

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

PARISH COUNCILS' FORUM

Tuesday, 15th July 2003, at 6.30 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillors Mrs. J. Dyer M.B.E. (Chairman), Mrs. S. J. Baxter, B. L. Fuller C.B.E. Q.F.S.M. and D. C. Norton

Parish	Representative(s)
Alvechurch	Mr. D. Waters (Chairman) Mrs. G. Lungley (Clerk) Mr. D. Matthews
Barnt Green	Mrs. E. Buckett (Chairman) Mrs. D. Warren (Clerk)
Belbroughton	Mr. R. E. Copley (Clerk) Mr. C. R. Scurrall
Catshill and North Marlbrook	Mr. P. J. Baker (Chairman) Mrs. D. Warren (Clerk)
Clent	Mrs. P. A. Harris (Clerk)
Cofton Hackett	Mr. R. J. Deeming (Chairman) Mrs. P. Foxall (Clerk) Mr. B. Bridgewater
Dodford with Grafton	Mr. R. J. Oakes (Chairman)
Finstall	Mrs. S. Reynolds (Clerk)
Lickey and Blackwell	Mrs. J. A. Casey (Clerk)
Romsley	Mr. I. A. Hodgetts (Chairman) Mrs. P. L. Taylor (Clerk)
Stoke Prior	Mrs. T. Roll (Chairman) Mr. P. D. Callaway (Clerk) Mrs. J. Birmingham
Tutnall and Cobley	Mrs. S. Reynolds (Clerk)
Wythall	Mr. R. S. Hall (Chairman) Miss P. Harrison (Clerk) Mr. K. Footman

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs. M. M. T. Taylor; Mr. R. M. M. Boss and Mrs. S. Willetts (Bentley Pauncefoot Parish Council); and Mr. S. Fitzpatrick and Mrs. L. Teese (Hunnington Parish Council).

2. **MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 10TH APRIL 2003**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Parish Councils' Forum held on 10th April 2003 were submitted.

It was **AGREED** that the Minutes be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. **QUALITY PARISH COUNCILS: UPDATE**

Mr. R. F. Lewis, Corporate Director and District Secretary, informed representatives from the parish councils that the Model Guidance relating to the Quality Parish Councils scheme had been published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Guidance reflected much of the content of the original consultation document and gave an indication of the approach which the District Council and the Parish Councils would need to take to address both the question of obtaining quality parish council status, together with the issues relating to the delegation of responsibilities; such as the impact on the efficiency of the services provided by the District Council and the related economies of scale.

The District Council had already taken measures to identify the areas where the delegation of services may be appropriate by appointing an officers' working group to investigate the matter. Due to the variations of population within parishes, it was considered that a "one size fits all" approach would not be appropriate for all parishes in the District. The conclusions of the officers' working group would be reported to the Executive Cabinet in order that a formal approach to the Parish Councils may be made; ideally to a future Meeting of the Forum.

This was noted.

4.

BROMSGROVE PARTNERSHIP COMMUNITY PLAN

("To aim for greater integration between County / District / Parish Councils' Community Plans and to advise parish councils so that they can be involved in the various themed groups which are part of the District's Community Strategy Plan.")

This item was included on the Agenda for consideration at the Meeting at the request of the Bromsgrove Area Committee of the County Association of Local Councils.)

Mrs. B. Haswell, the Audit, Best Value and Performance Manager, gave details about the Bromsgrove Partnership Community Plan and how this would relate to those plans due to be published by both the County Council and the Parish Councils. At present, the Plan was in its final draft stage and publication of the document is expected during September 2003.

She stated that the Worcestershire County Association of Local Councils was representing the parish councils on the Steering Group of key members. The Steering Group comprises Members of the Council, officer-level representatives, the Police, the Redditch and Bromsgrove Primary Care Trust, the County Council, and representatives from the voluntary sector. The work of the Steering Group had been divided into five themed group areas, each with an appropriate chairman - details of which are attached at Appendix 1.

Mrs. Haswell added that parish plans would have to be designed at a local level by the parishes themselves, but the Council would be in a position to lend support and share advice, guidance and experience. She then introduced Mr. N. Macleod, the Head of I. T. Services, who lead the Consultation Working Group - a subsidiary of the main Partnership Group.

Mr. Macleod detailed the process undertaken for, and methods of, consultation in the initial work relating to the preparation of the Community Plan. He then gave an account of the responses received; where they integrated with the five themed group areas; and their inclusion within the draft Plan so far.

This was noted, and the Chairman thanked Mrs. Haswell and Mr. Macleod for their report to the Meeting.

(NOTE:

Prior to the consideration of the next item of business, Mr. R. F. Lewis referred to the availability of copies of the Council's "Democracy Map" following the District Elections in May 2003. In addition, and bearing in mind the next item of business, he referred to the availability of copies of the latest publication of the in-house "Council Chat" magazine, which is delivered to all properties within the District.)

5. **PARISH COUNCIL INFORMATION LEAFLET - INCLUSION WITHIN ANNUAL COUNCIL TAX DEMAND**

("To request that a leaflet outlining the role of parish councils, with the names of each parish council and contact details be included in the next mailing of the annual council tax demand. Would the District Council impose a cost to parish councils for this leaflet?"

This item was included on the Agenda for consideration at the Meeting at the request of the Bromsgrove Area Committee of the County Association of Local Councils.)

Mr. Lewis stated that, due to the large volume of information despatched with the annual Council Tax demand (for example, information relating to the tax levies raised by the County Council, the District Council and the Police), the inclusion of an additional leaflet within the same envelope would probably not be very practical.

He explained that the Council was aware that the parish councils were seeking to promote their presence within the local government hierarchy and made reference to the current practice within the District Council's own in-house magazine - "Council Chat" - of articles relating to other agencies; for example, the Ombudsman, the Police, the emergency services, etc. Therefore, in an endeavour to be cooperative and supportive, Mr. Lewis asked whether the parish councils would prefer to take the opportunity to include some material in the next edition of "Council Chat", whether of a "generic" nature giving a wide range of parish council information, or of a more specific nature relating to individual parish councils.

From the following discussion, it was considered that the offer of space in "Council Chat" was well worth exploring, but that the full details would need to be examined by the Parish Councils and the Bromsgrove Area Committee of the County Association of Local Councils, in consultation with the District Council.

This was noted.

6. **BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL - TREE OFFICER**

("The role of this officer appears to have been altered to accommodate the administrative needs of the Planning Department; clarification of the role is requested."

This item was included on the Agenda for consideration at the Meeting at the request of the Bromsgrove Area Committee of the County Association of Local Councils.)

Mr. M. Griffiths, Director of Planning Services, addressed the Meeting and referred to a pre-printed outline of the work of the District Council's Tree Officer, which had been circulated to representatives prior to the commencement of the Meeting (see Appendix 2).

Mr. Griffiths explained the underlying causes behind recent difficulties with the Council's Tree Service and how the workload for the Tree Officer had expanded out of all proportion. He stated, however, that a formal review of the service would be undertaken within the next few months.

This was noted.

7. **LETTERS TO THE PLANNING SERVICES DIRECTORATE**

("Despite assurances at the last parish forum that correspondence to Bromsgrove District Council would at least be acknowledged, letters to the Planning Department continue to be ignored."

This item was included on the Agenda for consideration at the Meeting at the request of the Bromsgrove Area Committee of the County Association of Local Councils.)

Mr. Griffiths outlined the guidelines which officers try and adhere to when responding to correspondence and stated that, in recent months, the number of applications for planning permission had increased by approximately 20% over the last quarter. As well as this general increase in applications, another of the most likely causes may be due to the pending adoption by the District Council of SPG10 on Managing Housing Supply.

Whilst officers within the Planning Directorate sought to respond to correspondence as quickly as possible, this increase in workload may have had an adverse effect and he offered his apologies to the Parish Council representatives who may have been inconvenienced as a result.

This was noted.

8. **PARISH COUNCIL LIAISON - CONTACT OFFICER**

("Would Bromsgrove District Council consider appointing an officer to act as the first point of contact between parishes and the district council; that is, someone who can either answer specific queries or will know the person to contact to provide the answer? For example, the County Council has a dedicated parish councils' telephone helpline which is useful for parishes when they are unsure of who they need to contact at County Hall on a specific issue.")

This item was included on the Agenda for consideration at the Meeting at the request of the Bromsgrove Group of Parish Council Clerks.)

Mr. Lewis stated that the District Council's Executive Cabinet would be considering a report in the near future concerning the matter of liaison with parish councils, whether a specific "Parish Council Liaison Officer" was required and the likely resource implications of such an appointment, together with the associated funding demands from other service areas.

The ensuing discussion concentrated on improving the existing arrangements whereby parish councillors and parish clerks may be able to contact the relevant officer pertinent to their enquiry. The Chairman referred to the Worcestershire "hub", currently at an early stage of development, which would aid electronic communications between local authorities and other agencies within the County. Mr. C. R. Surrell also mentioned the existence of the District Council's internal telephone listing which may be made available upon request to the District Council.

Mr. Lewis added that there was an "A - Z of Services" on the District Council web-site which would also give an indication of the correct contact number depending on the type of enquiry.

This was noted.

9. **RURAL TRANSPORT SURVEY**

("With the constant review of public bus services, and some services under threat of being withdrawn, does the District Council have any plans to undertake a Rural Transport Survey to assess the transport requirements within the District?")

This item was included on the Agenda for consideration at the Meeting at the request of the Bromsgrove Group of Parish Council Clerks.)

Mr. S. Martin, the Transport Administration Officer within the Planning Services Directorate, informed the Meeting that the District Council would shortly be publishing a report outlining the current provision of public and community transport within the District. Following consideration of this report, the Council anticipated undertaking a thorough consultation to highlight any areas where existing provision of services does not meet the required need. This would then allow the Council to look at possible funding opportunities and coordinate these areas of perceived need. It was

envisaged that the Parish Councils will have a major part to play in the post-consultation period of this process.

Representatives considered that the information given by Mr. Martin was very encouraging and positive. However, it was felt that there was a need to guard against duplicating the work being undertaken by the County Council in respect of improving community transport.

In answering questions from the floor, Mr. Martin explained that the rural transport grant was one of the areas of possible funding, which can be obtained by application to the Countryside Agency. He stated that, to date, the 'take-up' of this grant by local authorities within Worcestershire had been disappointing. Having spoken to the Countryside Agency, Mr. Martin confirmed that there was still funding available. Furthermore, he believed that any funding which could be obtained would be likely to attract further investment from other agencies and, ultimately, give a better opportunity for future and sustainable proposals.

In conclusion, the Chairman stated that whatever steps the District Council took, in conjunction with the parish councils, could only be encouraging and comforting to those residents in areas which have seen services withdrawn at very short notice, and she expressed hope that this would lead to a more permanent form of local transport.

This was noted.

10. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was **AGREED** that the next Meeting be held at 6.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 7th October 2003, in The Council Chamber, at The Council House, Burcot Lane, Bromsgrove.

11. **RETIREMENT OF MR. R. F. LEWIS, CORPORATE DIRECTOR AND DISTRICT SECRETARY**

Mr. C. R. Scurrall referred to the fact that Mr. Lewis would have retired by 7th October 2003 - the date of the next Meeting - and proposed a vote of thanks on behalf of the Forum for his work in setting up the Forum. This was agreed

The Meeting closed at 7.55 p.m.

Chairman

COMMUNITY PLAN

KEY ISSUES ARISING FROM CONSULTATION

(a) **Consider Your Environment**

Over fifty suggestions for possible action by the Partnership were given, including -

- provision of more cycle paths and recycling facilities;
- conserve the green belt and provide more environmental education;
- more fines for dog owners who do not clear up after their pets and provide more dog waste bins;
- make footpaths safe and ensure roads are repaired;
- provide parks and open spaces;
- account for wildlife in planning.

(b) **Develop and Prosper**

Amongst the thirty plus suggestions for action for the Partnership to consider as being helpful to improve employment opportunities, tourism and transport in the area were -

- provide better transport services;
- improve the roads;
- subsidise local businesses;
- encourage more businesses to set up in the area;
- a better range of shops;
- conserve the green areas.

(c) **Feel Safe**

Fifteen suggestions were made for partners to consider in their attempts to improve community safety and tackle crime and disorder. They included -

- more police;
- provision of information and education;
- clubs for children to keep them off the streets;
- an increase in the amount of CCTV and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes;
- requests to examine each area to see what can be done to improve things.

(d) **Health and Social Well-being**

The highest rated activities in this section were -

- the provision of care and support for people of all ages in the community;
- ensuring that people have access to good, affordable housing;
- the need for people to take regular exercise to maintain health.

Many reasons were given by people for not taking enough exercise and included the need for -

- better facilities;
- the provision of a crèche;
- more affordable facilities and someone to go with;
- more free time;
- better footpaths and cycle lanes.

(e) **Learn and Grow**

Suggestions for Partnership action to improve opportunities for leisure, learning and training totalled thirty.

The top suggestion was -

- to improve the facilities for young people.

Other suggestions included -

- increase the amount of leisure and sports facilities;
- promote the leisure and sports facilities and make them more affordable;
- upgrade existing facilities and keep them clean;
- provide a bowling alley and cinema;
- listen to the community

THE FIVE THEMED GROUPS AND CONTACT DETAILS

(a) **Consider Your Environment**

Conservation, biodiversity, countryside and sustainability.

Contact: Alex Preston apreston@worcestershire.gov.uk 01905 766852

(b) **Develop and Prosper**

Traffic, planning and economic development issues.

Contact: Peter Michael p.michael@bromsgrove.gov.uk 01527 881327

(c) **Feel Safe**

Community safety, crime and disorder issues.

Contact: John Moody j.moody@bromsgrove.gov.uk 01527 881356

(d) **Health and Social Well-being**

Health promotion, NHS, social care and housing issues.

Contact: Susan Bishop-Rowe Susan.Bishop-Rowe@redditchbromsgrove-pct.nhs.uk 01527 507082

(e) **Learn and Grow**

Lifelong learning, youth groups and recreation/leisure.

Contact: Teresa Jones tjones@ne-worcs.ac.uk 01527 572619

Barbara Haswell
Audit, Best Value and Performance Manager
b.haswell@bromsgrove.gov.uk
01527 881289

Norman Macleod
Head of I.T. Services
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PLANNING SERVICES**TREE WORK**

<i>Previous Scope</i>	→	<i>Present Work Regime</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TPO and Conservation Area applications for tree work; ▪ Reviewing existing TPO coverage and developing long-term process of revocation and replacement; ▪ Comments on planning applications; ▪ Advice to householders on tree-related problems; ▪ Advice to developers on implementation difficulties caused by existing trees; ▪ Support to Housing Department on tree matters; ▪ Support to Recreation Department on tree matters; ▪ Support to Highways Partnership Unit on tree matters; ▪ Advice to Depot Services on tree issues; ▪ Supervising work carried out by Council Depot staff; ▪ Undertaking appeal work involving trees; ▪ Advising on planting schemes from Council Departments and others; for example, The Bromsgrove Society; ▪ Arbitrating between developer and householders on tree specific disputes; ▪ Monitoring quality of work undertaken by tree surgeons on behalf of the Council; ▪ Providing an emergency out-of-hours service for under-threat trees; ▪ Undertaking disease / damage assessment on major trees; ▪ Undertaking administrative work in connection with above tasks 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TPO and Conservation Area applications for tree work; ▪ Reviewing existing TPO coverage and developing long-term process of revocation and replacement; ▪ Comments on planning applications; ▪ Undertaking appeal work involving trees; ▪ Providing an emergency out-of-hours service for under-threat trees; ▪ Providing advice to Housing Department, Recreation Department and Highways Partnership Unit on tree emergencies only; ▪ Undertaking administrative work in connection with above tasks