

Northampton Borough Council

Northampton Pensioners' Forum

Thursday, 7 February 2013

1. WELCOMES AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair and Co-Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and members of the forum took the opportunity to introduce themselves.

Present were: Councillor Brian Oldham, Brian Nichols, John Rawlings, Jacqueline Forrest – Smith, Harry Tuttle, Hazel Tuttle, Joyce Smith, Norman Sharp, David Hewitt, Tony Mallard, Brian Dix

2. APOLOGIES FROM PEOPLE WHO CAN'T MAKE IT TO THE MEETING

There were none

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on the 13th of December 2012 were agreed. There were no matters arising.

Members of the forum were informed of the passing of Mr Samuel Owusu-Akuffo, a forum member and a member of Pensioners Voice. Forum members were informed that there was to be a memorial services on the 1st March 2013 at the Queensgrove Methodist Church.

4. NORTHAMPTON INTERCHANGE UPDATE (MIKE KITCHEN - NBC)

Since the last update on the bus interchange, in 2011, the forum were informed that there had been considerable progress made with regards to the development of the Northampton Interchange. It was noted that planning permission had been granted and that funding had been secured through the Capital Programme and £4 million investment from West Northants Development Corporation. The Principal Regeneration Officer updated members by informing them of a number of projects undertaken which included re - directing all utility services to make way for the development, the appointment of Kier Constructions and current demolition work being undertaken at Sheep Street. He explained that there had been no significant archaeological finds, but that a number of wells and a cellar had been discovered. It was noted that once the demolition had been completed, construction of the Bus Interchange would commence in March 2013 with an expected completion date of December 2013. It was explained that the works along the Drapery would include; new bus shelters, new paving and a new crossing – to ensure safe crossing. There would be 14 bus stops and another 8 along the Drapery in total.

In response to a question asked, the Principal Regeneration Officer explained that the stops on the Drapery and the new Interchange would not be physically joined in any way. With regards to work carried out on the Drapery, it was explained that it would be carried out in phases to reduce disruption to retailers and passengers and

that the construction of the Bus Interchange could be done with little detrimental effect on the traffic and re-routing of services.

Some members of the forum expressed concern over the number of buses using the facility, the time buses would have, per drop off/pick up, which may result in buses blocking other bays, and the number of people waiting at the stops. The Principal Regeneration Officer explained that he had not been involved in the scheduling of the buses and that would be a matter for the County Council.

The Chair commented that the negotiations were on-going and suggested that the officers speak to the Bus Operators and report back to the forum at a later date.

Concern was also expressed by members that National Express would continue to use Victoria Street to drop travellers off which would be further away to the Bus Interchange than the current Bus Station. It was suggested that a large proportion of people using National Express would be pensioners who would be going on coach holidays and that the extra distance to the new facility needed consideration.

Members were informed that bus routes were not within the remit of the Borough Council, as it would have to go through the Transport Commission, but they could advise as an authority. A discussion ensued about the number of buses that would be able to use the Interchange with one member suggesting that it could facilitate 27 buses and therefore no buses would have to use the Drapery.

The Co- Chair commented that initially, the Forum had supported the proposed Bus interchange, but that they now had a number of concerns and were therefore unable to support it. They expressed their dissatisfaction that they had written to the relevant Officer to show their concern but that no response had been received.

AGREED:

- a) That a relevant officer attends a future meeting to report back on any updates from Bus Operators.
- b) That further information be sought about the routing of buses and reported back at a later date.
- c) That the Principal Regeneration Officer speak to the Head of Planning to answer the letter submitted by the Forum.

5. NORTHAMPTON MARKET (DERRICK SIMPSON - NBC)

The Town Centre Manager updated members of the forum and explained that the market had been in existence for hundreds of years and had been a chartered market for over 800 years. It was explained that they were able to restrict another market from setting up business within six and two-thirds of a mile of the market. The forum was informed that there was a comprehensive list of all the regulation for the market holder and that there was collaborative working with a number of agencies including Trading Standards and the Police. It was noted that recently

there had been an instance of a Trader selling 'legal highs' but that this had ceased; whilst not illegal, it was felt as though it was not desirable. There had been much effort made in promoting the Market to attract new Traders including a monthly antiques market.

In response to a question, the Town Centre Manager explained that the 'six and two-thirds' rule did not apply to car boot sales but that organisers of the boot sales would have to inform the Council. The forum discussed the practice of selling produce by the bowl and expressed some concern that they were not always able to see the scales when their goods were being weighed, and consequently lacked assurance that they were getting an accurate measure of goods for their money. The Town Centre Manager, having listened to the concerns, explained that he would meet with Market Traders to encourage and request that the Traders put their scales at the front of their displays, to ensure visibility.

In response to another question asked, the Town Centre Manager explained that should any member of the public want to make a complaint about a Market Trader, they could do so by contacting operatives and officers of the Council who patrolled the market. It was noted that there was also a static mobile unit where phone numbers could be obtained should members of the public want to contact someone about a Trader(s).

AGREED:

That Market Traders be asked to display their scales at the front of their stalls or displays.

6. WELFARE REFORM (LAURA BESSELL - NBC)

The Chair introduced the Benefits Team Leader and suggested that Forum Members ask specific questions that they wanted answering as the topic was complex and members had individual concerns. Responding to a concern of a member, it was explained that a lot of information had been posted out to residents who would be affected by the reform, but that there was also a telephone number on letters whereby people who had concerns could speak to an officer at the Council and an outreach team who would assist people, particularly vulnerable people, in applying for relevant grants to ensure that people would receive what they would be entitled to. Concern was expressed about people who were the most vulnerable such as those affected by a disability. It was explained that the funding from national government had been reduced but that Discretionary Housing Payments could be made, but there was a limited budget and therefore the money would have to be spent wisely. If the money set aside for the Discretionary Housing Payments was not used, then it would be lost to National Government but that the only figures available were currently available for 2013/14 and not any future years.

The Benefits Team Leader also explained that one change to be introduced by the Act would be that Housing Benefit Payments would be paid directly to the tenant and not to the Landlord – which had previously been an option. It was suggested that this could lead to problems, with the poorest people having access to a large amount of money, spending it and subsequently getting into rent arrears and further

into poverty. The Chair explained that this was national government mandate and not specific to each local authority. It was further noted that due to the direct payments to tenants, everybody in receipt of such payments would also need to have a bank account which may also prove problematic as some people would be exempt from holding an account.

In response to questions asked about the 'bedroom tax' it was explained that should you have an extra bedroom that was not in use, the tenant would be liable to pay a percentage rate for that room or find alternative smaller accommodation. However, it was further noted that there was shortfall of 2 and 3 bedroom homes and that National Government would therefore encourage people to move from the area, to a smaller residency in another area. It was also explained that it would be likely that the demands on housing would be significantly impacted on as result of an overspill from London.

7. PENSIONERS' FORUM - WORK PLANNING FOR 2013 (JOE BISKUPSKI - NBC)

The Community Engagement Manager asked whether forum members were content with how the forums were being arranged or if they would feel it more helpful to have an annual work programme.

The forum members agreed that the idea of having a work programme may be beneficial as often there were too many topics covered in one meeting which was sometimes considered a little ambitious. However, they concurred that the meetings should continue to have a degree of flexibility to ensure that topical discussions would continue. It was also noted that with a framework in place the Community Engagement Manager would have more time to arrange for relevant speakers to attend forum meetings.

AGREED:

That at least 6 meetings per year be scheduled

That a framework of meetings be arranged by the Community Engagement Manager and that forum members inform him of the future topics that they would like covered.

8. COMMUNITY NEWS EXCHANGE

- Northampton Borough Council would be transferring the management of Abington Community Centre to a local community organisation.

ACTION: The Community Engagement Manager to explore whether the Forum was still affiliated with the National Pensioners Convention.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was none

10. SUGGESTIONS FOR ITEMS FOR FUTURE MEETINGS OR FORUM ACTIVITIES

Items for the next and future meetings were suggested as:

- Housing Stock Transfer
- NHS/Liverpool Health Pathway
- Corrosion of pathway and highways

11. DATE AND VENUES OF FUTURE FORUM MEETINGS

The forum members would be informed of the date of the future meeting as clarification was needed to establish when purdah would occur but it was hoped to be early to mid-March 2013.

The meeting concluded at 16.01