

BROMSGROVE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE PARISH COUNCILS' FORUM

TUESDAY, 6TH JANUARY 2009, AT 6.30 P.M.

PRESENT: Councillor R. Hollingworth

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Representative(s)</u>
Alvechurch	Mr. P. McHugh
Barnt Green	Mrs. J. Jagger (Chairman)
Belbroughton	Mrs. C. Limm (Clerk) Mr. C. R. Scurrall
Beoley	Mr. B. J. Somner (Chairman) Miss P. Harrison (Clerk)
Catshill and North Marlbrook	Mr. G. F. Witcomb (Chairman) Mrs. G. Lungley (Clerk)
Cofton Hackett	Mr. B. Hodgson (Clerk) Mr. B. Bridgewater
Dodford with Grafton	Mr. R. Harper (Chairman) Mrs. C. Limm (Clerk)
Hagley	Mr. S. R. Colella (Chairman)
Hunnington	Mr. J. Peeney (Chairman) Mrs. R. Mullett (Clerk)
Lickey and Blackwell	Mr. K. Woolford
Lickey End	Mr. C. W. Bateman
Romsley	Mr. I. A. Hodgetts (Chairman) Mrs. R. Mullett (Clerk)
Stoke	Mr. K. Strawbridge (Chairman) Mr. P. D. Callaway (Clerk)
Tutnall and Cobley	Mrs. H. Davies (Clerk)
Wythall	Miss P. Harrison (Clerk) Mrs. S. J. Baxter

Officers: Mr. K. Dicks, Mr. H. Bennett, Mrs. C. Felton, Mrs. D. Warren, Mr. D. M. Birch, Mrs. S. Mould, Ms. D. Parker-Jones, Mr. P. Murphy and Mr. A. C. Stephens

9/08 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mr. J. M. Bradley (Belbroughton Parish Council), Mrs. J. A. Casey (Lickey and Blackwell Parish Council), Mr. M. Keary (Stoke Parish Council), Mr. R. Levett (Acting Executive Officer, Worcestershire CALC), Mrs. S. Reynolds (Finstall Parish Council), Mr. L. J. Turner (Wythall Parish Council) and Mr. R. Westbury (Barnt Green Parish Council).

10/08 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Parish Councils' Forum held on Tuesday, 30th September 2008 were submitted. It was **AGREED** that the minutes be approved as a correct record.

Arising therefrom:

1. Update on the re-development of Longbridge

Following a question in respect of the re-development of the former Longbridge site in the current economic and market conditions, the Chairman stated that the formal Inquiry, or Examination in Public, had been delayed, and would take place at the end of March / beginning of April 2009. He reported that this date may still be subject to change but, in the current economic climate, none of the parties involved in the redevelopment were seeking to expedite matters and that, essentially, the re-development was 'on hold' for the time being.

11/08 **TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR PARISH COUNCILLORS**

Mrs. D. Warren stated that the views of the Forum were being sought in respect of the development of a programme of training for parish councillors on code of conduct, standards and ethical governance framework issues, as defined by the terminology used by both the Government and the Standards Board. She added that the proposals for a training programme were first raised at the Area Committee meeting of the County Association of Local Councils (CALC) on 3rd December 2008, where it was considered that the issues which were of particular interest for training included:

- personal and prejudicial interests (including the register of interests);
- 'dual-hatted' members (where a member may be a parish councillor as well as a district and/or county councillor); and
- pre-determination and bias.

The Forum were informed that the District Council's Monitoring Officer, through the Standards Committee, had a statutory duty to the parish councils to promote ethical standards. It was expected that the support and training provided by the Council would meet this requirement, together with any additional training the parish councils may wish to undertake voluntarily, or by way of their association with CALC.

Mrs. Warren also reported that the training would focus on standards and ethics issues but suggested that it may be possible to provide separate training to cover other areas beyond ethical framework issues; for example, the possible future role of parish councils in respect of the determination of Certificates of Lawfulness for Existing Use or Development, as considered (and subsequently deferred) by a meeting of the Council's Planning Committee on 5th January 2009.

12/08 **PLANNING ISSUES**

(Note: The following items were given consideration having been placed on the agenda for the meeting at the request of the Area Committee of the County Association of Local Councils (CALC)).

1. **Planning Consultations**

The Chief Executive reported that this issue had been raised by CALC as a result of the on-going implementation of the Council's Spatial Project. He stated that it was the intention of the Development Control Section to consult electronically with parish councils on planning applications but added that he was aware that some of the parish councils were not yet adequately resourced (in terms of, for example, electronic display facilities) to fully deal with the Council's aims in terms of electronic delivery of services.

In response to a question relating to the provision of support, especially to the smaller parishes, Mr. D. Birch, Area Planning Manager (East) gave details of the "Awards For All" Lottery Grants Scheme, which was aimed at providing funding for projects for the benefit of local communities. He referred to a parish council in Wiltshire which had received grant funding and briefly explained how to make an application, the information to include and how a grant would be an advantage to the local community. He added that he would make these details available to members of the Forum in order that they may wish to seek a grant towards the provision of electronic visual display equipment for use by the local communities in each parish.

The Chairman also stated that the Chairman of the CALC - Mr. D. Cropp - would also be keen for the parish councils within the district to maximise the use of any grant assistance which may be available, having spoken of the funding opportunities available at the series of Parish Seminars held at the Council House in May and June 2008.

It was considered that consultations by electronic communication was a promising step forward but it was recognised that the smaller parish councils were at a disadvantage at this early stage. It was reported that the Council's new database software and electronic communication systems had been installed within a very short period of time and that there would inevitably be issues with the 'roll-out' of the altered working practices. However, it was felt that, within a short space of time, the benefits of the electronic delivery of services would be of invaluable help to the parish councils within the district.

It was **AGREED** that the Chairman of the CALC - Mr. D. Cropp - be requested to assist those parish councils which may be seeking to improve their facilities to take advantage of the electronic consultations process in respect of applications for grant funding, with a view to ensuring that parish councils can improve community involvement and related facilities for community use.

2. Certificate of Lawfulness Applications

Mrs. Warren referred to the meeting of the Forum held on 30th September 2008 where it had been reported that the Council were investigating ways in which the parish councils within the district could contribute to the processes relating to the issue of Certificates of Lawfulness for Existing Use or Development (CLEUD).

She stated that a proposed process had been considered by the Council's Planning Committee at its meeting on 5th January 2009. However, because Members of the Committee were concerned about some of the legal technicalities involved (for example, the dissimilarities in the processes involved for an applicant from a parished area compared to those for an applicant in a non-parished area), it was considered that the Council may be exposed to the risk of a legal challenge in the event that the processes were not robust enough.

As a result, Mrs. Warren informed the Forum that the Planning Committee had deferred consideration of this matter to allow the Council's officers to consult with colleagues in other local authorities to determine how best to implement an effective system of consultation on CLUED applications received by the District Council, and that she would report on this matter again at the next meeting of the Forum.

3. Public Speaking at Planning Committee - Parish Councils

Mrs. Warren again referred to the meeting of the Forum held on 30th September 2008 where it had been reported that the Council was investigating the extension of public speaking at meetings of its Planning Committee to parish councils.

She stated that, at the Planning Committee on 5th January 2009, the extension of public speaking at Planning Committee meetings had been approved and that, because the decision involved a change to the Council's Constitution, the decision would need to be ratified by the meeting of the full Council on 22nd January 2009.

As a result, on the basis that the Council would be agreeable to this change, she suggested that each parish council nominate a spokesperson (for example, Chairman, Clerk or Chairman of the parish council's own Planning Committee) to speak at meetings of the Planning Committee on any application within each parish councils area.

13/08 **ELECTORAL MATTERS - BRIEFING NOTES**

Mrs. S. Mould referred to the briefing note she had prepared which had been attached to the agenda for the meeting and commented on the issues outlined therein relating to the new polling district codes and the publication of the new Register of Electors on 1st December 2008, the elections due to take place in June 2009 and the Casual Vacancies Summary for 2008.

In respect of casual vacancies, Mrs. Mould requested that she be contacted in the event of a vacancy arising at a parish council in order:

- (i) to enable the Electoral Services Team to prepare a formal Casual Vacancy Notice for publication;
- (ii) to ensure the statutory regulations are complied with; and
- (iii) for the 'significant dates' relating to the electoral procedures to be checked and / or correctly calculated.

14/08 **DISTRICT / PARISH CONCORDAT**

The Chairman reported that he had proof-checked a copy of the draft Parish Concordat and anticipated that a copy would be circulated to the parish councils within the District for consultation within the next two to three weeks.

15/08 **LOCAL NEIGHBOURHOOD PARTNERSHIPS**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. H. Bennett addressed the Forum and gave an update as to the current situation in connection with the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships initiative.

He referred to the recent stakeholder events held to obtain feedback on the consultation exercise for the parish councils and district councillors, and cited a number of key issues which emerged from the meetings:-

- that the District Council would be seeking to work with the parish councils, rather than imposing Local Neighbourhood Partnerships in particular areas without active support from the local community;
- that the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships in parished areas would be based on the relevant parish boundaries, rather than the District Council Ward boundaries or the County Council's Electoral Divisions; and
- that, subject to approval by the Council, the Local Neighbourhood Partnership initiatives would be well funded and resourced over the full 'roll-out' of the expected 12 partnership areas, thereby demonstrating the District Council's commitment to the initiatives.

Mr. Bennett explained that Local Neighbourhood Partnerships were based on the Local Strategic Partnership model, but that they would not be formal committees or subject to the District Council's Constitution and would not undermine the democratic legitimacy of the County Council, the District Council or the parish councils. Furthermore, as a result of the stakeholder events, it was felt that Local Neighbourhood Partnerships would enable the Council to target funding at specific local issues.

The Forum was informed that two further Local Neighbourhood Partnership pilots had been proposed, namely:

- (a) "Hagley and Rural", covering the Hagley, Clent, Frankley, Hunnington and Romsley areas, with a proposed budget of £20,000 (subject to the approval of the Council); and

- (b) Charford, covering an area contiguous with the District Ward boundary, with a proposed budget of £10,000 (subject to the approval of the Council).

The next stages in the process would be to develop and work with the two new pilot Partnerships, having gained an insight into any likely procedural problems and technical issues from the creation of the first two Local Neighbourhood Partnerships in Alvechurch and Rubery. Following this, it was proposed to repeat the stakeholder event type meetings in October / November 2009 to start the process of developing further pilot schemes in other areas of the district. However, Mr. Bennett emphasised that, such was the investment the District Council was proposing to contribute to the scheme, Local Neighbourhood Partnerships would only be established where the consultation processes with the local communities demonstrated that there was a demand for them. The Chairman re-iterated that the Council would not impose Local Neighbourhood Partnerships in those areas where the response to the community consultation indicated that there was no need or requirement for one.

In answer to several questions raised by the Forum, Mr. Bennett reported that it was anticipated that the new pilots would commence on 1st April 2009, and that inaugural meetings would be held in advance of that date with the relevant parties. He reassured members of the Forum that the Local Neighbourhood Partnerships were not an additional tier of local government and stated that they were a means by which to ensure the three tiers of local government were working together with a specific focus on particular areas. It was anticipated that the next pilot schemes would be determined by the consultation process in due course, details of which would become known later in the year.

16/08 **DATES OF FUTURE FORUM MEETINGS**

It was **AGREED** that the next meetings of the Forum be arranged for 6.30 p.m. on the following dates:-

- Tuesday, 24th March 2009
- Tuesday, 23rd June 2009
- Tuesday, 22nd September 2009
- Tuesday, 5th January 2010

The meeting closed at 7.35 p.m.

Chairman