

MINUTES OF THE CIVIC COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2008

PRESENT

Chair: Councillor Hall, the Deputy Mayor, Councillors Baddeley, Betts, J Harrison, Hart, Shaw, Sheldon and Walley.

Also in attendance: Andrea Bowers, Visitor Services Information Officer

64.07 APOLOGIES

The Mayor, Councillors Davies, Gibson, Harper, K Harrison and Mrs Humphreys

65. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sheldon declared a prejudicial interest, as an owner of a town centre business.

Councillor Hart declared a personal interest, as Regeneration Portfolio Holder.

66. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2008 were signed as a true record.

67. REGENERATION

a) Andrea Bowers was welcomed to the meeting by the Chair and invited to update members. Ms Bowers gave information on the re-structuring that had taken place within the Economic Development/Regeneration/Tourism section. Ian Jackson was now Tourism & Economic Development Manager and Councillor Hart the Portfolio Holder.

- i) Ms Filer had a site visit with Mr Mason of County Highways to look at the proposed locations for the welcome signs. Verbal permission had been granted, subject to the approval of the designs. The proposed design was circulated; also included would be two shallow planters. There was a size restriction, so that planning permission would not be required. Three quotes had been obtained, but only one company could deliver by the end of March. The design was approved and Councillor Sheldon requested that siting nearer to the town centre be considered for the southern sign, as watering was a problem. The ownership of the verge at the quarry entrance was queried. Ms Bowers was to discuss this with the County Council.
- ii) Regarding the Tourist Information Boards, it had been agreed that one be sited at the Wharf Road car park and one to be stored until a suitable location be found. Ms Bowers asked where it may be stored and it was thought that the rear of the town hall may be suitable. Discussion took place on the location of the Information Boards and it was decided that the preferred location would be the entrance to the car park (but only if the recycling bins were moved) and the second choice would be near to the ticket machines. Suggestions for inclusion on the boards were: Knypersley Pool; Biddulph Moor stone; Trent Head Well; Councils Connect; Biddulph Valley Way; Biddulph Grange and Country Park.

Members were keen to proceed with ordering the welcome signs and information boards and thanked Ms Bowers for attending the meeting.

67.b CAR PARKING STRATEGY REVIEW

The Chair welcomed Councillor Stephen Ellis, Portfolio Holder for Planning, to the meeting. Councillor Ellis announced that the Strategy had been formally adopted by Cabinet that day. The Review was a comprehensive overhaul of the parking strategy and there had been more response from Biddulph than the other towns in the district (more than 50%). These responses had been constructive and made with a clear depth of feeling. Meetings with Citizen Panel members had taken place on a one to one basis.

Councillor Ellis detailed the five strategic objectives:

- 1) provision of excellent parking facilities, at an appropriate cost, to users and Council tax payers;
- 2) supporting the economy of the Staffordshire Moorlands;
- 3) provision of safe and secure car parking environments;
- 4) Supporting the provision of appropriate 'on' and 'off' street parking for residents of the Staffordshire Moorlands; and
- 5) undertaking an influencing role and addressing local transport issues.

Councillor Ellis then went on to detail the key actions proposed to deliver each of these objectives. Members commented as follows on the strategy: abuse of blue badges should be stopped (it was suggested that information on the rules be placed in the Moorlands Messenger); that tickets were not transferable between the two car parks and that additional hours could not be added (resulting in people having to leave the town centre); the Strategy seemed fine, but that it would be the implementation that would be difficult.

Regarding pay and display, the Town Council had not wanted this in Biddulph and had tried hard to persuade the District Council of this. However, it had been imposed and the District Council had also decided, last year, to remove the subsidy from the budget. It had been, therefore, proposed that charges in Leek and Cheadle were to rise, but that the charges in Biddulph remain as they are at present and be looked at continuously in the light of the AAP. Councillor Ellis pointed out that the car parking budget was running on a predicted deficit of £127,000 this year; government grants had been reduced and pressures were adding up. However, the view was that Biddulph should be excluded from any form of charging increase, which would have a totally adverse affect on trade. This was not popular with his colleagues from Leek and Cheadle.

Councillor Sheldon felt that this was a critical period of upheaval and that if charges were totally removed during the construction period we could lose shoppers parking spaces to residents. She felt that the Moorlands Messenger should promote the 'shop in the Moorlands' message. Councillor Hart said that from a regeneration point of view, Sainsbury's usually run a system of 2 free hours and manage this themselves. Also, there would be an additional 200 spaces on the retail park site.

Councillor Rogers commented that when there were no charges in the town there was no problem. What benefit had the charging brought to Biddulph? Councillor Ellis replied that once this was in the budget it was too expensive to extricate. The Administrator pointed out that the Town Council had offered to take the burden of the car parks from the District Council and manage them according to the town's needs. There was the additional problem of free car parking in Congleton, at present. Councillor Ellis said that car parks were expensive to run and that supermarkets subsidise their own car parks. He was asked why the Co-op and Somerfield Stores weren't asked to assist with the Biddulph car park costs and replied that the District Council was unable to impose this on existing businesses.

The Chair thanked Councillor Ellis for his co-operation and suggested that he kept in regular contact with Councillor Rogers, as a trader in the town.

c GARDEN GATEWAY PROJECT

News that this project would not now be supported by AWM and so would not go ahead was received. Members felt that this was very disappointing.

d PROGRESS REPORT

Councillor Hart reported that the Executive had received the news that the County Council had an £80,000 shortfall in funds for completion of the phase II highway improvement works and that the District Council & Town Council were to be asked for a £60,000 and £20,000 contribution. If this was not forthcoming, the scheme would not be completed to such a high standard.

68. QUALITY COUNCILS

The Administrator was to attend a training meeting with SPCA on 21 February and would be discussing this item.

The meeting closed at 6.28pm

Signed.....Date