NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

AREA COMMITTEE - SOUTH EAST

At a meeting of the Area Committee - South East held in Choppington Social Welfare Centre, Colliery Road, Scotland Gate, Choppington on Wednesday, 12 March 2014 at 6:00 pm.

PRESENT

Councilor D Campbell (in the Chair)


OFFICERS

I Coe Transport Support Manager
D Bamford NEAT Manager
H Griffiths Senior Locality Development Officer
I Hedley Locality Development Officer
S Mason Lead Executive Director – Corporate Resources
K Norris Democratic Services Officer
L Rahman Network Improvement Manager, Highways and Neighbourhood Services
J Seaton Rural Development Manager

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor A Sambrook
N Knox (Arriva)
Public (24)

PART I

61. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Daley, Ledger, Richards, Rickerby, Tyler and Webb.

62. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday, 13 February 2014, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.
63. **Public Question Time**

**Barry Elliott, Town Councillor for Newsham, New Delaval and Blyth**

Mr Elliott referred to workshops on Plessey Road which were due to close and be demolished. It was thought that the land would then be used for housing. He expressed concern that there had been no consultation with local people or Blyth Town Council and asked for the support of Blyth Councillors to stop this happening in an area of deprivation.

The Leader stated that the project was being led by Arch, a development company owned by the Council. Approximately 2 weeks ago their Chief Executive had copied him, and Blyth Town Council, into an email which explained the business case and why the workshops were to close. It had been stated that the cost to repair the building was too high and the workshops were unaffordable. It was believed that the best option was to develop the land for housing. After further discussion as to why the Town Council had not received the email, the Leader suggested that the clerk contact their Chief Executive direct.

He added that ultimately it was a business decision for Arch.

**Malcolm Robinson, Bedlington**

Mr Robinson referred to his question at the previous meeting regarding the Bedlington Tesco ‘gap site’ and thanked officers for the written reply he had received. However, he said that was not what was originally said when ‘Go Wansbeck’ had presented the information. He questioned the capital receipt and said it would appear that someone was selling off the assets of Bedlington.

A local member responded and said she had received the same information as Mr Robinson. She stated that she would investigate the matter further and keep Mr Robinson informed.

**Keith Dalton, Bedlington**

Mr Dalton referred to the Love Northumberland Initiative with regard to Environmental Champions and asked if the Council was relying on volunteers to litter pick. He felt it was a good idea in principle but questioned the strategy as, in Bedlington, it appeared that only certain parts of an area were benefitting. He felt it was important to have a strategy as very few Town and Parish Councils had taken this up.

The Leader asked if Mr Dalton would accept a written response regarding the strategy as it was not something he had been involved with.

With regard to that particular area of Bedlington, the NEAT Manager said he would speak to Mr Dalton at the end of the meeting to discuss the matter further.
It was agreed that a written response regarding the strategy be provided to Mr Dalton.

Mr Dalton then referred to dog fouling and said it had been stipulated that 21 extra people had been employed in animal welfare. He asked if those 21 people had the authority to issue fixed penalty fines. In response the Chair confirmed that wardens had the authority to issue ‘on the spot’ fines.

Member of the Public

Reference was made to the former Coulson Park First School which had been set on fire last November. All of the mobile units had been removed but the school was standing derelict and was now attracting fly tipping. The lady asked if the Council had any plans for the site and if, in the meantime, it could be cleared.

The Lead Executive Director – Corporate Resources said, at present, the site was subject to negotiation with insurers and then the Council would look to sell it on the open market. He said he would speak to colleagues within the Council to look into the poor state of the site.

Adam Hogg, Bedlington

Mr Hogg asked if there had been any progress regarding the issue of road safety at St Benet Biscop’s school entrance.

The Local Member said a meeting had taken place which had looked at improvements already made (details of which were provided and included a staggered start time to relieve congestion, the junction having been widened to provide a turning circle and the crossing being moved further away from the junction). He said consideration was being given to the erection of barriers and alternative drop off points. All schemes would be looked at in order to improve safety.

Keith Chambers, Ashington Town Council

Mr Chambers said Arch was the least communicative body he had encountered and asked what members on the Arch Board were going to do about it.

A member acknowledged there had been communication problems with Arch in the past but said County Councillors now had regular meetings with Arch to receive updates and a request had been put forward for Town Councils to be involved.

Paul Hedley, West Bedlington Council

Mr Hedley referred to complaints received regarding parking on Shields Road, Hartford Bridge, Bedlington. He said he had previously reported parking problems on the bridge and asked if there was any possibility of having double yellow lines put on the west side of Shields Road.
The Network Improvement Manager, Highways and Neighbourhood Services said he would pass on Mr Hedley’s comments and request to colleagues in Strategic Transport.

Barry Elliott, Blyth

Mr Elliott referred to Section 106 Agreements and said it had been agreed that records would be put on the Council’s website and be made available to the public. He asked when this would happen as it had been stated that the whole of the database would be available by September 2013, not just selective parts.

The Lead Executive Director – Corporate Resources said Mr Elliott had made allegations which had been subject to an external audit investigation and were unfounded. At that time the Council had agreed to update the database and comply with the recommendations of the audit report. That would be done as soon as possible. The records were available for the public to inspect upon request. It was not a legal requirement for them to be on the website but work was being done in that regard and would be completed as soon as possible.

The Leader reiterated that all Section 106 agreements were available to the public upon request and it was not essential for them to be on the website.

Mike Slaughter, Ashington Town Council

Mr Slaughter referred to public conveniences in Ashington which had not been subject to asset transfer. He had understood they would be demolished and asked if the Council would look to see if any limitation of revenue capital was required when assets were not going to be taken by either authority.

The Leader stated that two sets of public conveniences were being looked at – those to the rear of the former co-op building (Back Woodhorn Road) which would be demolished and those by the TSB/Lloyds bank which were to be redecorated.

In response to comments that the public conveniences in Peoples’ Park were the main priority as they were clearly visible, the NEAT Manager said discussions had taken place with the Executive Director – Place and a meeting would be held to discuss the situation.

Member of the Public

Reference was made to Section 106 Agreements and it was asked if funds were stipulated.

The Lead Executive Director – Corporate Resources confirmed that funds were stipulated and could be subject to conditions.

Thom Bradley, Cramlington
Mr Bradley referred to his questions at last month’s meeting regarding VCS infrastructure funding and asked that his thanks be passed to the portfolio holder for obtaining a response. He referred to it having been said that another meeting would take place before work went out to open tender. As the tender went live at 1:00 am on Tuesday, 18 March, he said it did not give a lot of time for comments on that process and he was concerned that it had been rushed through in order to meet an end of March deadline.

64. Petitions

The Chair informed members that two new petitions had been received by Democratic Services.

One was in relation to traffic problems at Riverview, Bedlington and the other regarding the installation of the bus stop and newly erected bus shelter on Woodhorn Road, Ashington.

Mr G Straughan, lead petitioner for the latter, was in attendance to speak on the petition. He said there had been no proper consultation before the bus shelter was approved. The site had severe traffic issues and congestion had worsened. Prior to the bus shelter being erected, concerns had been reported to the Project Officer but had been dismissed. It had been stated that the bus shelter would not be erected for the foreseeable future but then it was erected within 2 weeks.

The main concern of petitioners was that no consultation had taken place. The petition had been submitted through the Local Councillor and, on issues of safety, residents were requesting that bollards be erected to stop the area being used as a “rat run” for vehicles driving at inappropriate speeds.

The Local Member said he fully supported the petition and had put money aside from his small schemes towards the cost of the bollards.

It was agreed that the petitions be received and reports produced for a future meeting of South East Area Committee.

There were no reports on petitions previously received and no updates on petitions previously considered.

DISCUSSION ITEMS - CORPORATE

65. Changes to Arriva’s Commercial Services in the South East Area

Nick Knox from Arriva was in attendance to give a presentation on changes to Arriva’s commercial bus network which would take place from 23 March and to give details of future plans. (A copy of the presentation is filed with the signed minutes.)

Members asked a number of questions and responses were provided as follows:

- “streamlining” did not mean there would be a change to the route, it meant
there would be less stops;

- The Council would be looking to secure a replacement for Service 30;
- It was confirmed that a double decker bus was shorter in length than a single decker bus;
- Wifi on ‘Sapphire’ buses could be accessed free of charge;
- It was stated that, in the past, low level buses had been provided, kerbs had been lowered then the buses had been taken away to another area. Concerns were raised that this could happen again. Mr Knox stated that Arriva would be spending a considerable amount of money on marketing for these service enhancements so it was not intended to down grade services;
- There was a low floor guarantee and that would cover every route in Northumberland except that of the X15;
- The intention behind ‘Sapphire’ was to attract people to use the bus and Arriva wanted stability;
- Arriva North East had 8 depots, Blyth/Ashington would have the youngest fleet of Arriva buses in the North East;
- Investment and standard of service was recognised at the UK bus awards in November last year when Blyth Depot was voted second best depot in the country;
- A member stated that it was Ashington Bus Station which Arriva needed to address;
- Clearly some services could be provided on a commercial basis and some could not and there would be difficult political decisions to be made regarding finance;
- Arriva was faced with a balancing act, services must be reliable, the changes in March would speed up travelling time with Tyne and Wear with no reduction in Northumberland;
- The X4 would be devoted to the link from Northumberland to Newcastle – it would be looked at again but no promises could be made;
- Last year and this year there had been no increase in fares which were below £3 and no increase in child fares. Other fares were kept in line with inflation and, as much as possible, Arriva would want that to continue.
- Triple tickets had been introduced and, in many ways, fares had become better value for money;
- Mr Knox agreed to look into comments that, at least once every day, a bus did not turn up on the Blyth to Morpeth route;
- The cambois service would be increasing to once per hour;
- If the bus diverted to East Hartford it was an additional diversion which would result in unreliability and issues of punctuality;
- The Council would be looking into the situation at East Hartford the following week to see if improvements could be made.

The Chair thanked Mr Knox for his presentation.
RESOLVED that the information be noted.

66. Working with Town and Parish Councils

Helen Griffiths, Senior Locality Officer, was in attendance to give a presentation about building on existing relationships by strengthening communication and engagement between the County Council and Parish/Town Councils; the benefits of partnership working and the commitment of senior officers to lead process with regular meetings throughout the year to discuss joint planning and the improvement of local services; and the revision of the Local Council Charter to improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of Northumberland. (A copy of the full presentation is attached to the signed minutes.)

Discussion ensued and in response to questions the following information was provided:

- There may be scope for Lead Officers to rotate – that could be looked at;
- Officers were looking to expand all information onto the website;
- It would be of benefit the community as it was an opportunity to sit down face to face with a senior officer who delivered services, there would be no missed messages and issues would be followed up;
- Comments regarding evening meetings and relaying information to the Chair of Parish/Town Councils (not just the clerks) would be taken on board.

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

INFORMATION ITEMS

67. Draft Local Transport Plan 2014-15

Leyton Rahman, Network Improvement Manager, was in attendance to introduce the above report which set out the draft programme for the next 3 years. He explained the process and said it was a key element to have the support of Councillors who would have a lot of input in providing local knowledge. The programme would be finalised the following week so if members had any comments he would be happy for them to be incorporated. Roads would always continue to deteriorate so the programme would need to change regularly and would be a live document.

Comments were made by members and noted by the Network Improvement Manager as follows:

Priority 33 on the South East list – Elsdon Drive/Coupland Road - could Elsdon Drive be exchanged for Chillingham Crescent?

Concerns regarding the surface of Croft Road.
With regard to priority 11, it was confirmed that it was partial resurfacing of the carriage-way.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

68. Members’ Local Improvement Schemes 2013-2014

RESOLVED that the information be noted.

CHAIR: __________________

DATE __________________