

PUBLIC PROTECTION FORUM

14th July, 2005

PRESENT -

Representing the Council – Councillor Harker (in the Chair); Councillors Holmes and Mrs. D. Jones.

Representing Outside Organisations –

Darlington Association of Parish Councils –

Councillor B. Jones.

Darlington Association on Disability –

Mr. G. Pybus.

Darlington Branch of the Alzheimers Society –

Mr. J. Rodwell.

Darlington Residents Panel –

Mr. M. Nicholson.

Durham Constabulary –

Sgt. Tim Kelly.

Heighington Village Hall Association –

Mr. L. Bedocs.

Independent Member –

Mr. K. Frid.

Patients and Carers Council –

Mrs. M. Springett.

Patients Council –

Mr. M. Smith.

Officers Attending – The Assistant Director – Public Protection and the Environment and Sustainability Manager, within the Development and Environment Department.

Apologies – Councillors Hartley, Lawton, Thistlethwaite and J. Vasey, Councillor N. Welch, Archdeacon Newton Parish, Councillor S. York, Middleton St. George Parish Council and Mr. Bell, Red Hall Partnership.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR – IT WAS AGREED - That Councillor B. Jones be appointed Vice-Chair of this Forum for the Municipal Year 2005/06.

3. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of the Public Protection Forum held on 14th April, 2005.

IT WAS AGREED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING – RESPONSIBLE DRINKING CODE OF PRACTICE - Pursuant to Minute 22/Apr/05, the Assistant Director, Public Protection advised members that there had been a successful launch of the Responsible Drinking Code of Practice and 33 Licensees have now signed-up to the Code which was supported by the Trade.

5. UPDATE ON REGULATORY SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW IMPROVEMENT PLAN – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) on the progress of the Best Value Review of Regulatory Services Improvement Plan which has a five year lifespan with improvements being undertaken in accordance with an approved timetable.

Discussion ensued on the extension of the naming and shaming of offenders to include the naming and shaming of bad Council workmanship however it was reiterated that this related to people who had received fixed penalty notices for offences such as dog fouling, littering, etc. Following a question by a member the Assistant Director, Public Protection advised that he would liaise with the Assistant Director, Environmental Services regarding refuse services.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That a further progress report be submitted to this Forum in January 2006.

6. CIVIL CONTINGENCIES ACT 2005 – Pursuant to Minute 15/Jan/05, the Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) which provided arrangements for the implementation of the Act (summary also previously circulated).

The submitted report outlined the current arrangements for emergency planning in Darlington, including funding arrangements, and stated that the Emergency Planning Unit (EPU) were continuing to help authorities meet the Act and that draft papers on Business Continuity and co-operation had already been prepared. The Council is to feed into the Local Resilience Forum (LRF) which is to carry out generic risk assessments for Darlington. Once complete the register would be updated by the EPU and Darlington's plans would almost certainly require updating.

Reference was made to the bomb scares in Darlington last night and the arrangements currently in place to deal with the situation. The Forum wished to place on record its congratulations to both staff and emergency services for the way it handled the situation.

Discussion ensued on a review recently undertaken by Public Protection and Community Partnerships Scrutiny on emergency planning, use of the web site in order to publish emergency plans due to the public always being the 'first on the scene' at any incident and the role of the utilities groups in emergency situations.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That the report be received.

(b) That the progress on the implementation arrangements for the Civil Contingencies Act 2005 be noted.

7. FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY AUDIT – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) outlining the results of the findings of an audit undertaken by the Food Standards Agency Enforcement Division and the agreed improvement plan.

The submitted report stated that the audit was carried out during October 2004 as part of a programme of 15 local authority audits and concentrated on examining internal monitoring arrangements and consistency to maintain a quality service. The audit identified various service improvements and the Council has to produce and maintain an Action Plan (also previously circulated) within agreed timescales set by the Agency.

IT WAS AGREED (a) That the report be received.

(b) That a progress report be submitted to this Forum once the Actions have been completed.

8. DARLINGTON TOWN CENTRE – PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON SAFETY AT NIGHT AND LICENSING/CULTURAL ISSUES : THE LICENSING ACT 2003 – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) which addressed licensing issues that impacted on the night time economy in Darlington Town Centre.

The submitted report stated that in 2005 local Councils took responsibility for the licensing of premises for the sale or supply of alcohol in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003 and as such this Council's Licensing Policy, published in January 2005, set out the four Licensing Objectives under which applications would be considered i.e. The Prevention of Crime and Disorder, Public Safety, The Prevention of Public Nuisance and The Protection of Children from Harm.

References were also made to the removal of constraints on terminal hours, 24 hour licensing and drinking, the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy, the number of licensed premises and alcohol related incidents within Darlington during 2003, Public Order Enforcement Issues, partnership working with licensees, provisions for a Safer Town Centre, problems encountered by town centre residents and the promotion of a Café Culture and Licensing of Open Spaces.

Discussion ensued on partnership working with Durham Constabulary and the possible establishment of a Licensing Unit if required, problems encountered with licensed premises on estates, the need for all Licensees to apply for their applications by 8th August, 2005, the inclusion of off-licences and supermarkets, the availability of identity cards containing a hologram to alleviate fraudulent Proof of Age cards being obtained from the internet, people with a disability not necessarily having a driving licence as proof of age and the possibility of Pubwatch being approached to consider the options and licence conditions relating to cleaning of litter-dropped areas within a certain radius of premises.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That this Forum endorses the strategies contained within the report.

(b) That once all licences have been issued a progress report be submitted to this Forum.

9. FERAL PIGEON MANAGEMENT STRATEGY – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) outlining a draft strategy designed to manage the feral pigeon population in Darlington.

The submitted report stated that the Town Centre Board had received an Environmental Strategy which made reference to wildlife management, particularly nuisance species that could have an adverse impact on the Town Centre. A Feral Pigeon Management Strategy (also previously circulated), which supported the Environmental Strategy and Town Centre Business Plan, had been produced. The aim of the strategy was to contribute to maintaining a high quality town centre by implementing a range of complementary measures designed to effectively and humanely manage and reduce pigeon numbers in Darlington Town Centre.

Discussion ensued on the need to stop encouraging pigeons by feeding and the use of fake owls to deter pigeons from certain areas.

IT WAS AGREED – That this Forum endorses and supports the draft Feral Pigeon Management Study.

10. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN THE TOWN CENTRE – The Director of Development and Environment submitted a report (previously circulated) outlining an Environmental Strategy for Darlington Town Centre, the aim of which was to make and maintain Darlington Town Centre more welcoming and attractive.

Reference was made to the One Year Action Plan of the Town Centre Business Plan which aimed to produce the Strategy incorporating the findings of the Street Environmental Best Value Review, cleanliness monitoring, public amenities and facilities, wildlife management and the litter initiative. Other organisations and agencies also have a role to play and the Council will seek partnerships in order to deliver the Strategy.

Discussion ensued on the successful removal of A-boards around the Town Centre, the working practices of ‘chuggers’ i.e. charity workers who approach you with clipboards and request money and the use of the Charities Act to alleviate some problems associated with badge sellers in the Town Centre.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That this Forum endorses and supports the Darlington Town Centre Environmental Issues Strategy.

(b) That the Strategy be widely distributed to all organisations who can influence or complement the Strategy.

11. DATES AND TIMES OF FUTURE MEETINGS – IT WAS AGREED – That future meetings of this Forum be held on 13th October, 2005, and 12th January and 6th April, 2006, commencing at 7.00 p.m.

11. QUESTIONS – There were no questions raised at the meeting.

12. KEITH ATKINSON AND BILL WESTLAND – The Chair referred to the retirement of Mr. Atkinson after 30 years’ service and extended, on behalf of the Forum, his thanks for his work. He also congratulated Mr. Westland on his promotion to Assistant Director – Public Protection.

