

## AREA PANEL FOR APPLETON, KINGSWAY AND RIVERSIDE

*At a meeting of the Area Panel for Appleton, Kingsway and Riverside held on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2003 at the Halton Stadium, Widnes.*

Present: Councillors E. Jones (in the Chair), Fraser, Gerrard, V. Hill, Leadbetter, Nyland and Philbin.

Apologies for absence: Councillors Craig, and Gleave

Absence declared on Council business: None.

Also in attendance: L. Naughalty – Operational Director - Neighbourhood Services;  
J. Unsworth – Regeneration & Neighbourhood Services  
S. Eccles – Section Leader Highways & Transportation;  
K. Marcroft – Policy Unit;  
D. Harrex – Policy Unit;  
N. Goodwin – Halton Borough Council;  
A. Battersby - Halton Borough Council;  
Station Officer J. Salt – Cheshire Fire Service;  
I. Aylward-Barton – Committee Services;

### MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2002 were approved.

### RECYCLING & REFUSE

J. Unsworth, representing Regeneration & Neighbourhood Services reported on initiatives in respect of recycling and refuse.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be received.

### TRANSPORT PLAN / NEW MERSEY CROSSING

The Panel received a presentation from Steve Eccles, a representative from the Borough County's Transportation Division on the Local Transport Plan and the Second Mersey Crossing.

The Panel was advised on the background and content of Halton's Local Transport Plan (LTP).

The amount of monies awarded to Halton as part of the LTP Settlement for 2003-04 was £7.089m. The key strategic transport areas for spending were as follows:

- (i) road casualty reduction;
- (ii) sustainable travel;

*Action*

- (iii) mersey crossing; and
- (iv) road maintenance.

The report identified the progress that had been made during 2001-02 on the implementation of the transport policies contained within Halton Borough Council's first five-year LTP, which covers the period 2001-02 to 2005-06.

The crossing of the Mersey was the biggest single transport issue facing Halton Borough, the existing bridge being the only internal link between Runcorn and Widnes. The bridge had four substandard lanes and the average flows of 80,000 vehicles every 24 hours causing congestion, queuing, accidents and regular gridlock.

The Mersey Crossing Group had been lobbying for a new crossing since 1995. Studies undertaken demonstrated that a new crossing to the east of the Silver Jubilee Bridge would meet transport objectives, give priority to public transport, pedestrians and cyclists and provide targeted opportunities for economic regeneration both locally and across the region.

The Government had given the Borough an encouraging endorsement of the new crossing with an allocation of £600,000 in the LTP settlement towards the next step, which was to produce a bridge design that resolved the geological, environmental and hydrological issues. The investigations could cost up to £1.4m. There had been very strong support from partner authorities and the necessary package of funding was in place. Detailed proposals would be available from the consultants by the end of March.

The main objectives for the Mersey crossing were: to relieve the Silver Jubilee Bridge; to maximise development opportunities; to improve public transport links across the river and to encourage the increased use of cycling and walking.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be received.

#### **VIKINGS IN THE COMMUNITY**

The Panel received a presentation on the Vikings in the Community programme.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be received.

#### **NRF AND COMMUNITY STRATEGY**

The Panel received a presentation on Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategies and the development of a draft strategy for the Appleton Kingsway and Riverside Wards.

The presentation was an update following a presentation received in November. It reported on findings in the strategy and detailed solutions, which had been offered, by residents and local groups.

Eighty community groups had been in consultation with the Council and there was still more to take place. The strategy would be presented in its draft form in June.

The Panel considered that Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy would be an important document which would shape how future Services were provided in the area and in order to give time for the strategy to be given full consideration it was suggested that a further consultation meeting be held.

RESOLVED: That;

- (1) the presentation be received; and
- (2) a further consultation meeting be held on Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2003 at 6.00 p.m. at the Halton Stadium, Widnes.

#### **BUDGET 2003/2004**

The Panel received a presentation on the budget proposals for 2003/04. It was anticipated there would be a rise of approximately £1.60 per week for housing in Band A.

Top priorities for the Council were Education and Social Services, the young and the most vulnerable. Education needed £1.9m to plug the gap as a result of poor settlement and standards had risen year on year in Halton. Without help, those improvements would be put at risk.

Social Services needed improvements. More was required for children and foster care, better and quicker access to services was required, improved services for the most vulnerable was needed and improved systems to ensure quality and reliability was also required.

With regard to the environment, higher standards and parks and open spaces was required, as well as more for recycling of waste.

Access improvements needed to be improved for the disabled. Improvements across the board were also required and a faster turn-around for benefits.

Currently, Halton had the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest Council Tax in the North West and it was anticipated that next year it would be 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest.

RESOLVED: That the report be received.

## PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Questions on the following topics had been submitted:

- (i) Mrs. P. Knowles (secretary of the Kingsway Tenants and Residents Association) asked the following question;

It is of major concern that we bring to your attention the very poor condition of both highways and footpaths on the Kingsway estate.

Although we have been promised on many occasions that the problems will be addressed, nothing to date has been forthcoming. Ian Saxby informed us when attending one of our meetings that Traffic Calming would commence in October 02, again nothing forthcoming. There is a continuous deterioration on the estate e.g. the vandalism to garages, some of which have been unoccupied for many years, and the degenerative state of the backlands is totally unacceptable. It must not be allowed to continue.

The association would appreciate the Councillors' urgent attention to these matters."

In response it was reported that;

- (a) With regard to the traffic calming, the works had been delayed due to problems with the Contractor. However works should have commenced on site.

The condition of the highway was the responsibility of the Highways department who were waiting for the Water Board to install new water mains before undertaking a planned full highway reconstruction.

- (b) (i) Garages . There were 2 garage sites;

Haigh Road 11 garages 7 Occupied 4 empty one to be demolished as part of strategy no waiting list

Henderson Road 9 garages all occupied no waiting list.

The garages were generally in fair condition, there was graffiti problems and they did require general maintenance. Number 11 Haigh Road was in poor condition and due to be demolished . The proposals were to retain these garages as part of the strategy and undertake repairs as necessary.

- (ii) There were also a number of ad-hoc garages on the backlands some of which were in poor condition, some clearly not occupied These had been investigated previously however there did not appear to be any current records of ownership of garages.

There were some garages in poor condition which the Department had tried to ascertain the owners, but leaving cards asking round proved unsuccessful and they were not in such poor condition that building control would arrange removal.

- (iii) An officer had inspected the backlands and reported that they were again generally in good condition i.e. large grassed areas cut relatively short and not full of large items of rubbish
- (iv) Unitask were trying to improve the area of grasslands and were working on a plot by plot basis involving the local community in ideas for improvements
- (ii) Mrs W. Naughton asked the following questions;

My question is, for the Council to ask Modwins or ASDA, to give part of the funding, to double glaze the windows around the estate, were the new ASDA is being built, as the Council have only enough money to double glaze a few windows in each house, the residents are not happy with this, and have all signed a petition against this, the ASDA should understand we will be getting a lot of noise and traffic in our streets as the ASDA is right on our doorstep, so the ASDA should understand our situation and consider helping out (the estate around is Cambridge St. Keble St. Oxford St. Quinn St.)

In response it was reported that;

The vehicle access to Asda was off Gerrard Street. Only buses would be permitted to enter the Asda car park from Brynn Street. Widnes Road was to be closed as was Brynn Street and Vine Street where they met Widnes Road. This was to ensure that traffic flows in the residential streets were not affected by the new development. There should be less traffic in the residential area than at present and it was very unlikely that a case could be made for double glazing.

Noise measurements would have to be taken and these would have to be done after the store had opened.

An environmental improvement scheme, "Streets Ahead" was being actively pursued for the residential area and this would further dissuade any unnecessary traffic entering it. It was not possible to say when the scheme would go ahead as funding was still being sought.

- (iii) Mr. C. Ellis asked the following questions;
  - (i) refuse bin required at bus stop on Gerrard Street, opposite co-op
  - (ii) Still no safety crossings for pensioners near the same spot of bus stop - applied for last year
  - (iii) No answer yet to my request for co-op lights to be turned off at night after 8pm

- (iv) Flagging repairs needed
- (v) Could do with some evergreen trees to brighten our end of Gerrard Street.

In response it was reported that;

- (i) The Neighbourhood Cleansing Manager had been contacted and he had undertaken to provide a refuse bin as soon as practicable.
- (ii) The Operational Director – Highways and Transportation had reported that traffic patterns in this area would change greatly once ASDA opened. However there could be little doubt that flows were likely to increase along Gerrard Street Provision would be included for a new Crossing in the coming year's programme of works.
- (iii) The complaint in respect of the Floodlights at the Co-op had been discussed with the Development and Building Control Division who had agreed to investigate the matter and liase with the co-op to solve this problem. This had been based on providing cowlings etc. as the previous question had not suggested switching off the lights after 8.00 pm. This would be further investigated.
- (iv) Flagging repairs – a response on this was still awaited.
- (v) The head of landscape had been contacted however he considered that any new planting in the area would need to be considered on completion of the new development.

(iv) Mrs. D. Newman asked the following question;

Last year we were told there were going to be speed bumps on Highfield Road, when can we expect this to happen ?

Also as it was stated last year, school transport plans are in the process of being drawn up when can we expect details and results ?

The dangers of crossing roads such as Leigh Avenue, without adequate crossing controls, at peak school time and rush hour are horrendous. Why not introduce "congestion charges" around schools - get those school transport plans on track !

In response it was reported that;

The traffic calming scheme proposed for Highfield Road would be going ahead early in the new financial year i.e from April onwards. It was not possible to give a firm start date as the work was not yet programmed.

The Council was working with a number of schools on the development of travel plans and it was expected to have them completed in the near future.

(v) Mr. B.P. Karalius asked the following question;

Residents Parking - regarding the proposed new Asda supermarket the problems which we face due to this new Asda - regarding parking in Frederick Street

In response it was reported that;

The car parking provision at the ASDA store had been designed to fully meet the projected demand. The ASDA car park, like all car parks in Halton, was to be operated free of charge. The new development was not expected to increase the pressure on town centre streets like Frederick Street. However the position would be monitored. If problems did materialise the position would be reviewed.

The Council had established a policy some years ago not to pursue residents' parking schemes. This policy was to be reviewed in the near future by the Planning, Transportation and Development Policy and Performance Board but this did not mean that changes to the established policy would necessarily be recommended.

(vi) Mr. J. Cowan asked the following question;

There is public concern and criticism over Halton Council having been conned by a former employee Stephen Atkinson at a cost of £350,000 to the taxpayer.

In the Widnes World (19.2.03) a "Halton Council Spokesperson" refers to a "vigorous internal investigation" having taken place.

Do Councillors feel that the situation as it stands is satisfactory or do taxpayers deserve more consideration?

On their behalf I ask that copies of the report of this investigation, with its recommendations, be placed in the libraries at Runcorn and Widnes for perusal within the premises by the public over a period of three months from a date to be notified through the local press.

In response it was reported that;

The events to which the question referred occurred in 1999/2000

There were two main reasons why the Audit report had to remain confidential:

1. It contained a lot of detailed information about business arrangements between the Council and third parties and the Council had an

obligation to those third parties to keep the information confidential;  
and

2. The Audit report contained information about the Council financial systems and security arrangements the disclosure of which would be contrary to the aim of ensuring that the Council's financial systems were secure.

No organization could ever totally eliminate the possibility of fraud by someone who was determined to break the law. What the Council could say was that its systems had enabled it to discover the fraud, and when it had been discovered the Council had taken the appropriate steps to deal with it. It didn't attempt to hide it in any way, and in order to send a message to anyone who might be tempted to try to defraud the Council in future, it reported the matter to the Police immediately and encouraged them to prosecute.

As to the financial loss to the Council, the Council was of course insured against such matters and expected to recover most, if not all, of the money through these arrangements.

(vii) Mr T. Mercer asked the following question;

When are the Water Board to start work in Highfield Road ?

In response it was reported that;

The Water Board had recently notified the Council that works on Widnes stage 2 would commence in February 2003.

These works covered a total of 7 kilometers from the Widnes eastern by-pass. Within that programme Highfield Road and Highfield Crescent were scheduled to be carried out during June to August 2003

It was noted however that the works have not yet commenced.

(viii) Mr. W. Twigg submitted a letter of thanks following action which had been taken with regard to the fence panels surrounding Canterbury smallholding. This had been taken following submission of a Public Question at the last meeting of the panel.