

# AREA FORUM (WEST WIRRAL)

Tuesday, 28 October 2008

<u>Present:</u>	Councillor	G Ellis (Chair)	
<u>In attendance:</u>	Councillors	D Elderton JE Green	J Hale G Watt
	Community Representatives	Gary Evans	
	Business Representatives	Ian McKellar	
	Lead Officer	Jim Wilkie (Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Policy)	
	Area Service Co-ordinator	Tracey Smith	
	Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	Sue Green	
	Wirral Primary Care Trust	Glen Coleman	
	Merseyside Police	Inspector Paul Vickers	
	Council Officers	Phil Dickson (Environmental Health Manager)	Howard Mortimer (Corporate Services Strategic Development)
		David Green (Director of Technical Services)	Peter Riley (Corporate Services Strategic Development)
		Caroline Laing (Manager, Anti-Social Behaviour Team)	

1 **WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair, Councillor Gerry Ellis, opened the meeting and welcomed approximately 220 members of the public to the meeting in West Kirby. He invited members of the forum to introduce themselves.

The Chair thanked members of the public for an excellent turnout, which he assumed was due to the high level of interest in the issue of a hotel in West Kirby. On three occasions in the last six months, the Chair had requested Howard Mortimer to ask the developer, Carpenter Investments Ltd, to organise a public meeting, and on each occasion the reply had been that it was not appropriate to do so. Councillors therefore decided to use this Area Forum meeting as a public meeting on the issue. The agenda will be re-scheduled to bring forward the item, Regeneration Projects update, and if necessary the meeting will be extended beyond the normal close time of 9 pm to allow everyone an opportunity to express their views or to ask a question.

## **2 AREA CO-ORDINATORS REPORT**

The Area Co-ordinator's report has been posted on the Council's website and paper copies have been distributed to One Stop Shops. A limited number of copies were available at the meeting. Further copies can be obtained on request to the Area Co-ordinator. [tel. 0151 691 8026 / email: traceysmith@wirral.gov.uk.]

The minutes of the meeting of the Area Forum on 11 June 2008 had been incorporated on pages 4 to 12 of the Area Co-ordinator's report. Written responses to the issues raised at the meeting had been incorporated under Matters Arising on pages 13/14.

The Area Co-ordinator drew attention to unallocated Community Initiative Funding of £15,812.77 and PCT funding of £4,250.00, available for projects in West Wirral. Voluntary and Community Sector groups are invited to submit applications by the closing date of 12 noon on Monday, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2008. Application forms were available at the meeting.

### **Minute decision:**

#### **Resolved: That –**

- i the minutes of the meeting of the Area Forum on 11 June 2008 be received;**
- ii the Area Co-ordinator be thanked for her report.**

## **3 "YOU DECIDE"**

Wirral Council has allocated £250,000 new money to be spent on extra Council services in Wirral's 11 area forums through a new project called 'You Decide'. To ensure everyone had the chance to take part, a Borough-wide survey was conducted in September asking residents to identify the additional Council services they would most like to spend the money on. A total of 179 responses had been received to the 5,000 questionnaires distributed in West Wirral. Forum members had met to analyse the results of the surveys and based on the priorities identified, Councillors and community representatives subsequently met and decided to allocate half of the £20,000 received by this area forum for youth supported activity and youth sports in

Hoylake, Meols, West Kirby, Newton and Thurstaston areas with the remainder being spent on street cleaning, including additional litter bins and graffiti removal; and road safety, including the introduction of automatic solar panel safety signs, initially in Caldby Village and one/two other areas.

#### 4 DOG FOULING

A request was made at the last Area Forum for a talk on the control of dogs in the area. Phil Dickson, Environmental Health Manager, was invited to give a presentation on dog fouling.

The Environmental Health Division of the Department of Regeneration has responsibility for a number of disciplines, namely, Food Safety, Health and Safety, Pollution Control, Environmental Health, Pest Control, Animal Health and Welfare and Animal Control.

Wirral Animal Control and Welfare Service [the Dog Warden Service] has three principal roles – enforcement of legislation in relation to dangerous dogs, the collection, kennelling and, wherever possible, the re-homing of stray dogs, and dog fouling. The Dog Warden Service is based at the Council Kennels in Corporation Road, Birkenhead, and is staffed by one senior warden, three dog wardens and three kennel staff.

The whole of Wirral Council area is designated under the Dogs [Fouling of Land] Act 1996. On designated land it is an offence for the owner or keeper of a dog to fail to clear up after their dog has fouled. Failure to comply can result in prosecution and a fine up to £1,000. Anyone who fails to clean after their dog may be issued with a fixed penalty or prosecuted. Enforcement concordat policy requires that offenders be given a verbal warning upon which they have the opportunity to put right any offence [ie by picking up the mess]. Further action is taken if they refuse. The burden of proof that is required before action can be taken is 'beyond all reasonable doubt', ie the wardens need to have seen evidence of an offence at close hand. Where there is insufficient evidence for issuing a fixed penalty notice a verbal or written warning may be given. An authorised Council enforcement officer or in some cases a Police Community Support Officer [PCO] may issue the owner or keeper with a fixed penalty notice of £50.

A Wirral Dog Watch campaign involved visiting all areas of the Borough over a 12-month period and using the media and other means of publicity to raise awareness. As a result, there has been a progressive change in attitude, evidence of increasingly responsible dog ownership, and a reduction in the number of complaints about dog fouling. Nevertheless, dog fouling remains an issue of concern.

In 2007 Wirral Council invested £20,000 in a further campaign, '**Don't give a dog a bad name**'. This involved increased presence via wardens and community patrols, posters, poop scoop bags and leaflets. In 2008, Wirral Council committed a further £40,000 for dog fouling initiatives. This involves the purchase of a new multi purpose cleaning and enforcement vehicle, new tri-signs, posters on lampposts, and an incentive scheme that offers reward cards for a monthly £50 draw.

The Services continues to work successfully with Wirral Partnership Homes and more recently has worked with the Police CSOs in dealing with this issue of dog fouling.

In response to questions, Phil Dickson stated that there have probably been about 25 successful prosecutions in total since the legislation was introduced. There were five fixed penalties issued by wardens in 2007. Fines tend to be £50 or £100. The Press are invited to attend the Court when there is a prosecution, but they tend not to attend, so it is difficult to 'name and shame' offenders. There have been no prosecutions this year and so far seven written and about 30 verbal warnings have been issued. The Wardens would be interested in seeing any photographic evidence of an owner being irresponsible, but a witness statement is more likely to be received in court than a photograph. The legislation applies to all open land, including beaches. There is no legislation that applies to dog owners who allow dogs out on their own. If the dog has no identification, the wardens can pick up the dog and the owner would need to pay a redemption fee for the return of the animal. The wardens regularly monitor along the promenades.

**Minute decision:**

**Resolved: That Phil Dickson be thanked for an interesting presentation.**

## 5 REGENERATION PROJECTS UPDATE

Jim Wilkie explained that he proposed to give a presentation on the regeneration plans for West Wirral, to provide an update on how the projects have developed so far, and finally to focus on the regeneration programme for West Kirby.

In providing background information, Jim Wilkie stated that the return of The Open was the catalyst for regeneration. A master plan was developed and consulted on and although there was disagreement with some aspects of the plan, there was general support for the overall master plan.

The principal aims of the master plan are to:-

- enhance the quality of Hoylake and West Kirby and their sea fronts
- improve local facilities and business prospects
- improve the quality of the Country Park
- seek investment in a golf resource
- benefit residents and businesses.

The potential outcomes would be to:-

- improve the local environment.
- improve the local economy
- secure £160 million investment
- create 500 new jobs
- influence the future return of The Open to Wirral.

Following a major consultation exercise, initial work on the development of the proposals began in 2003/04 with the aim of gauging the interest of major backers to support the proposals.

Jim Wilkie described the progress made to date on each of the projects:

- Market Street Hoylake Improvement Scheme

- Hoylake and Meols Promenade improvements
- Proposal for a new Golf Resort in West Wirral.
- Wirral Country Park – new Visitor Centre
- West Kirby –
  - ▶ Public Realm improvements
  - ▶ The Sail Project (hotel)
  - ▶ The Greater Concourse.
  - ▶ The Crescent
  - ▶ The Canopies

To date, no firm decisions have been taken on the Sail project except that the Cabinet has identified Carpenter Investments Limited as the preferred bidder to develop their ideas for a new hotel in West Kirby under a lock in agreement. The lock in agreement ends at the end of the year and Officers will be preparing a report and recommendations to Cabinet on the West Wirral master plan.

The Chair commented that both he and Councillor Hale have made it clear in the past they are opposed to the Sail project in its present form and that other West Wirral Councillors are opposed to the proposal. The public have been consulted and the response of Councillors as representatives of the people in the area is that the project should not go ahead.

Councillor Hale referred to the public meeting attended by 120 people in 2003. He was the first to say that he was opposed to a hotel on the proposed site and nothing has happened since to change his mind. 95% of the people at that meeting had voted against a hotel on that site. Since then, leaflets have been issued to every house in his ward and people had voted overwhelmingly against the proposal. He had recently been given access to the developer's questionnaire which had allegedly indicated that the responses were in favour of the development. He intended to study the results in greater detail.

He reiterated the comments by the Chair that the Officers should reflect the views of the people of West Kirby when they prepare their report, and that the Cabinet should respond accordingly.

Councillor Watt added that in his view the consultation process undertaken by the developer was inadequate, and the exhibition was inadequate and vague. He gave an assurance that Councillors representing West Kirby and Thurstaston Wards would do their best to ensure that Cabinet is made fully aware of all the issues and that Cabinet will make the right decision and stop this thing going ahead.

Councillor Hale added that, although West Wirral is not represented on the Cabinet, Cabinet members have a duty to listen to the clearly expressed view of the people of West Kirby and further afield that the promenade should not be touched. To disturb the promenade would be a grave error and the hope of local Councillors is that Officers will be giving the same message to Cabinet when they do their report.

By prior arrangement with the Chair –

Mr Amos gave a presentation which focussed on the Pedestrian perspective. He quoted examples where the rights of pedestrians would be eroded by proposals to reduce the width of pavements to facilitate vehicular parking. He sought the support of members of the public and the area forum in ensuring there is no encroachment of pavements.

Also by prior arrangement, John Hutchinson gave a presentation on impact on the promenade and the car park should the proposal go ahead for a hotel to be built on the proposed site. He stated that the area is a zone 3 flood area, and his presentation included photographs of a typical winter scene taken in the area where the hotel is due to be sited and of the Dee Lane car park.

Mr Hutchinson stated that he had prepared 60 questions on the public consultation, the hotel prerequisites, car parking needs, site construction, and the basic question, 'Does West Kirby need a new hotel?' He had directed the questions to Councillors and Council staff, but has received no substantial replies.

The Chair invited comments from anyone who is in favour of the proposals.

Mr Alan Beer, Managing Director, Carpenter Investments Ltd, and his colleague David Brewer identified themselves amongst the audience. David Brewer explained that he had only heard about the Area Forum meeting at 6 pm this evening and he had not had time to prepare a formal presentation.

Mr Brewer stated that he has been working with Council officers for several months with the objective of delivering something that everyone can be proud of but there is no desire to deliver something that is not wanted by the public. Detailed plans are not yet available but a top-class firm of architects has been appointed to develop the plans; more than 700 residents in the area have been consulted, but he has not been contacted by email by any Council member. It was upsetting to be portrayed as someone who did not wish to speak to people.

He believed that the scheme and images that have been shown tonight by Mr Hutchinson bear no resemblance to anything he would be prepared to put his name to. He would be happy to hear from any member of the public and disclosed his email address at his office in Hope Street, Liverpool. He offered to answer questions.

In the question/comments time which followed a number of issues were raised by members of the public as follows;

Who's idea was the hotel, the Council's or the developer's?; when was the hotel decided?;

What other sites were looked at in West Wirral?

What feasibility studies have been undertaken to assess demand for a hotel?

When will we see the elevations and detailed plans, before a decision is made; what plans will be available for the Councillors to base their decision on, and when?

Who owns the land?

The planning application and planning process

It's not so much about whether or not a hotel is built, it is to do with the process for consultation. Asking people what they want to have. Whether there has been a robust consultation. There needs to be consultation for three weeks rather than for three days, then there would not be a need for so much 'hot air' tonight. There should have been an opportunity at a much earlier stage for people to voice their opinions.

The process from here on, rather than what has happened in the past. It seems the message is not getting out; many people do not know what is going on. We have heard about 5,000 leaflets and low responses. You need to get out and talk amongst the people of West Kirby about what they want, and perhaps offer some alternative proposals. A number of people said that they didn't know what the proposals were

and were told that this was because of commercial confidence. Some people had written to Carpenters via the website and have had no response. The general feeling is people have not had responses from Carpenters.

If a decision has to be made by the end of the year, how can decisions be made on incomplete plans? Surely, before making an important decision of this magnitude they need to see the plans. Can I ask when the plans are going to be in place and if there is a delay in the introduction of those plans ask Jim Wilkie to delay his report, otherwise there will be no true consultation on those plans.

The form that was given out was not clear. It asked Yes/No about the hotel, but they were talking about the Sail project.

One of the questions I asked at Carpenter's consultation was the number of storeys the building would have. I finally elicited from the company that they intend to build a four-storey building.

I have been attending meetings for the last five years, and everyone seems to be disjointed about what is going on. We don't want a cheap hotel and people have reservations about other things that are going on. There has been a steering group working with Councillors, and at every meeting people have been given categorical reassurances by local Councillors that they were not in favour of a hotel because the public are not in favour of it. I feel we have been misled by the Council. The town has said we don't want a hotel and there seems to be a need to go back to basics and decide what we really want.

There was an artists' impression of the building at the meeting in the Concourse. There has been an independent survey. How many forms were issued, whether those people who received the forms in a position to vote, who was in control of those forms, who handled them? Four/five months have elapsed during which time those forms may not have been in control of someone who is independent.

It is possible to have an extension of the Cabinet meeting. I am concerned that a decision will be made when plans have not been made. It is possible to extend the timescale?

I am concerned that the whole project has been developed on the idea that sailors will be staying at the hotel. If that hotel fails, is it an opportunity to convert it into flats; given there is an embargo on flats in this area.

The Council say that Area Forums should be an important part of any consultation. How much influence does the Forum have in bringing that to bear?

The majority of us here would want that discussion to take place and for decisions to be made in the open where residents have an opportunity to see the decisions made.

Can we trust the Cabinet to make the right decision, given the confusion concerning the proposal by the PCT to develop green belt land, in a country park, in Thingwall? Do we want the same thing to happen in West Kirby?

Is the land dedicated for use by the public? If so, that dedication needs to be lifted before you can do anything with it.

Nothing has been said tonight to prove there is a demand for a hotel on that site. Is anyone going to tell us that there is a demand for a hotel? If it is to be on this site it means people want to use it. If business users want to use it, it doesn't have to be on the front. If people are coming on holiday, it doesn't have to be on the front. I feel insulted that the developers have said there was a reasonable consultation. As soon

as someone asked a pertinent question, the answer came back, 'these are not the final plans' etc. That is not consultation. If you need to build on stilts over the car park, why not build somewhere else? What happens if there is a storm? The building will not last five minutes in a storm. No sailors want the hotel that has been proposed. They want B&B not a posh hotel. If it is to finance the sailing school, build it somewhere else. Still put the money in and we have the improvements in the sailing school. Have you consulted the sailors and people who will be using it? Those people have not been asked. Have you done your homework?

If you are asking for someone with a positive view, I favour the proposals. There is an opportunity for a positive message from this meeting. The hotel could be welcomed, but it is the site that is the problem.

Q. Can you clarify who the sailing school will belong to?

A. The sailing school would remain in the ownership of the Council.

The Chair gave Carpenters representatives the opportunity to have a final word.

Mr Beer stated that he appreciated the opportunity to join in the debate this evening. He strongly believed that the point of consultation is to listen, it is not to 'sell' the proposal, but to listen and take on board what has been said. The message from the public has come over loud and clear and as a resident himself it is important that people have the opportunity to express what is important to them. He believed it is an important development that can create great benefit for West Kirby but it was important to get it right and develop something that everyone can be proud of.

Carpenters are happy to listen to all comments and will take on board the criticisms. Clearly there is a lot of feeling about the location and there are many issues that are important to local people. Especially in the current economic climate, the company is not prepared to invest a vast amount of money in a scheme that does not have broad support, but if it goes ahead there is a need for something that is high quality, not mediocre.

In closing the meeting, the Chair asked members of the public to signify by a show of hands if they were in favour of or against the proposal to construct a hotel on the site described. Three members of the public, apart from Carpenters' representatives, indicated that they were in favour of the proposal for a hotel. Over 200 people voted against it.

The Chair thanked everyone and closed the meeting at 9.45 pm.

## 6 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

**The next meeting will be held on Monday 16th February 2009 at Hoylake Chapel, Station Road, Hoylake**

## 7 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

## 8 PARTNER INFORMATION

## 9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS



