

# AREA FORUM (WEST WIRRAL)

Wednesday, 14 October 2009

## Present:

Councillor	G Ellis (Chair)
Councillors	D Elderton JE Green, J Hale G Watt
Community Representatives	Cynthia Radford
Business Representatives	No representation
Lead Officer	Jim Wilkie (Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Policy)
Area Service Co-ordinator	Tracey Smith
Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	Gary Doherty
NHS Wirral	Kathy Doran, Chief Executive
Merseyside Police	Sergeant Andy Carter
Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service	Tony Mooney
Older Peoples Parliament	Sandra Wall
Council Officers	Ian Brand (Head of Asset Management), Caroline Laing (Manager, Anti-Social Behaviour Team), Howard Mortimer (head of Special Initiatives Team), Mark Smith (Head of Service, Streetscene and Waste), Mark Traynor (Area Streetscene Manager)
<u>Apologies</u>	None

## 1 **WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES**

The Chair, Councillor Gerry Ellis, opened the meeting and welcomed approximately 62 members of the public to the meeting in Hoylake. He invited members of the forum to introduce themselves.

## 2 **AREA CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT**

The Area Co-ordinator presented her report containing the minutes of the meeting on 17 June 2009, and local updates on Equality and Diversity, Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, Streetscene, Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Wirral Youth Service, NHS Wirral and Community Safety.

John Hutchinson pointed out that the minutes did not include a reference to his complaint that a named Council Officer had failed to reply to an email he had sent to the officer. He had raised the issue again in an email to the Chair on the following day and the Chair had responded.

The Chair recalled the conversation and said the omission will be corrected.

John Hutchinson continued that he had not received a reply to an email to the Streetscene Manager on disabled issues.

The Area Co-ordinator apologised to Kathy Doran for misspelling her surname in the minutes.

**Resolved: That –**

- i. the minutes of the June meeting of the Area Forum be confirmed, subject to the amendments discussed above.**
- ii. the Area Co-ordinator be thanked for her report.**

### **3 AREA PLANS**

The Chair explained that the Area Plan gives local residents the opportunity to raise issues they wish to bring to the attention of the Council and its partners. Local Councillors have met with Council Officers on a number of occasions to update the Area Plan for West Wirral.

The Chair floated the idea of using an Area Forum meeting for the community to come along and say what is good and bad, and what can be improved about the area.

Councillor Green replied that he thought it was an excellent idea. Such a meeting would present a real opportunity to take stock and audit what has been done so far, what is needed and what can be improved in the area, and make sure everyone in the community has the chance to be involved.

The Chair enquired whether an ad hoc meeting was needed, or something that could be put on the agenda for a future meeting.

Councillor Green replied that whatever is decided, there is a need to make sure that it has a mechanism to report back to the community - have an appropriate agenda and a properly structured meeting as opposed to offering ideas around the room. The process could start in the afternoon with a drop-in session with all the partners there, followed by a meeting in the evening. He suggested that the event could be publicised through posters inviting people to come along and express their views, and by proactively involving schools in the area.

**Resolved: To ask the Area Co-ordinator to develop an event, starting with a drop in session on the lines suggested and drawing on the experience from a recent successful similar event in Eastham, at a suitable venue in West Kirby.**

#### 4 STRATEGIC ASSETS REVIEW (SAR)

The Chair commented that members of the public were already aware that the proposal to close libraries in Wirral has been abandoned. In expressing pleasure that Hoylake Library will remain open, he thanked people in the room this evening and local community groups who organised campaigns to achieve that objective.

Councillor Green added his personal thanks to everyone who had made the arguments etc. Sue Charteris was clearly impressed by the residents of Hoylake and across Wirral who had made the case for the libraries to remain open. Her report was presumably so devastating that the programme has stopped, but the victory is due to the efforts and response by members of the public.

A question was asked who paid for the report produced by Sue Charteris? I wonder if the leading members of the Council are not guilty of misusing funds because this report was totally unnecessary and that is a waste of public funds.

Cllr Green responded that the Government paid for the report, which has not been made public. Wirral Council hired a barrister to present its case. The cost of the barrister has not been revealed, but it has been suggested that the cost of the barrister was about the same as the total cost of the abortive report, which was not necessary in the first place.

The Chair continued that the other part of the SAR is concerned with the handing over of a number of community halls. Ian Brand, the Council's Head of Asset Management has been invited to give a progress report on the asset transfer process.

Ian Brand recalled that there had been an initial progress report on where the asset management transfer process was up to in terms of community centres at the June meeting. There are 19 community centres identified to transfer, each of which has a joint management committee in place. Two of these centres are in the West Wirral area forum. In addition, there is a total of 31 premises identified for transfer through the Asset Management review process, of which about 13 have a joint management committee. The Council has put a policy in place to deal with all community asset proposals on a consistent basis across the Borough. The immediate focus is to transfer the 19 community centres with joint management committees and Council Officers have met the joint management committees of all 19 centres. One of the issues is about timetabling. There is no hard and fast timescale, except that the transfers should be completed by January 2011. The Council is committed to ensuring that each property is in a fit and proper condition to transfer and where it is clear that the transfer is going forward, the Council will commission an external firm to undertake a full survey. Condition surveys have been undertaken for the three premises in this area.

The Chair invited the Chairs of three management committees to outline their experience in the process so far.

The Chair of the Hoylake Community Centre described talks with the West Kirby and Greasby Community Centres, the efforts made devise a business plan and to attract new users to boost income generation. David Ball had visited the centre when the opportunity had been taken to draw his attention to the slow progress made in the transfer process.

Mr Williams concluded his report by describing the arrangements for the survey of the building as 'total incompetence', adding that there has been no support whatsoever.

John Smith, Greasby Community Centre, and Ray Davies of Westbourne Community Centre, stated that their experiences were similar to those of Hoylake. The general feeling was that the transfer of these centres cannot go ahead until the management committees are assured that the Council has done what it has said it will do, and the management committees know exactly what they are taking on.

A member of the public said it was a matter of regret that Wirral Council's Chief Executive is not here this evening to hear people's concerns.

Councillor Green replied that Jim Wilkie who is present is a senior Officer of the Council, he is Deputy Chief Executive, and as such, he is accountable for the programme of Asset Transfer. It appears from the discussion this evening that there has been a degree of incompetence. He asked the questions, '*Who is accountable for this work?*' and '*What have they done in the past six months?*'

Jim Wilkie explained that he was present this evening as Lead Officer for the West Wirral Area Forum. It is clear that people have raised a series of 'concerns' this evening. He apologised for any delays, and for people being given undertakings about things that clearly have not happened.

Jim Wilkie gave a personal undertaking that the Chairs of the three Community Centres would be contacted on the following day, and that within a week, they would be invited to a meeting where they would be told where things stand at present, what Council officers undertake to do and what has been done so far to honour the commitments given.

Councillor Green asked for an appropriate project plan to be produced which shows who is responsible for resolving the particular issues, with target dates and a proper timescale.

Councillors commented:

*At a recent meeting David Ball had given assurances that things would happen quickly, and everyone would be kept fully informed. Things have not happened quickly.*

*The survey report on Hoylake Community Centre was highly unsatisfactory – although some items had been listed and accepted other, more important items, such as the condition of the roof and roof space, were ignored.*

*The high cost of the survey cannot be justified in terms of the results.*

*The first step is to carry out a detailed and competent survey of the buildings, with costs, and how it can be undertaken. Until this is done no-one has any understanding of what is required to make the buildings fit for purpose and what problems they are likely to encounter in the future.*

*Why have these organisations been given the names of people who clearly have failed to do the job?*

*A competent professional company should be appointed to do that straight away.*

*The first step is to find competent professional surveyors to carry out the survey on what needs doing, because of the time lost, that needs doing as a matter of extreme urgency. Start the process immediately.*

Ian Brand stated that it clear from the feedback received that people have many misgivings and there is an issue here. The community centres themselves are unhappy and one of the things he would be doing would be to speak personally to the various Chairs to clarify the process, so that things can move forward within the timescale. Clearly, there is a need to rebuild confidence and to do that by delivering better than officers have been perceived to be doing so far. The surveyors were procured through Council processes and they are all qualified and competent architects or surveyors. There are a number of things that will run in parallel. Condition surveys is one element. Other things could be getting statistics done and providing a business plan. He expressed confidence that all these things would happen within the timescale given for affecting those transfers. Generally, there is clear dissatisfaction, and there is a need to address that.

Councillor Green commented that the people who are running those centres understand and know how they work. The progress made so far can only be described as 'laughable' but the Officers are now saying that everything will be fine. The person who is responsible seems to be spending a lot of time doing other things. It would be nice for Officers to engage with those people who are doing it for nothing. Officers are paid officials, and they should engage with the people that have a point and not flip away from the fact that people have real concerns. He hoped that there is a plan in place for the groups with leases to receive the same support as for other community centres.

In bringing the discussion to a conclusion, the Chair stated that the fact that Jim Wilkie has agreed to talk to personnel is a positive move forward.

Jim Wilkie added that it is clear that people are dissatisfied with what has happened. If he could have the telephone numbers for the three Chairs of Management Committees, he will endeavour to have a meeting set next week, not just with himself but with relevant officers.

He acknowledged the huge effort by the volunteers who make a large investment of time and he was not complacent about that.

## **5 REGENERATION UPDATE**

Howard Mortimer explained that the technology for an on-screen presentation was not working. In a verbal update he explained the purpose of regeneration; summarised the progress to date; gave an update on the master plan for Hoylake and West Kirby; and commented on scarcity of public funding due to the downturn in the economy.

The regeneration had been fired by the return of the Open Championship in 2006. Its purpose was to bring investment into the area, to bring about high quality improvements similar to those in Hoylake that would have sustainable benefits to West Wirral and its community. The focus is to make significant progress on the eight projects in the master plan by the time the Open Championship returns to Hoylake, whenever that might be. He reported progress on the eight project areas: Wirral Country Park, The Sail Project, The Greater Concourse Project, Public Realm

improvements in West Kirby, The Crescent, Hoylake and Meols Promenade, Hoylake Golf Resort.

Public comments after Howard Mortimer's presentation included -

*The Sail Project. The scheme that is going forward bears no resemblance whatsoever to the originally agreed scheme.*

*Throughout the discussions, assurances had been given that the developer would provide a new sailing school – but the developer would own it and it would be leased back to the Council at a peppercorn rent. If the Council wanted to do something else with the land, in the future would have to buy it back.*

*There is already a shortage of parking spaces in West Kirby, and whilst efforts are being made to retain as much parking space as possible, the overall plans bear no resemblance to what was expected and agreed to at the start.*

*No Chandlery is being provided. It is time to start again. Cries of HEAR, HEAR*

*Compulsory purchase was mentioned for the first time at a Cabinet meeting. Who will compulsory purchase what? Reply: The ice cream shop.*

*The Crescent: The statement that pedestrianisation may improve the trade is utter nonsense.*

*The Sail: Every time there is a report, it is an Exempt Report, which is leaked to the Daily Post. Who is responsible for those leaks?*

*The Promenade. Residents cannot park outside their own homes.*

*Greater Concourse: Is there a possibility it might go ahead, but the Council are unable to do anything about the Railway station area, which has been a headache?*

Martin Harrison gave a short on the role of the West Kirby Working Group. In his presentation, he explained that the main aim of the working group is to suggest ways to the Council of improving public engagement.

In the summer, the group asked to see the Leader and Deputy Leader and Senior Officers of the Council to talk about suggestions to improve public engagement. Those present had said they were personally committed to making this work and things have moved on from there. The Cabinet had agreed in April on the need for public consultation on the Sail Project and for the consultation to be on a proper footing. It is a step in the right direction but it is important that the Council liaises with the public because they have an input, and the development will not 'crash on' without involving anyone other than Carpenters.

A Lake User Group has been formed and will now represent sailing school users. They will be able to talk to officers and tell them what is wrong with the current project and will help create a world class sailing club.

John Hutchinson expressed the view that to leak is to subvert the democratic process. The confidentiality clause has been broken. Every leak should be investigated and the person brought to account. He continued that the car park is a 'con'. Salisbury Avenue has been recently re-surfaced, and five minutes after the signs had been taken away, vehicles were double-parked. This is an indication of the need for parking in that area.

Jackie Hall commented that misleading information had been given about Hoylake Promenade and that there is a major refurbishment going on. A large amount of money is being spent on preventative work that this Council should have been doing

over the last twenty years. The work being done is maintenance and not refurbishment. People should not be getting credit for a refurbishment programme, which it is not. The residents of Hoylake know what they want on the promenade. The residents of Hoylake want the promenade to be restored to its former glory. Local residents are effecting the improvements, and they should have the credit. It is not refurbishment.

The Chair advised that there will be a detailed scrutiny of the Sail Project at a meeting on 27 October at 6 pm at Wallasey Town Hall. If anyone wishes to speak they should contact the Committee Officer.

## 6 **STREETSCENE UPDATE**

The chair commented on the recent survey of pedestrian's concerns, which had been carried out by Ian Campbell and colleagues.

Frank Amos said he would like to compliment the Police for taking action on parking on pavements in Meols, and pointed out that similar action is needed in Newton where he lives. Cars can be parked right across the pavement and this means that people have to walk on the grass verge or in the road.

Sgt Andy Carter responded that the Police have made a start in tackling the problem of parking on pavements, and have started in Meols where it can be a particular problem when pubs with big screens are showing popular football matches. The Police have enlisted support from the pubs who have put up notices to the effect, 'Please don't park on pavements when there is a football match'.

Sgt Carter agreed to tackle the problem in Newton via enforcement using Fixed Penalty Notices.

Cllr. Elderton commented we talked about bringing out a local by-law about parking on grass verges. Has that progressed any further?

Mark Smith replied we are all aware of some of the difficulties in relation to vehicles parking on footways and verges, and the difficulties the Police have in enforcement. We have looked at a number of locations that might lend themselves to that. Something we have started to look at as a Council. We are now looking at the success of the early trials, using the traffic regulations rather than a by-law.

Replying to a question about Christmas trees, Mark Smith said the Council will do everything it can to support people who want to put up Christmas decorations and provide energy and space etc.

The Chair invited Margaret Campbell to give an update on allotments. She said there is a problem with allotment sites on Wirral and the waiting list has increased. There was a community meeting about a month ago, which was interesting. We asked the Council, as part of its statutory duty, to provide sufficient allotments.

We submitted a submission for the use of unused land in West Kirby. This is public Council land and it has not been used for anything at all for years and years. We offered to pursue funding and we will manage it at no cost to the Council. The reply was 'We will follow it up' but there is no urgency about the situation.

Jim Wilkie said he would follow through the issues and contact Mrs Campbell and tell her where we are up to with all the issues.

Mrs Campbell said she was pleased to see what Black Horse Hill Junior School has done in Grange Cemetery.

## 7 **PARTNER INFORMATION**

The Chair welcomed representatives from Partner Organisations and invited updates:

**NHS Wirral:** Kathy Doran explained that at present swine flu numbers are very low. There has been no great increase, and that is common across the North West. There are very good plans in place for the Hospital, the Council and other colleagues, and the hope is that they will not be needed.

A member of the public linked to the support section of Wirral Partnership Homes expressed appreciation to the medics/paramedics in dealing with a crisis at home recently who had given the most excellent support.

**Wirral University Teaching Hospital.** Gary Doherty: Quite a lot of work at the hospital will be going on over the next few years. I apologise for any disruption on the Wards whilst the work is ongoing, but when people see the improvements and advantages, they will agree it is all worthwhile.

I am going to Arrowe Park Hospital to be a volunteer tomorrow. Will I have to pay to park?

Gary Doherty. - The car park is not affected by the building work. It is the wards only.

Sandra Wall commented that she had attended a launch of an appeal for equipment for the eye department. She said she was really impressed. Virtual eye surgery. Anyone with an eye problem needs to find out what they are doing. It's really impressive.

Gary Doherty was asked about the progress of single sex wards. He said there are some areas of the hospital where it is not practical to have separate facilities because of the small number of beds. All general wards are going to have separate wards; the majority of wards will be single sex. Where remaining mixed, areas will be separated. A programme that will take a while to do. There will be high technical areas, e.g. heart attacks, where there will be shared provision.

**Older Peoples Parliament** Sandra Wall said there were 800 plus associate members. We are always recruiting, the more names we have the more people we represent, the more power we have. I have some forms here if anyone wants to sign up.

We are working on issues like Housing, Housing Development coming up in Wirral. Parking at the hospital, and we have more disabled spaces than previously and action is being taken against people who park in disabled spaces. We have regular liaison with younger people and planning a short film talking about what we do and young people will hope us make it, use their expertise, and understand their problems, many of which are the same as older people's. I hope we can get as involved as possible with the youth.



## 8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair drew attention to two documents, Coastal Area Forums, relating to a Review of the North West and North Wales Shoreline Management Plan. He invited members of the public to take away copies and comment on them.

Sue Duncan, Business Manager for Hoylake Holy Trinity School introduced herself, and ask for advice and help from the Area Forum on a proposal to develop the vacant site formally occupied by Heaps and Partners.

Hoylake Holy Trinity School has very limited sporting facilities at the Hoylake Rugby Club. An opportunity has arisen to address this, and help and advice is needed on achieving this.

Everyone is aware that the Heap & Partners has re-located, vacating a very large piece of land which backs on to the school playground. Sue has been in touch with some senior officers in the Local Authority, who are very supportive and really interested. This would be a one-off opportunity for the community of Hoylake to acquire the site for a sports pavilion and running pitch for use by the school and the community, but once the site is sold, the opportunity will be lost. There are a large number of groups in the area who have expressed a real interest. Sue has looked around the building with the estate agents and the officers of the LA, but there is not much that can be done with the building to interest people, and the land needs to be cleared. Sue asked for help and advice from anyone who can come forward and perhaps help to progress this further for the community.

Local Councillors have already indicated that they would be prepared to help in any way possible. Sporting groups are interested, but there is no point in going down this route until it is clear that it will be possible to acquire the land. The site is on the market for £1 million, but it has been suggested that it is over-priced.

The Chair wished Sue well with her discussions with the Local Authority. If there is anything the Councillors can do, please advise them, equally members of the public.

A question was asked, how does one acquire information as to the relevance of Councillors' conduct and Councillors expenses, and how much is paid to Council Officers. As Council Tax payers, we are entitled to know how much we are paying our Councillors and employees.

Cllr Green replied, as he understands it, all the information is on the Internet. What people could get and what they claim. You can alternatively go into the Town Hall and someone will provide that information.

## 9 DATE OF FUTURE MEETINGS

**24 February 2010. In West Kirby Ward (if practical)**

The Chair thanked everyone and closed the meeting at 9.20 pm.