

Westcotes Community Meeting

Your Community, Your Voice

Record of Meeting and Actions

7:00 pm, Wednesday, 6 May 2009
Held at: Church of the Martyrs

Who was there:

Councillor Andy Connelly

Councillor Sarah Russell

INFORMATION SHARING – ‘CAROUSEL’ SESSION

The following information stands were sited in the room. Members of the public visited the stands and were given an opportunity to meet Councillors, Council staff and the local Police and to bring enquiries and raise and issues.

Ward Councillors

Members of the public were able to talk to their local councillors.

Cleansing Services

Information and advice on graffiti removal and cleansing services.

Highways

A chance to discuss local highways issues with officers.

Britain in Bloom

Officers introduced proposals for Leicester in this year’s Britain in Bloom contest

Parks

Officers discussed with residents local parks issues.

Festivals and Events

Officers introduced details about festivals, including the upcoming Riverside festival.

Community Legal Advice Centre

Promoting the Centre, at which advice could be given on legal, financial, benefit and many other issues.

City Wardens

The City Wardens team were present to explain their work and listen to residents’ concerns about the ward.

Police

Local police were present to discuss residents’ concerns.

At the conclusion of this informal session members of the public were invited to take their seats and take part in the formal session of the meeting.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Councillor Connelly was appointed as Chair for the meeting.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received from Councillors

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they may have in the business on the agenda and/or declare that Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 applied to them.

Both Councillors Connelly and Russell declared personal interests in budget applications from King Richard III School, as their son attended the school, and Councillor Russell was a Governor of the school. For these items, they would not vote themselves, but would record the views of the meeting and submit these views to the Cabinet Lead who would make the decision.

4. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Westcotes Community Meeting, held on 27 November 2008 and the Joint Castle and Westcotes Community Meeting, held on 4 March 2009 were agreed as correct records.

5. UPDATE ON RESIDENTS PARKING

Councillor Russell gave an update on the position of the proposals for residents' parking in the ward. She said it had been a big issue for some time and had been discussed and consulted on extensively with residents, faith organisations, schools and businesses.

Councillors and officers had spent many months working through the detail of the scheme, in order to address as many concerns as possible, and the report was almost complete. It was anticipated that the report would be brought to the next Community Meeting. A formal consultation period would then follow; notices would be put in the paper and on streets. Councillors would also be continuing to consult. People would be able to submit formal objections to the scheme at this stage.

A member of the public expressed disappointment that a committee of interested parties had not been formed. Councillor Russell replied that the scheme had already taken a very long time to get to this stage. This scheme had already invited much more public input than any other scheme in the city and views were now fully known. There was still opportunity to object in the formal process. Another member of the public stated that they, and the local church, had been allowed to fully express their views on the matter. It was also noted that focus groups had been held in the ward. Councillor Connelly said that the time had come for them, as elected representatives, to agree to move forward.

In response to a question, the meeting was informed that the scheme could not have a trial period, due to the amount of work to set it up, with installation of signs and painting of lines. Councillor Russell said that they were looking at each street in great detail to ensure it worked as well as possible. Its implementation was to be complemented by the new park and ride at Enderby. Councillor Connelly said that safety issues at junctions and introducing more one way streets were also being looked at as part of the scheme, which would benefit the area. Work was also being done to allow residents to buy permits from Westcotes Library.

Jeff Miller outlined the statutory process, explaining that draft Traffic Regulation Orders for each street would be published; people would then be able to formally object. If there were any objections, they would be considered by the Council. These could be overruled, but officers would try to work through them by consensus. The Cabinet Lead and Ward Councillors would be consulted prior to a final decision.

6. HIGHWAYS

Jeff Miller, Service Director, Regeneration, Highways and Transportation, gave a presentation on highways issues in the City and the Westcotes Ward.

He had identified what the meeting had highlighted as main issues at previous community meetings. These included parking provision and obstruction, speeding and road safety, public transport, and condition of roads and footways. He explained how the work of the team fitted into main Council strategies and gave an indication of the extent of the work they were responsible for, including roads, footways, lights, traffic lights, highway trees and car parks.

Jeff explained how the team could help with the priorities identified. Parking could be dealt with by the proposed parking scheme, verge hardening, laybys, enforcement and highway design. Ways of tackling speeding and safety included speed surveys, vehicle activated signs, safety cameras on major routes, traffic calming, pedestrian crossings and lower speed limits. It was noted that Leicester was the first city to roll out 20mph speed limits on residential roads. Making public transport more appealing and accessible was a priority; options included a new bus terminal, and looking into a tram service. Other measures were linking traffic signals to minimise delay, junction improvements, quality partnerships with bus companies, concessionary fares, Star Trak and park and ride.

Jeff stated that roads and footways in the city had been assessed as in fair condition. Work was ongoing to improve them. Highway inspections were being done, and the Council had introduced a rapid response team to deal with any dangers that were reported. Utility companies were being instructed to reinstate surfaces properly after work. There was also the Council's winter service which gritted the roads.

Jeff reported that the frosts this winter had led to an increase in pot holes across the country. The Council would deal with any that were classed as a danger. The meeting discussed problems with roads that were cobbled underneath and the surface was breaking up. It was noted that there were specific issues with cobbled streets, as tarmac didn't stick to them well.

The Upperton Road scheme was discussed, and Jeff said that this was a major scheme of which they were particularly proud, as it was the biggest scheme of its kind in the East Midlands. A high quality environment was being created around the new road. The scheme had recycled a majority of the material from the old bridge, and had taken other environmental issues into account. The Liberty Statue had been restored and placed on the roundabout. It was explained that the new road was slightly narrower, to deter people from overtaking dangerously.

A resident asked what could be done about tree roots that stuck up and were covered by tarmac, as they were a danger. The meeting was informed that removal of the trees could damage foundations. An option was to look at using the gravel-type surface that was recently used in the city centre refurbishment. A resident said that crab apple trees had been planted in the ward, and these caused a mess and danger. Another resident said that leaves were not cleared enough and blocked drains. Councillor Russell said that the cleansing team had a big job to do to clear them by hand, due to parked cars. Residents suggested that they clean in the day time when fewer cars were parked.

Councillor Connelly thanked Jeff and his team for the work they had done in the ward, and for their responsiveness to the Ward Councillors' requests. He highlighted the success of the bollards on Narborough Road. He explained to the meeting that Councillors had a balancing act to do with budgets and there was never enough money to carry out all the work needed, but that they and Jeff's team did their best.

7. OPERATION COCOON - POLICE UPDATE

Patrick, PCSO at Hinckley Road Police Station, explained Operation Cocoon, a scheme to install free gates to residents' alleyways to combat burglary and other criminal activities. Phase One had been a great success. This covered streets from Bruce Street to Walton Street. Gates were now being installed. The alleys had been cleaned up prior to the installation. Further phases would be carried out across the ward, the next being Eastleigh Road to Raymond Road.

An update was also given on police involvement with licensed premises. Test purchases had taken place, and the majority of premises passed. The ones that didn't had been dealt with and were now working correctly. Underaged drinking was being tackled, which was leading to lower alcohol-related crime rates in Bruanstone Gate and Narborough Road. A scheme called "West End Watch" was being brought in which created links between all licensed premises in the area. They were all to display a logo stating "Behave or be Banned." Street drinking bans in areas surrounding the ward had been successful. Police had powers to move on antisocial drinkers. This would not affect people not causing a problem who wanted to enjoy a drink in public spaces.

A member of the Street Pastor team welcomed the West End Watch scheme and stated that the street pastors were available to offer support.

8. WARD ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Councillor Russell gave an update on the Ward Action Plan. She explained that it was devised at the first Community meetings and that the issues were being addressed in a variety of ways. She hoped that the plan could be adapted as priorities changed.

A resident asked what could be done about garages near the Merry Monarch, as they were covered in graffiti. It was explained that owners' permission was needed before the Council could do anything. Graffiti removal could also cause damage to property.

Councillor Connelly said that he was meeting with Council officers to try to address delays in dealing with planning enforcement issues in the ward, as residents were getting frustrated that things weren't being done.

9. COMMUNITY MEETING BUDGET

The budget applications that had been submitted were considered as follows.

B1 – Police Cycle funding and kit

The meeting considered that it was inappropriate for them to support funding the whole of the bid, and raised concerns about insurance of the bikes. They agreed to recommend funding the bikes only. The funding would be subject to the Police obtaining insurance and paying for the kit.

AGREED: Recommend approval of £990 from the Ward Action Plan budget for bikes, subject to the police providing insurance and kit.

B2 – Summer Soccer Academy

The meeting fully supported this bid.

AGREED: Recommend approval of £2,500 from the Ward Action Plan budget.

B3 – Summertime – Grow it, Cook it, Eat it

Councillors did not express an opinion on this item due to interests declared.

The meeting fully supported this bid.

AGREED: Recommend approval of £1,000 from the Community Fund.

B4 – Oh I Do Like to be Beside the Seaside

Councillors did not express an opinion on this item due to interests declared.

The meeting fully supported this bid.

AGREED: Recommend approval of £1,000 from the Community Fund.

B5 – Riverside Festival.

It was noted that, although the festival was for the city as a whole, the majority of visitors were from Westcotes Ward.

The meeting fully supported this bid.

AGREED: Recommend approval of £2,000 from the Community Fund.

B6 – “Respect Your Neighbourhood” signage “Safer Routes for Students” banner proposal

It was noted that the scheme would reduce nuisance for residents and allow students to get home more safely. It was to be joint funded by Castle Ward and the Joint Action Group. It was unclear what proportion was to be funded by the Community Meeting, so it was agreed to recommend a maximum amount.

AGREED: Recommend approval of a maximum of £1,000 (with discretion of the Councillors) from the Community Cohesion Fund.

10. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was to be held on 8 September 2009, at the Church of the Martyrs Hall, subject to its availability.

11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Concern was raised by a resident regarding the state of bridges covered in graffiti. Officers agreed to investigate reasons that had been given as to why it couldn't be dealt with.

Councillor Connelly reminded everyone of the Riverside Festival 6-7 June 2009.

12. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 9.07pm.

