise which it was hoped would happen on the Guildhall steps at lunchtime on 17 May. The Mayor had been invited and it was hoped to fly the Rainbow Flat outside the Guildhall to mark the occasion. It was understood that the opportunity to make a noise was hoped to be extended to anyone who wished to join in and hopefully would include some of the young people from Money 4 Youth projects for learning to play the dhol (Punjabi) drum and the steel pans. The Forum welcomed the idea of the 1 minute's noise and agreed to lend its support to the project.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was none

8. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for 11 July 2007