

AREA FORUM (WEST WIRRAL)

Thursday, 21 October 2010

Present:

Councillor G Ellis (Chair)

In attendance:

Councillors D Elderton

G Watt

Community Representatives Gary Evans, Cynthia Radford

Lead Officer David Ball

Area Service Co-ordinator Tracey Smith

Community Safety Jim Thompson

Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust Pippa Roberts

NHS Wirral Cathy Doran

Merseyside Fire Service Myles Platt

Merseyside Police Inspector Paul Vickers

Older People's Parliament Sandra Wall

Council Officers Mark Smith & Joey Smith – Technical Services, , Peter Riley Special Initiatives Team, Howard Mortimer Head of Special Initiatives Team, Michelle Gray Community Engagement

Apologies

Councillors J Hale, J Green & E Boulton
John Percival & Kevin Adderley

1 **WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair, Councillor Gerry Ellis, welcomed forum members and 36 members of the public to the West Wirral Area Forum meeting being held at Blackhorse Hill Junior School in West Kirby. He explained to forum members and members of the public that they were welcome to raise questions throughout the meeting.

2 **AREA CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT: INCLUDING MINUTES OF LAST MEETING AND MATTERS ARISING**

The Sail Project - The Chair, gave an update on the Sail Project which had been rejected by Cabinet on Thursday 14th October 2010. (*The vote, carried a 7:3.*)

The Cabinet had decided that despite the endeavours of Carpenter Investments there appears to be little realistic prospect of a resolution of the car parking issues to their satisfaction, making further efforts to resolve this issue likely to delay the possible improvement of the Sailing School. The Cabinet had thanked Carpenter Investments for their commitment to the Sail Project since 2007, but informed them that the Council will not proceed further with this development. However the Cabinet would now seek options for securing the future enhancement, or re-provision, of the Sailing School, without involving any material net loss of public car parking in the vicinity.

The Area Co-ordinator, Tracey Smith, presented her report containing the minutes from the previous meeting held in June 2010 included was local updates from our partner organisations. There were no matters arising and the minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as a true record.

Tracey Smith apologised, for the inaccurate/missing information within the area forum report. Tracey will be raising this at the next staff meeting to address these issues and that this will not happen for any future area forum meetings.

3 **WIRRAL'S FUTURE - BE A PART OF IT**

The Lead Officer David Ball gave a presentation on the biggest consultation that Wirral has carried out. The aim of the consultation is to be comprehensive and flexible to properly engage with staff, residents, stakeholders, businesses and community groups across Wirral,

We need to find £108 million in savings over the next four years and this will mean reducing the pay bill and ultimately employing less staff. It will also mean structural and service change and improved performance.

Principles are: led by independent task forces made up of key stakeholders, wider possible level of public engagement, to inform the setting of Council priorities & budgets, to be delivered on an annual basis to inform the corporate plan.

There are four areas of Questionnaire are:

- **Living in Wirral**
- **Children & Young People**
- **Adult Social Services**
- **Economy & Regeneration**

David Ball responded to questions and comments.

Public member – Some people have not submitted the questionnaire as they feel they won't be listened to.

David Ball – All questionnaires received via post and completed on-line are being collated and a team of officers are working on this up to the end of the consultation period. We have also recruited graduates to administer this process.

Public member – approximately 2,500 have been completed in one month how is this being administered?

David Ball - Tracey Smith is leading a team that is responsible for analysing and inputting all data received. All this information will be put into the 4 themes that were on the questionnaire ready for the task forces to report back on.

Public Member – raised concerns about how the members of the task force will scrutinise reports

David Ball – summary reports will be designed for each task force with access to detailed questions & answers, including all respondents. Answers/comments received will be group together for easy usage.

Public Member – raised the issue around budgets and what are we facing.

David Ball – this budget plan is for the next years approximately £25/£28 million per year savings, it is a challenge. The Cabinet has to look at what we do, can it be done by other organisations, or do we continue with that service and also to review services that are duplicated within other organisations.

Tracey Smith informed the forum that consultation as taken place at supermarkets, shopping centre, schools, libraries, public events to main a few. We have a team of 35 members of staff who have volunteered to help with consultation; this is the 1st time Wirral Council has ever done a consultation exercise on this scale.

David Ball – informed the forum that this is an extensive review of all council services and it's spending, looking at statutory services and those services we deliver that are non-statutory. We have also issues over 6,000 members of staff with the opportunity of EVR (Early Voluntary Redundancy).

Sandra Wall – highlighted that savings can be achieved by working with or alongside partner organisations in delivering services better and smarter, services that the council may stop delivering will be run by others organisations.

4 HOYLAKE GOLF RESORT

Chair Councillor Gerry Ellis introduced Howard Mortimer and congratulated him on a great job he and his team have done in recent years.

Howard Mortimer gave a detailed presentation on the following two topics:

- The Regeneration of Hoylake & West Kirby
- Hoylake Golf Resort in the Birkett Valley

He explained that the Council was seeking investment in and the improvement of areas of West Wirral on the “back” of the return of the Open Championship.

The target areas are: Wirral Country Park, West Kirby Town Centre and seafront, Hoylake Town Centre and seafront and Hoylake Golf Resort – east of the town

This is because these areas and townships would benefit from investment to bring about improvements to what the area offers to deliver environmental and economic benefits to the local community, improve business prospects and help make West Wirral more attractive for residents, businesses and visitors.

He summarised the progress to date since 2005:

Wirral Country Park - Study by WS Atkins, Money spent on pathways and cycleways

Central Hoylake - £3million Phase 1 Public Realm improvements along Market Street complete

West Kirby Seafront - £300k improvements and investment in a range of facilities around the seafront including: The Boardwalk, Coronation Gardens and Hilbre Island.

Opportunity to focus on investment potential in West Wirral, particularly private sector resourcing, crystallised originally through the return of The Open Championship in 2006. The staging of the Women's Open in 2012 and the further return of The Open to Royal Liverpool in 2014 is seen as continuing and reinforcing the opportunity to market West Wirral as a place to invest.

That said clearly the current economic climate continues to be uncertain with a further down-turn still yet possible and bank lending still very unpredictable.

This added to the major cut back announced recently in respect of Public Sector Spending means that the chances of any significant Public monies being available to support the regeneration of West Wirral must be very limited for many years to come.

Whilst council officers continue to examine possible ways in which the necessary resources might be assembled, there is no guarantee of success in the current economic climate.

The Greater Concourse Project – This £20 Million proposal features a new Fire Station, Health Centre and a Town Centre Square or Piazza enabled by a new retail development. The project has now been reviewed with a view to re-entering the market place. Both the Council's Public Sector partners; the Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service and the Primary Care Trust, have recently been asked to re-confirm their commitment to the project. The MF&RS has already done so with great enthusiasm and indicated its willingness for the new station to be partly used for community purposes. Market place interest in the project remains buoyant. Further public consultative events are planned.

Public Realm Improvements – Phase 1 – Central West Kirby 1st Phase improvements to the public realm are proposed for Dee Lane and Upper Banks Road with an approximate value of £1.1 million. This, if resources can be found, would be in respect of road and pavement surfaces, lighting, street furniture, signage and planting. Council Officers are currently seeking the necessary resources, again there is no guarantee that this will be successful.

The Crescent – Pilot pedestrianisation – this proposal is currently on hold at the request of the traders on the Crescent given the present state of the economy.

Coronation Gardens Frontage – Following investment in the gardens themselves the Council is interested in the replacement of the current café buildings (through the private sector) fronting the gardens and alongside the promenade. This proposal, supported by The Friends of Coronation Gardens, is subject to delay and legal process.

Hoylake - Phase 2A “Station Gateway”

£1 million Public Realm and Environmental improvement scheme between the Station and the Quadrant

There is broad agreement between the various partners – Mersey Rail, Mersey Travel, Mersey Electrics – we are currently seeking a detailed agreement.

Important project in the light of the forthcoming Women's Open and The Open.

Hoylake Promenade

Scott Wilson study providing a broad vision of potential future improvements subject to detailed consultation and resources.

The Council gives due credit to local fund-raising efforts in the area of the new Lifeboat Station resulting in the restoration of the model boating lake.

A report to the Council's Cabinet in respect of West Wirral regeneration is anticipated within the next 2 – 3 months.

Hoylake Golf Resort in the Birkett Valley

The title “Hoylake Golf Resort” is a technical and working title. If the project proves deliverable, its final name would be a matter for the council and the developer. However an initial suggestion for such a name might be “Hoylake Carrs, [in the Birket Valley]” Hoylake Carrs invokes an ancient name – Carrs is Old Norse for “Bogland area with gorse bushes and brushwood”

The proposal is in the light of the return of the Open Championship originally in 2006 and again, in 2014. It provides an opportunity to focus on the regeneration of the area and the potential of significant investment. This includes bringing about improvements to Wirral's' Leisure and Recreation “offer” and the accompanying economic benefits.

A Regeneration Masterplan was agreed in November 2004 after much public consultation. The measures agreed were short-term, medium-term and long-term. The potential Golf Resort is a long-term objective and the biggest in scale and value.

In pursuing this aspiration the Council is seeking to maximise benefits for local residents and businesses.

Key Objectives under-pinning this project – what we are trying to achieve

- We seek to maximise the potential of the target area through high quality investment and remedial works which:-
 1. Transforms and uplifts the site creating a high quality environment

2. Helps to protect the agricultural economy within the valley offering diversification opportunities
3. Creates new leisure and outdoor recreational facilities including a new championship golf course, 4 / 5 star hotel, restaurant, spa, conference facilities, horse riding, fishing and so forth.
4. Ensures the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitats and the footpath network
5. Seeks major improvement to flood protection within the Birket Valley.

Ideas from the public so far include:

- Potential investment in the Gilroy Nature Reserve?
- Market garden restoration has been proposed along with some education initiative about farming?
- Some orchard planting has been proposed?
- Green Belt - The UDP identifies the whole site as Green Belt (where national planning policies apply).
- Remedial Action - It also identifies the site and the land within it as "in need of remedial action"
 - Any developer must demonstrate Very Special Circumstances in a planning application
 - A planning application – may need to be notified to the Secretary of State before the Council will be able to determine it and that it could be called-in for a public inquiry, to allow the Sec. of State to take the decision himself. An ultimately successful application will need to demonstrate overwhelming and wide-ranging benefits both economic and environmental.
 - Flooding is a big problem both to local farmers and the Municipal Golf Course, its users and others. It causes a deal of problems particularly in the winter and spring. Construction of the new golf course could mitigate any flooding problems, whilst providing wildlife habitats.
 - Resourcing – This project is a 100% private investment scheme.
 - Landownership – The Council owns about 40% of the target land, the balance of the target area is in a range of other ownerships. The Council has had useful, initial discussions with the other land owners.
 - Land Assembly – would be the responsibility of the Developer

The first study – The Needs Assessment – examined the detail of the planning scenario and concluded the project was difficult but potentially achievable and with the signs of strong market interest. The second study addressed technical and engineering issues. This study also included initial discussions with a range of local Stakeholders Groups. In July 2008 Wirral's Cabinet approved that Officers should seek expressions of interest from the market place.

5 LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN & FEEDBACK FROM "HAVE YOUR SAY"

Mark Smith the interim Head of Technical Services gave a brief update on the LPT3.

Merseyside's Third Local Transport Plan will start in April 2011.

All residents have the opportunity to have their say on how transport affects them, LPT3 packs are available for people to take away.

6 **UPDATE ON PARKS & OPEN SPACES**

Mark also informed the forum about developments around our parks and open spaces. They cost the council 12million it covers areas such as parks & country services, cemetery services, rangers, beach/life guards, allotments, bulky bobs.

The council is to review this service and Cabinet resolved procurement on service delivery. This service will be delivered by an external agency and will deliver the same or a better service that is already in place.

Process will be:

- contract to go out to an external organisation
- end of January 2011, there will be an extensive consultation period, including a new contract
- tenders to be in by Mid April 2011
- decisions made by June 2011
- award to a single contractor by early September 2011
- new contractor in place by Christmas 2011

Consultation process:

- series of workshops with members and staff
- 4 workshops scheduled:
 - sports/clubs
 - golfing
 - bereavement services
 - parks & countryside

Mark Smith also informed the forum that Councillor David Elderton who is the cabinet member will be working closely with him through this process. Councillor Elderton stated that he will be involved fully and will attend group meetings to get a flavour of all what is being said/discussed.

Mark Smith – highlighted that staff who will be under the new employer will have their terms & conditions honoured and hopefully under the new contractor be working with new and better equipment.

Public Member – has in the past engaged with Wirral Council, concerned with standards, assets no good, equipment rubbles it got to improve as for the parks they are poor standard, vandalised, need to be improved and upgraded.

7 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Public questions were raised and answered under each individual agenda item

8 **PARTNER INFORMATION**

NHS Wirral Cathy Doran highlighted that the NHS Wirral update was detailed within the papers for this evening meeting.

Older Peoples Parliament Sandra Wall explained that anyone over the age of 50 can join and newsletters were available for people to take away this evening

Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust Pippa Roberts highlighted that the hospital trust updates was within the papers.

Merseyside Fire Service Myles Platt highlighted that there was a full update in report 'Watch what you Heat' campaign was highlighted whereby the Fire Service visited over 22,000 homes delivering home fire safety checks as part of a comprehensive accidental dwelling fire strategy. Also highlighted was the Bonfire Strategy 2010 which includes bonfire removal. This initiative is to commence on Monday 18th October until approximately 1 week after bonfire night. Went on to say that they will be working closely with Wirral Partnership Homes and hoping to run 'waste stations'. WPH will leaflet their properties advising when their waste removal vehicles will be in the area for any unwanted items.

Merseyside Police Inspector Paul Vickers gave out the current edition of his Police Newsletter.

Community Safety Jim Thompson highlighted that there was a full report from Community Safety in the papers and also press releases around "No Call Calling" and "Telephone Scams" and asked people to read these.

He also wanted to reassure people that Wirral remains one of the safest places within the North West At the end of 2009 - 2010 Wirral recorded the 8th lowest level of crime in the whole of the North West. This year between April - July Wirral has continued to reduce all crime still further.

Wirral now has the 6th lowest level of crime in the North West and we have reduced crime by a further 7.3% compared to the same period last year which means there are 424 fewer people who have been a victim of crime. The Home Office which produces this information also compares Wirral to 14 other Community Safety Partnerships across England and Wales. Home Office analysis judges that Wirral is not only better performing than areas similar to ourselves but that we are also Clearly Improving.

9 **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS & AOB:**

Date of future meeting – Wednesday 9th February 2011

AOB:

Energy Project Plus Officers were available at the meeting to give advice on the Warmer Wirral Campaign and to give advice on energy saving for anyone who is interested

Localism Tracey Smith updated the forum on the Localism Agenda. This will be going to cabinet in December. The council is currently looking at ways that we might devolve more decision making to local ward councillors and to communities, i.e. decisions about how budgets are spent and how services are delivered and how we can build on what we do already through the area forums. We have consulted so far with community reps from the forums and tenants and residents associations about

what they think works well and ways in which the council might improve how it engages with local communities.

Thanks Chair Councillor Gerry Ellis thanked everybody for attending and apologised for the area forum running over time as there was a lot of information to be shared with members of the public. Future agenda's will be reviewed and have less presentations, to give more time for members of public to raise their questions, issues & concerns etc.

Meeting closed at 9.40pm